

## **"Sounding Identity: extending the traditional portrait form with temporal sound and music as its initiating media"**

### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the portrait genre and the limitations imposed by the media traditionally employed; a single moment captured visually via paint or photography. Missing in the approaches and forms is an awareness of the potential contribution that could be made by the intertextual addition of music and sound. Chapter one introduces these ideas, leading to a review of literature in chapter two, which explores the ideas further. A series of case studies on key artists' work will be included to demonstrate the methodology and the point of departure the author has chosen to pursue and these will be discussed in chapter three. Two issues emerge in these chapters; the potential of the use of music and sound as an intertextual element in the traditional portrait and the implications for the subject of portraiture when portraits, and particularly these hybrid portraits, are created by a single artist-originator. Chapter four offers a methodological approach based on the points of departure offered by the examination of literature and key artists, to provide a framework by which the author's creative works could lead to new insights into the portrait tradition. This framework will be demonstrated through a series of creative works examining the potential role of music/sound, the artist's subjectivity and the way both inform and extend portraiture and the self-portrait in particular which are detailed in chapters five, six and seven. The thesis finishes with a series of findings based on the artist's approach to the portrait genre which covers the importance of intertextual music and sound and the artist's subjectivity in the creative process.

## CHAPTERS

### 1. INTRO: PROBLEMS, SIGNIFICANCE, QUESTIONS & THEORETICAL OUTLINE p. 5

Articulates the problems encountered in portraying human identity via the traditional visual art self-portrait. Thereby the significance of the research is articulated and contextualised within a broad theoretical overview, taking in visual art, film and music/sound as they relate to the representation of a human individual.

### 2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS p. 8

Details the existing theoretical considerations as they concern the changing perceptions of human individuality and identity within society and how the portrait tradition, both visual art and film, reflects this. Missing in the traditional approaches is an awareness of the contribution that could be made by music/sound and this is considered in detail. While focusing on contemporary theory, the chapter includes historical research of each media highlighting key first principles, to understand the contribution each form makes to the representation of a human identity in order to investigate where music/sound might provide a significant text to extend and inform the traditional self-portrait.

### 3. KEY ARTISTS and their practice pg 25

This chapter details case studies of various artists practising in different media and their influence on the research. It begins by briefly describing significant historical artists engaged in the changing depiction of 'self' within visual portraiture referenced by the doctorate. It then moves on to cover contemporary artists working in fine art video portraiture and sound portraiture in order to identify the point of difference between these and the methodology employed to complete the creative works submitted.

### 4. THE METHODOLOGY pg 63

The methodology leading to the creative outcomes produced for the doctorate. The traditional portrait is largely temporally fixed via the painted image or photograph; missing are the temporal elements of music and sound. This thesis asks how might a series of creative works involving the mixed media of image and music/sound be employed to answer the research question. This chapter details the main methodological concerns of the effectiveness of the use of music/sound as an intertextual element in portraiture and the implications for the subject of portraiture when portraits, and particularly these hybrid portraits, are created by a single artist-originator.

5. MINOR PROJECT - *Voyeur Series* pg 69

This chapter details the creative development leading to the points of departure for the subsequent major creative works.

6. MAJOR PROJECT- *Self-portrait #1: Fragments of Presence & Absence* pg 77

This chapter deals with the conceptual framework and problems encountered during the process of completing the first major project *Self-portrait 1: Fragments of Presence and Absence (2018)* - 26 minutes, 7 channel audio with 6 channel film created for the Data Arena at UTS. The chapter includes links to the creative works.

7. MAJOR PROJECT 2 - *Self-portrait #2: Multiple Heads*

8. CONCLUSION and Impact pg XX

Have I answered questions? How do I know? (How I've improved on previous works based on my judgement based on research of theory and artists)

The thesis finishes with a series of findings based on the artist's approach to the portrait genre.

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Carla Thackrah

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### The Voyeur:



We are all voyeurs. How many of us watch the faces around us and imagine who the 'real' person is behind them? As new born babies, our eyes are constantly drawn to the face of the mother; as children, the first figures we draw are usually stick bodies with oversized faces, and even these faces, primitive as they are, have expression. As adults, we overtly and covertly catch glimpses of ourselves and others in mirrors, reflective windows; we watch each other in public places - on buses, in the car beside us at the traffic lights, at parties and cafes.

We attempt to 'capture' these faces in portraits and self-portraits. Family photos, social media, passports, identification cards, police mug shots, advertising, painted and photographic portraits in museums and galleries - all these images of faces are ubiquitous in our lives. And the remarkable thing is, in all representations of the human form, there is something to intrigue us, to inform us and whether accurately or not, to spike the imagination.

Portraits attempt to capture not just a physical good likeness but also some sense of the 'inner self' of the sitter. And yet can we really attain, with any consistency, some deeper understanding of the other by looking at a portrait presented solely as an image, a captured single moment in time, a face with a single expression? And on another level, we could question the very existence of that essential identity in each human being; is there, in fact, anything real to be represented? Or, as Jean Baudrillard contends, is every moment of reality, including our inner selves, merely a "model of a real without origin or reality" ? (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 166) A dark view indeed but one that perhaps sums up the world of virtual identities, the photo-manipulated reproduced images, the 'fake news' photos and 'alternate facts' of personal and social narratives - the endless circuit of 'simulacra' that are the hyperreal, edifice of reality in the twenty first century.

Both these questions encapsulate the problems encountered by traditional portraiture. The portrait has a place as an historical artefact, or as an iconic trace of a memory but I

suggest, the traditional portrait has only limited expression and cannot fully achieve its intention of capturing both the outer and inner manifestation of who we are.

### **The research question:**

Hence the aim throughout my dissertation and creative works has been to explore how significant music and sound might contribute to and enrich, the hitherto silent world of traditional visual portraiture. The creative outcomes of the doctorate are one minor project and two major portfolios of work that make up two self-portraits. Each self-portrait is created via portraits of several individuals, with each portrait using music and sound as its initiating media; that is, each portrait begins as a sound portrait to express the intangible, emotional nature of their inner identities. Attached to each sound portrait is moving film image which depicts the external manifestation of identity. In this way, I ask whether this significant music and sound text can legitimately extend the traditional practices of portrait making past the depiction of an external 'good likeness', to capture a representation of our fluctuating contemporary inner selves?

### **The theoretical overview:**

I've chosen the topic 'portraits' within the context of music/sound paired with film. The idea fascinated me because it enabled an approach to the research in equal detail across the three disciplines that would be involved in the creative practice; visual arts, documentary film and music/sound. Each of these areas resonate personally because my creative practice to date has been as a professional performing musician, a part time visual artist, documentary film maker and film composer. I offer the following broad outline of the theoretical considerations that I will expand on in later chapters.

Visual art theory has written voluminously on the subject of portraiture largely because of its long portrait tradition beginning in the Renaissance. (Reiss, 2003; Walker, 1984) It is the visual arts that have defined portraiture as a form and that definition could be summed up as “a representation or depiction of a living being as a unique individual possessing

1. A recognisable physical body along with

2. An inner life. That is, some sort of character and/or psychological or mental states” (Freeland, 2010, p. 5).

Put simply, a portrait is an expression of both an external and an internal identity. It is within the theorising and creation of visual art portraits that theories of ‘self’ are met head on and addressed by artists and scholars. While the visual arts, due to their history, have defined portraiture, documentary film has taken up the form with its own supplementary 'added values'<sup>1</sup> (Chion, 1994): the combined effect of image, music, sound and temporality. While documentary has more media resources at its disposal it has economic and cultural constraints - funding, broadcast requirements and a limitation created by its claims in regard to objective truth in reporting (Adorno & Eisler, 1947; Breitrose, 1964; Corner, 1996; Minh-ha T, 1990; Nichols, 1993; M Renov, 1993; Winston, Wang, & Vanstone, 2017). Music and sound is the least practiced in representing the human identity; perhaps its particular strength lies in this minimal representational ability (Cox, 2011; Langer, 1953; Raffman, 1993), leaving space for an openness not available in the other two disciplines. To state the obvious, it does not *look* like anything however, the particular emotion and meaning that can be conveyed by significant sound, words and music, alone of all the arts, is an affective 'added value' (Chion, 1994; Daltrozzo, Schön, & Scho, 2008; T. Fritz et al., 2009; T. H. Fritz, Schmude, Jentschke, Friederici, & Koelsch, 2013; Janata, 2004; Koelsch et al., 2004; Kuchinke, L Kappelhoff, H Koelsch, 2013; Painter & Koelsch, 2011; Slevc & Patel, 2011; J. Sloboda, 2005; J. A. Sloboda, 1991; John A. Sloboda, O'Neill, & Ivaldi, 2001).

These three disciplines are often separated in scholarly realms as well as in practice. The doctorate unites them, both creatively within a work that requires a single artist-originator (Gernalzick, 2006) to exercise skills across each discipline of music/sound, film and visual arts; and theoretically, via the philosophical considerations that cross all the disciplines - from Cartesian ideas in the Renaissance to the post-structural theorists to whom practitioners in each discipline refer in their thinking and practice. To approach the portrait form with music/sound combined with film, I am, as well as researching contemporary theoretical considerations, also exploring the historical first principles of portrait, documentary and music/sound theory to ask what each brings to the portrait - the limitations and the strengths determined by the specificity of their

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<sup>1</sup> "The expressive and/or informative value with which a sound enriches a given image, so as to create the definite impression that this meaning emanates 'naturally' from the image itself" (p. 221)

form - to investigate where music/sound might provide a significant text to extend traditional visual portraiture.

## CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Considerations

### EYES

#### Embodied Likeness and Interiority: referencing and extending the traditional Renaissance portrait

From the stick figures and handprints of cave paintings; the primitive featureless forms of Neanderthal man's carvings, through to the 'spirit catching' Egyptian tomb portraits; the perfect idealised forms of Greek and Roman portraits to the Renaissance when modern portraiture as we know it began, the simple definition of a portrait fits each and every one of these eras. That is, the portrait refers, in bodily form, to a human being that in some way exists outside the portrait.<sup>2</sup>



Scholars Richard Brilliant, Cynthia Freeland, Marcia Pointon, Van Alphen, Catherine Soussaloff, Joanna Woodall, offer a similar definition that a portrait is a representation of both an 'inner' and 'outer' manifestation of an individual (Brilliant, 1991, 2007; C Freeland, 2010; Cynthia Freeland, 2007;



Pointon, 2013; Soussloff C. M., 2006; Wendy Steiner, 1987; Van Alphen, 1977; Woodall, 1977). Marcia Pointon says that portraits are the representation of “an individual known to have lived, depicted for his or her own sake. Some might add that a portrait should aim to represent body and soul, or physical and mental presence” (p. 48) She goes on to say a portrait also shows the history and social milieu of the time; a good portrait

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<sup>2</sup> A whimsical idea of mine to add the portraits of various scholars I review and yet, a point is made. On their own, images mean very little - particularly the more recent portraits which appear mugshot-like in their blandness. None the less, placed beside the text, they immediately take on a deeper meaning; the image and the words each inform and enrich the other. For Barthes, the text forms the 'anchor' to the image, directing the reader to 'see' the portrait in a certain way and the image adding meaning to the text. (Barthes, 1977a) For Benjamin, the text turns all images into literature and without this, the photograph may remain meaningless. (Benjamin, 1997, p. 256)



“captures the essence of the sitter by being much more than a likeness. A good portrait is about history, philosophy, milieu” (Pointon, 2013, p. 59).

### The face:

The standard of likeness cannot be maintained in the object portrait with any consistency, but the expectation that we can potentially or actually recognise an individual in a portrait makes the genre what it is (Soussloff, 2006, p. 6).

The face was traditionally the central place for representation of both the external 'good likeness' and the 'inner self' from pre-Renaissance onward, and the powers encapsulated in the representation of the face were particularly amplified by J.C Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* (1774-78) that offered a scientific codification of the face that supported the assertion that it could also reveal the inner psyche (Lavater, 1789).



Charles Le Brun, the court painter to Louis XIV took these studies to his portraits and they became the guide for portrait painters for at least the next 100 years.<sup>3</sup> Franz Joseph Gall followed with his science of

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Le Brun *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions* (1667). Le Brun based his ideas of Descartes's earlier work *Passions of the Soul* (1649). Le Brun took the study of phrenology to portraiture as a refutation of the more naturalistic Renaissance portrait, moving instead towards scientific codification. He claimed the centre of the soul-body interaction was in the pineal gland which makes its feeling most apparent in expressions in the face, particularly the eyebrows.

phrenology<sup>4</sup>; Charles Bell<sup>5</sup> and Duchenne de Boulogne<sup>6</sup> both developed theories to measure the expressions of the face culminating in Charles Darwin's work *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1899).<sup>7</sup>

The conclusions drawn and the authority the face was granted based on the ideas presented could appear naive to contemporary thinking - the study of a face was considered a science that could reveal the true soul, images of faces subjugated populations and races via their study as 'types', portrayed faces played a part in political, monocratic and theocratic power and they could even place themselves on the canvas with God. For contemporary postmodern artists, the portrayed face has now become a playground to trivialise, subvert, endlessly reproduce and distort concepts of human identity. None the less, rather than having abandoned faces, we still follow our Darwinian biology and attend to and interpret the expressions of the face even though, intellectually, we know that the face cannot reveal a true 'inner self'. It continues to be rare indeed, even in the postmodern twenty first century, to find a portrait without at least some manifestation of a bodily part, and usually it is a face.

My creative research is informed by the traditional Renaissance portrait's focus on the visual conventions of a facial likeness front and centre of the frame. However, I aim to extend the techniques and media of the traditional portrait with the use of music and sound, to research the proposition that this may act to increase the focus on the interiority of the sitter. I expand on these ideas in the following sections.

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<sup>4</sup> The eighteenth century saw two alleged sciences of the head flower; phrenology and physiognomy. Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828) wrote *Physiology of the Nervous System in General, and of the Brain in Particular* (1810) and it was upon this work that the science of phrenology was developed. Gall developed a system whereby he believed the bumps, shapes and proportions of the face would show the level of moral virtue, vice, intelligence, vanity and pride of their owners. In this way, merely by portraying accurately a face, one could be said to be revealing the deep psychology, the true 'self' of the subject.

<sup>5</sup> Bell, C. (1806) *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting*. His ideas influenced artists, particularly the Pre-Raphaelites.

<sup>6</sup> Boulogne, G.D de. (1862) *Mecanisme de la physiognomie humaine*. Boulogne followed through Bell's work with his photographic experiments on the faces of mental patients.

<sup>7</sup> Darwin was the first to undertake scientific studies to determine conclusively the facial expressions of emotion. He concluded that some expressions are universal across cultures and even across species.

### **The fluctuating self:**

Portraits are a unique form of representation in that they are re-presenting a human individual. They "take us away from the passive state of 'it is painted' as one would claim when viewing a painting to, "the complex action of 'I see another'" (Soussloff, 2006, p. 122)



The "I see another" of portraiture is a complex plenitude of interactions that supplies endless questions for theorists and artists alike. What is this 'other' that portraitists have been aiming to capture? Concepts of identity are inextricably linked to the history of portraiture. Because portraits re-present human figures, "their seeing and showing also contains the ways through which a society learns to imagine human essence, in other words discourses and practices about body, self, soul, mind, identity, and subjectivity" (Subhash Jaireth, 2003, p. 37)

Cartesian views of identity and portraiture have been the dominant mode of thinking about the self since modern portraiture began during the Renaissance (Doy, 2005; Walker, 1984; Woodall, 1977). From this thinking came a single pointed, highly directed view of reality, a separation of mind and body, a separation of reality 'out

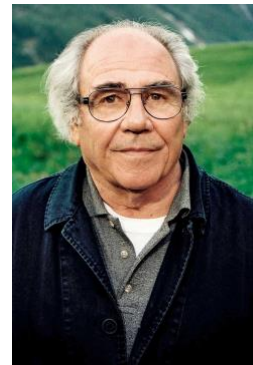


there' and the experiencing subject, a separation of sitter, viewer and artist originator. An explosion of portraiture came with this decline of religious repression and the rise of the individual during the era, reflecting the theories developed by Descartes. The Cartesian view saw the human as dualistic; body and mind were two distinct elements. The 'self' was seen as separate and stable, with a free will that enabled the individual to act independently; a will that could abstain from believing in things - even in God - and that exempted the individual from being subject to Him. This was a radical shift away from the ancient world and the later Christian West, where individuals did not have a 'self' that exercised free will, intent and choice but rather, a soul inextricably bound to God and the social community. This idea of the soul could not survive the impact of modern physical science in the 17th and 18th centuries and Descartes's idea of the 'self' as consciousness was recruited to take its place. It was this unified stable 'self', discoverable by a clear rational mind, that became the subject of portraiture (Reiss, 2003). Realistic portraits of the growing numbers of middle class, with the defined form

of a face highlighted front and central and a dark or disappearing background utilising perspective, were widespread (Walker, 1984).



The Cartesian 'self', it has been argued, is no longer entirely viable within the context of post-structural ideas of the subject, object and the 'death of the author' (Barthes, 1977b). According to Martin and Barresi, by the 2nd half of the



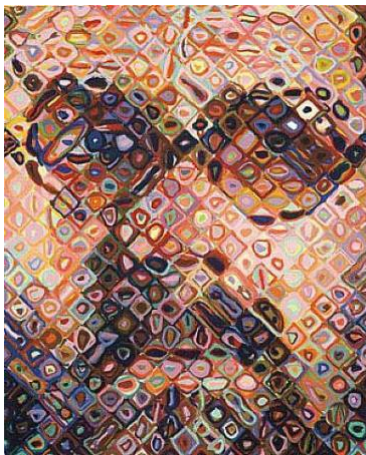
twentieth century, post-World War II, largely because of French post-structuralism, theories of reality and identity had become comprehensively fragmented and dethroned (Martin & Barresi, 2006). After WWII, building on the semiotic theorist Saussure, the structural theorist Levi-Strauss and the psychoanalyst Freud, the post-structuralists, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard, each with their own variation, discarded the Cartesian model of 'self' as unique and stable and recast the "self" as socially and linguistically constituted. They claimed that the reflective powers considered by the Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers to give human individuals free agency, were constructed by the very language and culture that restricts those powers because words themselves have no stable meaning; without a stable centre the 'self' is destabilised and decentred and in a constant state of reconstitution (Martin & Barresi, 2006).

It is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analysing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse... The author has been decentred, that is, relegated to linguistic structure - a subject position not a centre. In place of a centre is an author that creates a clearing (Foucault, 1984, p. 118).

It was into this new mid twentieth century reality that confidence in the definitions of a 'portrait' begin to become undermined by the new theorists. The portrait genre, in its imperative to convey an authentic likeness of the sitter both in their inner psyche and external features, was placed in an untenable position as the centre of a storm of debates about the nature of reality and identity. It could have been the end of portraiture as a genre however, instead, the portrait artist's dilemma about the nature of the 'self' to be represented became the perfect place to deconstruct and subvert prior

thinking about the 'self' and to engage in new ways of thinking about the intersection between portraits and human identity (Van Alphen, 1977).

### Visual Art Portraits and the fluctuating 'self':



As Wendy Steiner has said, it is through these potential paradoxes of portraiture that postmodern thinking around identity is being, and has been, most powerfully expressed. (Steiner, 1987, p.171) Mimetic portrayal was the first victim of contemporary thinking. Abstraction, cubism and impressionism undid the mimetic imperative with Picasso's mask-like

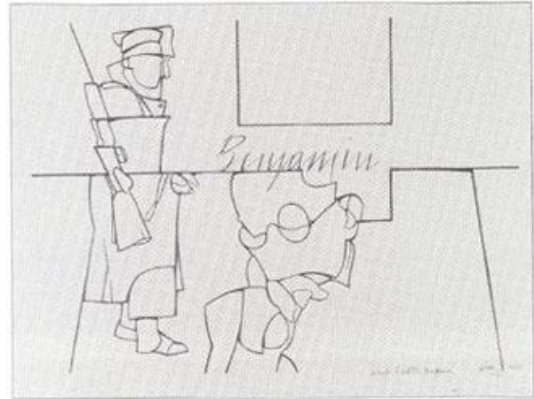


*Portrait of Gertrude Stein* a radical departure from earlier mimetic portrayal. The deeply subjective expressionists Kokoshka, Munch, Beckman and Sheile portrayed the 'inner self' alone, almost completely neglecting the 'good likeness'. The desecrated faces of Bacon also defied the mimetic imperative. The mimetic 'good likeness' becomes merely a simulacrum with no real 'self' behind the portrait

in the postmodern work of Sherman, Niki S. Lee and Close. For Warhol too, the inner person becomes a surface representation of celebrity rather than a real 'self'. For twenty and twenty first century artists the creation of one's face and body image as a mimetic 'good likeness' was no longer the imperative.

As a consequence of the loss of mimesis, intertextuality has become important - titles, narratives and other signs became the defining element in portraiture (Steiner, 1978). As Barthes contends, text can act as an anchor to meaning. It is a "parasitic message designed to connate the image" (Barthes, 1977c, p. 25). And Derrida in *The Truth in Painting*, devotes a chapter to the *Retratto di Walter Benjamin* by Adorno, in which he speaks at length 'around' the title of the portrait.

"When the face begins to disappear, or as here, no longer to occupy the top of centre, the legend becomes necessary... Disappeared is the subject. What has disappeared appears, absent in the very place of the commemorative monument, returning to the empty place marked by his name. Art of the cenotaph." (Derrida, 1987, p. 178, emphasis in original)



The contemporary portrait is no longer able to sit comfortably within its simple definitions because the concept of the existence of a solid inner identity that has its outward manifestation in the face and body of the sitter can no longer be sustained. "The idea now seems to be that the face hides so much of the person's reality that the true markers of autobiographic revelation are anything but the person's face." (Seigel, 2005, p. 73)

### **Film Portraits and the fluctuating 'self':**

The 'self' captured in film and television documentary portraits has also been subjected to the pressure of the postmodern lens. The belief that there was a reality 'out there' that could be captured identically by a signifier image, has been called into question. This was particularly so in documentary because the camera had been from its inception, enshrined as the ideal of scientific transparency. It was this detailed presentation of reality that provided a convincing canvas in which to turn unreality into a *pretence* of reality.

In this way, documentary portraiture and high art portraiture sit in a similar dialectic. Film's problematic dialectic between the claims of evidence-based reality and the subjective expression of the filmmaker, mirrors and amplifies that of high art portraiture, where traditionally the portrait was expected to be offering as close to a mimetic representation of the subject as the artist's ability allowed. Looking at the history of film and film theorising, we can see the issues argued in a concertinaed version; a dialectic that plays out over a hundred years, from the first public showing of a film by the Lumière brothers in 1895 to the present, against the five hundred years

since modern art portraiture began in the Renaissance. In both art forms mimetic representation has been conflated with the reality or truth of the referent (Bazin, 1958; Benjamin, 1997; Corner, 1996; Eisenstein, 1949; Metz, 1985b; Mitry, 1998; Nichols, 2010) and yet both art forms were deeply embedded with the artist's subjective interpretation. The conflation and the attending debate has been more marked in broadcast documentary film than art portraiture because the work is presented with mimetic images and sound in the form of evidence, with the use of archival and seemingly accurate capturing of reality 'as it happens' as well as interpretation of the image in the form of an authoritative voice-over and interviews. It is these 'supplementary components' as Christian Metz calls them, (Metz, 1985b) incorporated into the temporal motion of film, that makes it most powerfully appear to mirror reality. (Nichols, 2010).

For visual art practice, the scholarly argument has focused on identity theory, particularly the changes in the late twentieth century. For documentary, the arguments come from two places; the economic and political influences on filmmakers and the potentially covert nature of the filmmaker's subjectivity. The strength and longevity of the style of expository broadcast documentary spearheaded by Grierson (Winston, 2008) and the studios funded by government and other business interests, are testament to the effects of politics and funding on an art form. Film prepared for broadcast consumption, is an expensive pursuit and it is the dominant political and cultural paradigm that will determine the financial winners. (Adorno & Eisler, 1947; Minh-ha T, 1990) While visual art has been driven by the economic imperative of patronage at various stages in its history, in the twentieth century visual art has been able to, at least partially, wrest itself from being tied to sources that would strongly direct the final work with the beginning of independent government funding bodies. Unlike the production of film, creating small, independent art work is affordable and hence able to be created for a wide audience without major financial support. This has altered the *raison d'etre* for both art forms. Visual art is able to take space for aesthetic and philosophical considerations and such subjective musings are considered its major 'reason for being'. The artists' aim is self-expression; the 'hand of the artist' is actively sought in a portrait and it is applauded.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed the more famous the 'hand' the more it is applauded financially

Documentary film's use of the camera, an instrument enshrined as the ideal of transparency, reinforces the claims of authenticity and truth thereby masking the highly subjective nature of any artistic output. And yet, as the scholars I have reviewed have argued, broadcast documentary is highly invested in appearing to be objective. (Corner, 1996; M Renov, 1993; Winston G. Chi, Wang, 2017; Winston, 1993) Brian Winston suggests a solution to this dilemma:

If documentary drops its pretence to a superior representation of actuality, explicit or implicit promises of simplistic, evidentiary 'referential integrity' will no longer need to be made... Unburdened by objectivity and 'actuality', film of the real world could be creatively treated without a hint of contradiction (Winston, 2008, p. 290).

With more single artist-originator filmmakers offering a "forceful reflex of self-interrogation" (Renov, 2004, p. 105) in their work, filmmakers wishing to express a subjective truth can and do look toward the ideal of art practice, that is, where the artist's hand is obvious and applauded. It is art's very subjectivity that relieves it of the burden of objective truth and gives it its strength and poetry. Documentary then, like art practice, becomes fiction; a fiction whose truth is purely personal, creating portraits that are 'signed' unashamedly by the filmmaker/artist - portraits at once equally of the portrayed, the portrayer and the viewer.

## **EARS**

Music/sound<sup>9</sup> is the central and initiating media I have chosen to depict the fluctuating, transient contemporary 'self'. We live in a world dominated by the visual; media in general prioritises the visually perceptible - advertising, film, TV, tablets and computers, visual art, projections - our eyes dominate to the neglect of hearing.<sup>10</sup> As film

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<sup>9</sup> The 'instrumental music' (including the voice as instrument) I employ, mixed with the worded voice, vocalisations and all other sounds will be named 'MUSIC/SOUND'. I will name it thus because no one element will take priority but rather each of these different sounds are used as instruments in my overall composition; the outcome being the sound track to which the film images are finally added. Each sound, whether it is produced by an instrument, an object, electronically or vocally, is of equal definition and weight in the overall composition which is ultimately 'musical'. As needed for explanation in my text, I will call each of these sounds by their different denotations at times, but the overall composed result is always musical 'music/sound'.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, visual dominance over audio and other senses has been frequently scientifically demonstrated. eg. (Posner & Nissen & Klein, 1976; Spence, 2009)



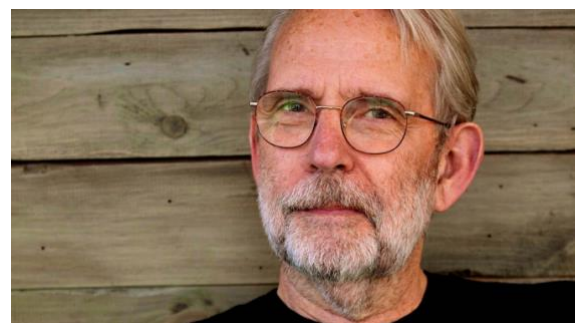
theorist Christian Metz pointed out, our physiology and perceptive hierarchy holds us in thrall to sight; sight that signifies being, space and presence; while sound, which is spatially vague and with no solid form, signifies absence of the material and as such can only have the status of a secondary "attribute" in relation to the primary visual and tactile "substance". (Metz, 1985a) Audio has become an experience that has been denied us in its totality through framing the world as something that is seen (Schedel & Uroskie, 2011). Even Michel Chion, whose writing emphasises the power of music to add value to the image by delivering information and emotion, states it does it with the illusion intact that it is the *filmed image* that is delivering the information.



Sound shows us the image differently than what the image shows alone, and the image likewise makes us hear sound differently than if the sound were ringing out in the dark. However, for all this reciprocity the screen remains the principal support of filmic perception. Transformed by the image it influences, sound ultimately re-projects onto the image the product of their mutual influences. (Chion, 1994, p. 122)

And not only does sound retreat into the background of our senses, but film music/sound has also floundered in the background of scholarly observation and exploration:

For it is also part of Sound's effacement that she respectfully declines to be interviewed, and previous writers on film have, with uncharacteristic circumspection, largely respected her wishes. (Murch, 1994, p. ix)



My intention throughout the creative works and writing is to tempt music/sound out of the shadows to firmly take its place in the realm of portraiture at least, where it can share the portrait with the face of the other.

### **Music/sound and the fluctuating 'self' 1:**

Music/sound has always been recognized to be a peculiarly non-representational art, because it lacks the reference characteristic of words and images; that is, as a signifier or sign that stands for some other thing outside of itself (Cox, 2011; Raffman, 1993). For this reason, music/sound has long eluded the analysis that has surrounded the visual arts in terms of representation, signification and reality and, as a result, has been considered to be purely formal and abstract. Many philosophers have seen music as the 'ideal'; the 'absolute'; the one that offers us 'significant form' precisely because its abstract nature leads it to be most suited to expressing emotions as opposed to the visual arts which are representational and viewed in terms of their correspondence to external reality. Kandinsky brought his view to it in 1914, but it is just as relevant today:

A painter . . . in his longing to express his inner life cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts today, achieves this end. He naturally seeks to apply the methods of music to his own art (Kandinsky, 2011, ch. 4, para. 4)

The music philosopher's intuitive view that music/sound is effective in expressing abstract human emotions is borne out by psychological and cognitive studies. Physiological testing particularly from the 1980s onwards, has shown without doubt that music and sound can convey both emotions and meaning. Leonard Meyer led the way in directing the course of early physiological testing of music when he claimed convincingly that music was able to elicit emotions. He suggested music achieved this by the action of either fulfilling or suspending musical expectations within the structure of music itself; that is, emotions were produced in the listener when their expectations of what they were about to hear in a piece of music, were either fulfilled or suspended: "Affect or emotion-felt is aroused when an expectation - a tendency to respond - activated by the musical stimulus situation, is temporarily inhibited or permanently blocked" (Meyer, 1956, p. 31). Music philosophers Stephen Davies, with Nicholas Cook and Peter Kivy all argue for what one could call the 'appearance' of emotions in music rather than theories that claim music arouses or contains emotions; it's a position one could call "appearance emotionalism" (Davies, 2011, p. 7) which corresponds with Cook's claim that music offers the 'appearance' of emotions much like a man can 'appear' sad. (Cook, 1998) "These expressive appearances are not emotions that are felt, take objects,

involve desires or beliefs. They are not occurrent emotions at all. They are emergent properties of the things to which they are attributed" (Davies, 1994, p. 228). The music does not contain the emotions, nor does it necessarily create emotions but rather it is music's resemblance to the "temporally unfolding dynamic structure and configurations of human behaviour associated with the expression of emotion ... it is expressive because we experience it as possessing a dynamic character relating it to humanly expressive behaviour" (Davies, 2011, p. 10) and it is deliberately created to have those attributes. We then, as listeners, tend to resonate or mirror the emotional tenor of the music. Davies claims that "music is capable of expressing a fairly limited number of emotional types, but that it can express these objectively, so that suitable skilled and situated listeners agree highly in attributing them to music." (p. 11)

It was Meyer's early ideas that formed the inspiration for many studies that were to come - scholarly, unscholarly and in between - explaining in particular how *film* music works; that is, how music acts to support or enhance the image and narrative when they are combined. I have chosen not to dip into this literature on film music for the reasons detailed in the next section on music and film. Rather, I will outline studies that approach the physiological effects of music and sound alone to best understand the *intrinsic* power of music and sound.

## **Physiological Studies**

### **(a) Emotion:**

Sloboda found that specific musical structures lead to specific psychophysiological reactions, and he showed that new or unexpected harmonies, as Meyer had claimed, can make listeners shiver with emotion (Sloboda, 1991). Koelsch, extended the findings on music and emotion and determined that (1) music was capable of inducing emotions with a strong intensity, (2) such emotions could usually be induced quite consistently across subjects and (3) music could induce not only unpleasant, but also pleasant emotions (Koelsch, 2005). Various measurements of the components of emotion have been systematically studied over the years which point to the clear evidence that the emotions evoked by music are 'real'. For instance, Sloboda et al reported that emotions were felt subjectively and could be described (Sloboda et al., 2001); Koelsch et al showed that the emotion centres of the brain were activated with music (Koelsch, Fritz, Cramon, Müller, & Friederici, 2006); Becker showed that measurable facial expressions were

induced by music (Becker, 2004); North et al showed music could induce people to action - either to help others, buy a product or to dance (North, Tarrant, & Hargreaves, 2004). All things that any listener to music could confidently state from their own personal experience. It was these and other studies that confirmed Meyer's initial claims, but another study in 2008 (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008) extended the single mechanism Meyer offered as to *how* music induced the emotions, that of an interrupted musical expectation, to include five others: (1) as an unconscious brain stem reflex, (2) as evaluative conditioning because of prior happy associations with the music, (3) as emotional contagion or mirroring of the perceived musical expression while listening, (4) via visual imagery induced while listening and (5) via memory of events related to the music.



**(b) Meaning:**

Semantics is a key feature of language but there was no evidence that music could elicit brain mechanisms related to processing meaning as language could. It was a ground breaking study by Koelsch et al in 2004 that changed the thinking with regard to music and meaning. (Koelsch et al., 2004) Previously, Meyer considered that music did not have referential meaning outside itself, as language did, but rather an embodied meaning; that is "a musical stimulus (be it a tone and phrase or a whole section) has meaning because it points to and makes us expect another musical event" (Meyer, 1956, p. 35) But as for referential meaning, most music philosophers and psychologists alike agreed that music had no semantic content. Langer claimed that while music has many elements, like words, that can be perceived and that come together to form a complex whole, those elements are *not* words that denote a thing, rather the elements have no meaning in themselves: "Just as music is only loosely and inexactly called a language, so its symbolic function is only loosely called meaning, because the factor of conventional reference is missing from it" (Langer, 1953. p. 31). Stephen Davies also contends that music is not meaningful because it is not a symbol aimed at denotation nor is it depictive like painting because all these ideas fall outside the boundaries of the music itself (Davies, 1994, p. 201). He says "the relationship between parts of a musical work are relationships of implication that should not be conflated with the linguistic or semiological notions of reference, denotation or

signification" (Davies, 2011, p. 73). And Diana Raffman: "Music may be intended but it isn't intentional: it isn't about anything ... music does not refer or bear truth" (Raffman, 1993, p. 41, emphasis in original).

Koelsch's work, however, added *meaning* to the list of attributes that music could elicit showing that physiological measurements were triggered by music in the same way as they were by language (Koelsch et al., 2004).<sup>11</sup> These measurements showed, not that a musical sound directly represented something (one could not order a take-away for instance) but that the brain processing required for matching a conceptual meaning to a word was also elicited when the conceptual meaning was matched to a musical sound, in the same way and with the same strength and consistency. Koelsch's study began to open the way to the possibility that music and sound can have extra-musical meaning; that is, meaning outside itself (Daltrozzo et al., 2008; Orgs, Lange, Dombrowski, & Heil, 2006; Schön, Ystad, Kronland-Martinet, & Besson, 2010). Later studies showed that extremely short (250 msec) musical excerpts and also unidentifiable single sounds could elicit both semantic processing and emotional responses, indicating that they occur automatically and prior to the brain being able to verbalise or name the sound (Daltrozzo et al., 2008; Orgs et al., 2006; Schön et al., 2010). The assumption from this was that it was the music or sound *itself*, not the listeners identifying and/or naming of the music/sound, that conveys the meaning. From this can be taken that it is not the verbalising the sound nor the musical structure (harmony) alone that conveys meaning, but a more likely candidate is the timbre of the music or sound. One study in particular, particularly emphasised this point when it showed that a single unrecognisable sound, even when presented to the listener outside of a musical context, could convey meaningful concepts (Painter & Koelsch, 2011).

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<sup>11</sup> The measurement used for electrical activity in the brain observed when an individual is processing semantic meaning in language and music, is the N400 which is a component of the event-related brain potential (ERP) measured by electroencephalography (EEG). It was discovered to be related to semantic processing and first began to be used in 1980. This is the method that has been used in most studies since then to measure the normal brain response to words and other potentially meaningful stimuli, in this case music and sounds.

Diana Raffman in her book *Language, Music and Mind*, has tried to develop a model of music as a form of language to explain its ability to carry meaning. It was Lerdahl and Jackendoff (Lerdahl & Jackendoff, 1983) who wrote what is considered to be the paradigmatic reference to the theory that there are links between linguistic and musical structure.<sup>12</sup> A similar observation had been made by Susanne Langer when she wrote "we are so deeply impressed with the paragon of symbolic form, namely language, that we naturally carry its characteristics over into our conceptions and expectations of any other mode" (Langer, 1953, pp. 28-29). But this quasi grammatical structure that is being referred to by Lerdahl, Jackendoff and Langer is more than a fanciful wish to find parallels. Raffman claims that "what sets music apart, lending it unique kinship to language, is its apparent possession of grammatical structure - or, more properly, the listener's apparent possession of (domain-specific) psychological rules for apprehending that structure" (Raffman, 1993, p. 41). While this quasi grammatical similarity to language gives music a sense of meaning, Raffman claims this meaning is in part '*ineffable*' and can't be translated either into direct representations or words. Raffman says that music's similar structure to language makes us believe there is something being conveyed by the music that we hear and that we have an innate desire to *speak* it: "since music (more than the other non-linguistic arts) is kin to language in certain important respects, an expressivist conception might account in part for the impulse to tell what we know of a musical work" (p. 41, emphasis in original). This meaning that we sense so strongly and wish to speak of cannot be put into words. This confirms and adds to Langer's view:



It seems particularly difficult for our literal minds to grasp the idea that anything can be known which cannot be named ... but this ...is really the strength of music expressiveness: that music articulates the forms that language cannot set forth (Langer, 1942, p. 198).

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<sup>12</sup> It seems their research was first inspired by a lecture and book written by Leonard Bernstein in 1973. I mention this because I'm heartened that an empirical, scholarly study can emerge from the principles offered by a non-scholarly practising musician who has, as Jackendoff states, a deep intuitive understanding of music (Jackendoff, 1977).

While it can convincingly be argued that music and language share a similar generative grammatical structure, it is the idea of the *ineffability* of the meaning generated that holds the most appeal for my work. Perhaps John Dewey sums it up in its simplest terms: "If all meaning could be adequately expressed by words, the arts of painting and music would not exist" (1934 cited in Raffman, 1993, p. 2).

**(c) Identity:**

A final group of studies relevant to my work are those carried out on the correlation between identity and music. (Folkestad, 2012; Hargreaves & Meill & MacDonald, 2012) The study writers believe that while the areas of cognitive and emotional aspects of music psychology have been well studied, the social aspects and in particular the role music plays in forming and developing an individual's sense of identity has been neglected. They postulate that music is similar to language in its ability to determine and mark identity. The studies have located different ways people engage in music that amount to a "network of associations" or their "inner musical libraries" and as a consequence, "people's musical identities are determined and influenced by these networks which are based on their accumulated lifetimes experience of different music, all of which are further associated with socially and culturally-situated experience" (Hargreaves, D. J. Hargreaves, J. J & North, 2012, p. 170). Folkestad has coined the phrase "the personal inner musical library". He uses it in relation to the inner library that a composer may draw on to enrich their creativity and imagination, but by inference, we all, even non-musicians, hold within ourselves our inner musical library - the 'soundtrack of our life' - that can be accessed and used in a portrait (Folkestad, 2012). In other words, the continual fluctuations of identity will interweave with one's experience and identification with genres of music and sounds, both mirroring and constructing our sense of 'self'.

These studies offer compelling, and for my creative work, useful results. However, many of the studies are carried out in a laboratory setting with a narrow focus on the minutiae of the aural experience. This raises the question whether the 'music alone' (Kivy, 1990b)<sup>13</sup> or 'absolute music' that was tested in these studies actually exists? Cook says there is no such thing as 'music alone'. He asserts: "pure music it seems, is an aesthetician's (and music theorists) fiction: the real thing unites itself promiscuously

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Kivy names music that is independent of non-musical representation such as a text, title, program, lyrics - pure music or 'music alone'.

with any other media that are available" (Cook, 1998, p. 92). Susanne Langer names music as an "unconsummated symbol"; that is, a symbolic representation that is missing the final moment of representation or meaning. As such, music is constantly urging toward consummation and it can achieve this by attaching to other media. (Langer, 1953) As Cook concludes, and other theorists confirm, (Tobias, 2004) 'music alone' rarely happens. At this point I will look at music/sound combined with film image to explore and question the uses to which music's particular intrinsic strengths have been put to in commercial film, TV and media in particular.

### Music & Film:



Eisenstein wrote extensively about the way image and music could interact, well before the Hollywood juggernaut overwhelmed filmmaking last century. In his *Statement on the Sound Film* he called for the non-synchronisation of sound with image. By 'synchronised' sound he meant the use of sound recorded on a "naturalistic level, exactly corresponding with the

movement on the screen" that he believed would limit the art of filmmaking and open film up to populism and commercial exploitation (Eisenstein, Pudovkin, & Alexandrov, 1949, p. 158).<sup>14</sup> The terms synchronous and non-

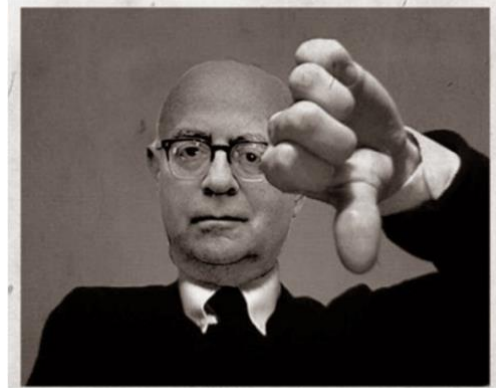
synchronous also partially equate with Chion's idea of "empathetic" and "anempathetic"

music/sound; empathetic music/sound directly

expressing and mirroring the feeling, rhythm and phrasing of the image and

anempathetic music/sound being indifferent to those characteristics on the screen.

(Chion, 1994). Eisenstein, followed by Adorno and Eisler, were in a minority in their criticism of the 'culture industry' as it existed (and still does) in Hollywood. They argued that film had become standardised for mass consumption and film's value judged solely in terms of its exchange value in the market (Adorno & Eisler, 1947; Eisenstein, 1949;




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<sup>14</sup> "ONLY A CONTRAPUNTAL USE of sound in relation to the visual montage will afford a potentiality of montage development and perfection... THE FIRST EXPERIMENTAL WORKS WITH SOUND MUST BE DIRECTED ALONG THE LINE OF NON-SYNCHRONISATION WITH THE VISUAL IMAGE" (Eisenstein et al., 1949, p. 258 emphasis in original)



Hufner, 1998). The total synchronisation and subservience of music/sound to the story and image played an important part in creating the 'filmic illusion' that still maintains this economic status quo in the Hollywood studio system.



Buhler and Neumeyer point out that the discourse on film music since then, has consciously followed the same two opposing paths; that is, those who are invested in the classic Hollywood ambition to preserve the filmic illusion, and those who see this as a blatant attempt to sustain the dominant ideology. Put simply, synchronisation of music and image perpetuates the



illusion, counterpoint creates tension. (Buhler, Neumeyer, 1994) Gorbman, Flinn and Kalinak (Gorbman, 1987; Kalinak, 1992) explain the most pervasive general rule, film music "was supposed to 'repeat' the activity or mood of the film image and was not supposed to deviate from this nor draw attention to itself qua music ... it is really quite simple: bad cinema music is noticed; good scores are not" (Flinn, 1992, p. 37). This is the general expectation of music/sound in synchronicity with the narrative image. Cook, Chion, Murch, however, claim that the narrative and image is not, as the film industry contends, the most important element, rather the music/sound, image and story all work together to create meaning. French sound theorist, Michel Chion, in his book *Audio-Vision* claims music addresses neither the eye nor ear separately but at one and the same time - what he calls the 'audio-visual illusion' or the 'added value' (p 112) that sound and image bring to each other. His contention, put simply, is that sound and image act together to signify. (Chion, 1994; Cook, 1998; Murch, 1994) Although Hollywood film, TV and commercial media in general, has embraced film music and put it to work for its narrative and emotive ends, it has done so with the composer's role tightly controlled by the director and producer. As a result, film music has often languished in conservatism (Burch, 1969). Buhler and Neumeyer suggest that the reason for this is because of music's intrinsic power - "the danger is that music may do more than just supplement the image and indicate what those images cannot. More than just supplement the images, music may instead become

an alternative site of moral authority." (Buhler, Neumeyer, 1994, p. 381) This potential is borne out by the physiological studies discussed in the previous section.

So, wherein lies the power of music that is not subservient to the image on screen? According to Chion it lies "in the gap"; for Eisenstein non-synchronous music with image creates the "4th dimension"; for Barthes it creates the "obtuse meaning". Both Eisenstein and Cook critique at length the synesthetic ideals of Kandinsky and Scriabin, viewing synaesthesia as being the extreme form of synchronicity (Cook, 1998; Eisenstein, 1943). For Chion, by choosing what to keep and what to eliminate or by associating sounds that do not align or even conflict with the image, music/sound composers and filmmakers who use this style of music/sound and image montage thereby invite the viewer to step into "the perceptual vacuum" and their imagination will follow (Murch, 1994). As Eisenstein eloquently puts it: "Art begins the moment the creak of a boot occurs against a different visual shot and thus gives rise to corresponding associations" (Eisenstein, 1949). It is at that point, Chion says, when the relationship between sound and image is stretched in such a way as to create a tension between what is on the screen and what is in the mind of the viewer; we have moved "into the gap". Barthes describes in his own way, a similar idea, that "the signifier is not filled out" by the music/sound when it is indifferent or not synchronous with the image and thus the "obtuse meaning" can emerge (Barthes, 1977c). And Eisenstein, also describing the same mechanism, claims it is in this way that the 4th dimension is revealed. It is this tension, mindfully created, that holds the power in a music/sound and film relationship; a relationship of equals. It is this tension I hope to exploit in my creative work.

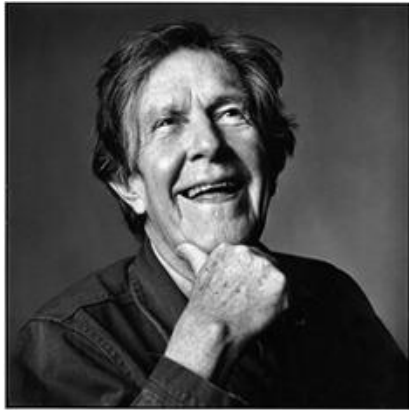
### **Music/sound and the fluctuating 'self' 2:**

Late 20th Century post-structuralism rejected the idea that images and signs can represent or signify a solid reality in a pre-existing world. They rejected closed systems



with predicated outcomes and instead embraced chaos and loosely bound, fluctuating moments in time. Some artists working with music/sound have embraced these

ideas. Sound art, spearheaded by the Futurists, led by Russolo at the turn of last century, the coming of recording in the 1930s, and Pierre Schaeffer's *Musique Concrète*, a term by which his compositions were known from 1949 onwards (Palombini, 1993, p. 14), held the most promise for a radical deconstruction of musical thinking. It gave



composers access to what John Cage called "the entire field of sound", making conventional distinctions between music and sounds



increasingly irrelevant (Cox, 2011; Kim-Cohen, 2009). Cox explains that the sounds produced by *Musique Concrète*, even more than the 18th century ideal of 'absolute music', were seen as pure, unadulterated 'sonorous objects'; entirely non-representational "presentations of the sonorous object itself" (Cox, 2011, p.156).

However most electroacoustic or acousmatic composers<sup>15</sup> and theoreticians would dispute this view of music/sound as non-representational (Kim-Cohen, 2009).

Acousmatic music's use of environmental recordings carries with it a range of real-world references and associations that motivate listeners towards the identification of objects and the spaces that contain them. John Young explains that composers of electroacoustic music exploit the entire range of sounds, from representational sounds we can readily recognise to sounds disassociated from any known physical context, to express ideas on a continuum from those based on 'reality' through to pure abstraction. These latter abstract sounds invoke strong metaphorical meanings in the listener

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<sup>15</sup> The term acousmatic comes from the Greek meaning 'a thing heard'. It is a form of music that was born from Schaeffer's *Musique Concrète* in the late 1940s but its origins, as the name suggest, began earlier. As Schaeffer says "This term has so little to do with our techniques that it comes to us from way back down the centuries ... someone else had experienced the powers of a faceless voice, had identified the phenomenon: Pythagoras" (p. 63) The hidden acousmatic voice that Pythagoras spoke of was emanating from behind a curtain. Modern acousmatic sound is composed for loudspeakers: "it is a noise that is heard without the causes from which it comes being seen" (p. 64). Sounds are manipulated in the studio so "we have a sort of 'disguise' an acousmatic veil over the sounds" (p. 195) Ultimately, "acousmatics proposes turning our backs on the instrument and musical conditioning, and placing sound and its musical "potential" squarely before us" (Schaeffer, 2017, p. 69). A more contemporary definition sees acousmatic as referring to "the listening condition derived from the reproduction of sound through loudspeakers, incorporating the creative use of recorded sound reproduced and processed in the studio and strategies of sound manipulation" (Amelides, 2016, p. 213).

"because (these transformed or synthetic sounds) create a sense of detachment from known physical reality, these ... may be taken as a metaphorical representation of the inner world of the imagination" (Young, 1996, p. 73). Schaffer in 1966, proposed four modes of listening to sounds: mode one describes the listener easily identifying sounds representing things based in the physical world; mode two describes listening to sound without any identification involved; mode three involves listening to specific attributes of the sound itself and mode four involves our response to sounds with an unknown source within a context that creates a metaphorical or encoded meaning such as listening to music (Schaeffer, 2017). Denis Smalley has a similar scheme called surrogacy (Smalley, 1992). First order surrogates are those where the source of the sound, both its object and human gesture, is obvious; second order is the gesture upon musical instruments; third order is where both the gesture and the object is ambiguous; and fourth order surrogates are disassociated from real objects and gestures and we must interpret them via imagination and metaphor based on other similar gestural types. These fourth order interpretations are in a constant state of flux and are considered conducive to abstract interpretation (Smalley, 1992, p. 85). Electroacoustic, or acousmatic composers can exploit these ways of listening, by creating a compositional strategy that directs the listeners attention between each of these modes, enabling meaning and narrative to be conveyed.

The electroacoustic medium can justly be regarded as one of the most significant single developments for music in the late twentieth century. By bringing the entire breadth of sounding sources under the composer's direct control, it provides the opportunity for the full scope of human listening mechanisms to be employed in revitalised ways - particularly our strong natural tendency to seek recognition of sound sources and causes. Combinations and transfigurations of recognisable sounds draw on listeners' cultural and environmental associations and experiences in ways that can engender metaphors and evoke symbols. (Young, 1996, p. 91).

This technique combined with music/sound's power over our psychological and cognitive responses - outlined in the previous section - makes for a potent tool to be used in the process of portrait making. The appeal in using music/sound for my research is that music/sound can be both representational and expressive. Placed with image as an equal

and significant partner, one that not merely mirrors the image in tone, rhythm and expression, music/sound is in a strong position to create a space for the listener to evoke their own meanings, narratives and emotions. From this perspective it could be seen that music/sound has a unique capacity to express that space within which our elusive, slippery inner psychic world can reside and be portrayed.

### **CHAPTER 3:**

#### **Artists Review**

**Summary:** The portrait form has been clearly defined since modern portraiture began in the Renaissance. The two main defining elements of a portrait I refer to in this doctorate are an identifiable likeness to an individual's external manifestation and a depiction of the individual's interiority. In this review of portrait artists significant to the research, I will be focusing on the two main points of research - the artist's subjectivity in the creation of portraits and the place for intertextual music and sound within portraiture. I will begin with fifteenth century Renaissance portraits where new notions of an individual 'self' first emerged within society as mirrored in portraiture. This is well illustrated by Albrecht Dürer's contribution to the emerging art of self-portraiture.

The twentieth century saw new notions of selfhood emerge again with post-structural theorists seeing the 'self' no longer as a cohesive whole but rather fluctuating, de-centred and formed by mass culture mediated through language. This change led to a dissatisfaction with, and subsequent subversion of, the portrait form which grew in strength throughout the twentieth century. I explore this subversion beginning with the fine art video portraits of Andy Warhol. I continue by exploring a small selection of fine art video portrait artists and sound artists, engaging with the ideas of the artist's subjectivity and the place for music and sound within portraiture.

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## Renaissance Portraiture

### Albrecht Dürer *Self Portraits*



Figure xx: Albrecht Dürer *Self-portrait* (1500) oil on panel

As a domain of representational practice, the self-portrait provides a place where the 'self' can be celebrated, questioned or dismissed. As I have detailed in Chapter 2, the Renaissance heralded a crisis in thinking about the human 'self' and it was from this crisis that a new genre of portraiture emerged, with Dürer at its centre. (Koerner, 1988; Martin, 2006; Reiss, 2003; Seigel, 2005). Dürer was the first artist to create a self-portrait and this, and his subsequent self-portraits, garnered such attention in their time that they continued to be singled out by art historians to illustrate the profound changes happening in the early modern period in Western thinking about identity, reflected by these new developments in portrait making. (Koerner 1988, pg.84).



Figure xx: Jan van Eyck, *Man in a Red Turban* 1433. Image by Carla Thackrah

Jan van Eyck's *Man in a Red Turban* (1433) is tentatively considered to be the first self-portrait; the words "Jan Van Eycke made me as well as I can"<sup>16</sup> are displayed prominently on the frame pointing to the historical conclusion that it is a self-portrait, however the identity of the sitter as Van Eyck has never been proven. It is Dürer who can be said to have created the first autonomous self-portrait whose identity is assured with his self-portrait of 1493. However it is in Dürer's stunning Munich self-portrait of 1500 that is seen the first truly modern example

of self-portraiture on several levels. Not only was the idea of capturing an image of one's 'self' for no formal reason a novel exercise and one that in a practical sense was encouraged by the widespread manufacture of the first quality flat mirrors, Koerner offers the view that Dürer's 1500 Self-Portrait combines both his likeness, his powerful signature on the canvas and the statement translated as "I, Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg portrayed myself in everlasting colours aged twenty-eight years" to not merely declare the image to be created by himself, but also to exemplify the emerging Renaissance concept of the presence and value of the individual human 'self' within the work of art.

It is a painting which appears wholly to validate the art historical belief that Dürer's self-portraits represent a passage from one age to another (Panofsky, 1943). The panel's date of 1500 takes on a special importance, not only because its round number cannot help but being regarded as epochal, but because, in its prominent placement near the center of the darkened visual field at the upper left, one senses that the artist has fashioned the moment of his painting as a

<sup>16</sup> "Als Ich Kan" at the top of the frame and "Me Fecit" at the bottom

point of passage, indeed that his self-portrait is the appropriate emblem of that great year (Koerner 1988, p.35).

Unlike the earlier painting traditions before him that saw the individual not as an originator but a link in the chain of tradition, Durer had an impulse to "pour out new things which had never before been in the mind of man" (Panofsky 1943, p.45). It could be said he was, as Foucault calls, "an initiator of discourse" (Michael Foucault, 2010, p. 135) and none more so than in this work.



Figure xx: Head of Christ - copy after Jan van Eyck from his workshop. Original lost thought to be painted in 1400.

Retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32941370>

21/01/2019

The self-portrait shows his likeness as both a continuation of tradition and as a striking departure, revealing a radically new notion of selfhood that associates the human individual to God. His face, facing directly front, fills the frame, the placement taken directly from vera icon or true image of Christ, particularly Van Eyck's *Head of Christ* painted around 1400 which was conceivably the original prototype of Dürer's self-portrait (Koerner, 1988, p. 107). His perfectly featured face is surrounded by a halo of finely detailed hair and his right hand is held in

the place of Christ's blessing hand similar to the many *Salvator Mundi* that went before and after. Without a doubt, Dürer deliberately painted himself in the likeness of Christ. He not only adopted the compositional scheme of the vera icon but even changed his own features to make them conform more to the traditional view of Christ (Panofsky, 1943, p. 43). The face is pressed hard against its flat black background. It is not a body in a worldly setting nor a body showing movement in space. The lack of setting and flatness of the background is heightened by the placement of the artist's signature and inscriptions placed on either side of the face. This is not merely an image of a human



likeness within the world but rather a statement of the principle of selfhood - a 'self' that has been raised to the level of religious icon. As Koerner says:

It articulates through the example of the 'artist' that troubled dream of the completed, finished, and representative self" (p.71) and that "by transferring the attributes of imagistic authority and quasi-magical power once associated with the true and sacred image of God, to the novel subject of self-portraiture, Dürer legitimates his radically new notion of art, one which is based on the irreducible relation between the 'self' and the work of art (p.82).

This exploration and inspiration from Dürer's self-portraits is done with one of my main research points in mind; that is, the role of the artist's subjectivity within the act of portrait making. The German art scholar Joseph Koerner, who I quote regularly throughout this section, adds some insights from Joachim Camerarius (1500-1574) who wrote a biography<sup>17</sup> of Dürer not long after his death. He equates Dürer's physical perfection to his noble character "nature bestowed on him a body remarkable in build and stature and not unworthy of the noble mind it contained". His ultimate conclusion is that Dürer's perfect physical body and interior noble 'self' is mirrored in the perfection of his art "the nature of a man is never more certainly and definitely shown than in the works he produces as the fruits of his art. What single painter has there ever been who did not reveal his character in his works." Camerarius, using Dürer's fine self-portrait as his example, was stating a novel idea for this time - that any work of art will be essentially a self-portrait. (quoted in Conway, 1889 p.136-137) Certainly with both Van Eyck's purported self-portrait and Dürer's many, the presence of so prominent a signature on either the canvas or the frame was significant, signaling a heightened awareness of individual selfhood. This contributes an historical insight into a notion that continues to be argued into the twenty first century - that all portraits, if created by a single artist originator, could be seen as a self-portrait.

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<sup>17</sup> A biography was a novel idea in Renaissance Germany, an enterprise which in itself illustrated the impact Dürer had on contemporary thoughts of selfhood.

## Twentieth and Twenty First Century Fine Art Video Portraits

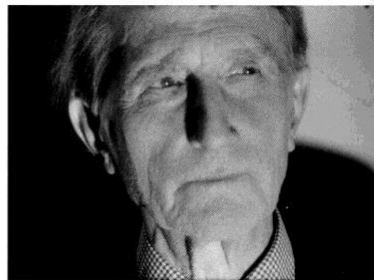
### Andy Warhol *Screen Tests* (1964-1966)



ST78



ST78



ST79

Figure xx: Three stills from two of Warhol's *Screen Tests*  
Donovan and Marcel Duchamp. Image from Angell, 2006, p. 63)

Throughout this section I will refer to temporal film or video portraits that reference the visual arts as fine art video portraiture to distinguish it from documentary portraiture which is created to be suitable for broadcast on television or film theatres (usually a classic narrative structure with clear start, middle and end; single screen high quality broadcast format) and photographic portraiture which is a single still image.

It could be said that the portraits of Dürer and Warhol occupy similar positions in their respective times; both posed questions about the human 'self' within portrait making and for both, the continuing strong responses to their work means they are singled out time and again to document and signify changes in thinking about the human individual in their era. While Dürer's portraits marked the appearance of the reasoning human

individual separate from God with both the artist and the portrayed becoming wholly present in the art work for the first time in history, Warhol's portraits marked the disappearance of the individual on both sides of the portrait; both the artist and the portrayed (Van Alphen, 1977, pp. 242–243). Not only are Warhol's actions as a painter largely and purposely absent in his mechanically reproduced print/paintings but his sitters are equally bereft of their interiority and identity. Like many theorists, Blake Stimson sees Warhol life and work as exemplifying the transition from modernism to postmodernism. As he says that "more than any other cultural icon, he helped to effect the transition from the old worlds of God, reason and labour to the new world of consumption we still find ourselves in today" (Stimson, 2014, p. 39). As the artist considered to most embody the intrinsic qualities of postmodernism - the "ur-postmodernist" (Sartwell, 2013) - Warhol's art and life stood in complete opposition to the modernism that began in the Renaissance. His subjects, like him, were coolly impersonal; there were no angst-ridden cathartic splashes of paint like the artists immediately before him, but rather garishly coloured, mechanically produced pop art stolen from advertising, packaging and the media. Even his actual physical appearance was pale and uncoloured; an empty mirrored surface to reflect the world of shallow consumerism around us. As he famously said, "if you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it" (Berg, 1989, p. 56).



Figure xx: Cindy Sherman *Untitled Film Still #17* photograph gelatine silver print

Retrieved from <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sherman-untitled-film-still-17-p11516>

In the late 1970s, feminism gave rise to further explorations on the theme of the loss of 'self' in postmodernism with Cindy Sherman's portraits, *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980) being some of the earliest and most celebrated. These photographic portraits show in the most disturbing way, how the act of representation itself can capture a completely empty portrait by portraying a 'self' without any original and therefore without any inner being; a true simulacra. Her sitters, which are in fact herself pretending to be an actress portrayed in a non-existent 1950s Hollywood film still, have no original signified but are rather portraits of the act of portraiture itself. Van Alphen says "we don't see a transparent representation of a full subjectivity, instead we see a photograph of a subject which is constructed in the image of representation. The traditional portrait ... is turned inside out" (Van Alphen, 1977, p. 244). Sherman, Niki S Lee, Tracey Moffatt, Nan Goldin and others too numerous to detail here, have used their subversion of portraiture to continue to question the place of the 'self' within a portrait.<sup>18</sup>

In Warhol's *Screen Tests* (1964-1966), the sitters *are* real people; they were the various celebrities and attractive faces that came into Warhol's Factory in New York during these years. Each portrait fills a 3 min length of silent film stock, shot with a Bolex 16mm camera on a tripod set to close-up and usually left static. Each sitter was told to sit still against the neutral background, staring into the camera, preferably without blinking. They were often simply left to sit throughout the duration without anyone operating the camera. As Benjamin says in *A Little History of Photography*, another 'self' projects to the camera than to the eye and this is nowhere more obvious than in the 472 portraits of 189 individuals portrayed in the *Screen Tests*. If there was an aim in these portraits one would assume it began with Warhol's fascination with portraits created via mechanical means - this time a film camera that repeats frame after frame creating what was essentially an extended and continuous photograph.<sup>19</sup> As Warhol said of his early films "the point was to make a moving-picture still life" (Kent, 1970). Given the lack of movement, props or expression, there is on the surface, like his screen print portraits, little evidence of either the artist's or the sitter's 'self'; they portrayed his classic potent message of surface alienation rather than the "inner life" and the

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<sup>18</sup> While these artists are important in that they have used their subversion of portraiture to continue to question the place of the 'self' within a portrait, because of the scope of this research, I will not deal with fine art portrait photographers in any detail.

<sup>19</sup> According to Callie Angell there were several other names for the *Screen Tests* but one was 'Stillies' referencing the photographic stillness of the sitters within the moving film (Angell, 2006)

"character ... or psychological states" (Freeland, 2010, p. 5) that is considered essential in a portrait.

However, through this process more is revealed than perhaps was intended; through the process of posing, the sitters were put to a test in the true sense. For some the sheer duress they were placed under to self-script their encounter with the camera over these 3 minutes *did* reveal an individual 'self': as Warhol says "it's much harder to be your own script than to memorize someone else's" (Kent, 1970). Some were, as Callie Angell suggests "stricken and exhausted" by the process (p. 206). As if the process itself was not enough to unnerve the sitters, they were also provoked into response with bright lights and verbal prodding from behind the camera. She says:

Some subjects seem overcome with self-consciousness, squinting into the bright lights, swallowing nervously or visibly trembling, while others rise to the occasion with considerable force of personality and self-assurance, meeting the gaze of Warhol's camera with equal power. As the collection of *Screen Tests* grew, these provoked responses gradually became the overt purpose or content of the films, superseding the original goal of the achieved, static image (Angell, 2006, p. 14).

So while Warhol was not originally concerned with the traditional need to portray some manifestation of an inner identity of the sitter and was actually subverting that very concept, his purpose changed as the *Screen Tests* developed. As well, there are two additional aspects of the *Screen Tests* that undermine the original aim to depict the surface alone, offering us instead, an insight into an 'inner self'.

The first aspect that allows a richer interpretation of the 'inner self' of these sitters is the intertextual information. These portraits are far from anonymous; they are replete with intertextual or archival information because all his sitters were celebrities either by virtue of their public notoriety or simply because they were sitters for Andy Warhol: Bob Dylan, Susan Sontag, Edie Sedgwick, Nico, Salvador Dali, Marcel Duchamp, Lou Reed, Anne Buchanan, Alan Ginsberg - the list is long. If they had no known celebrity to begin with, over the years they have acquired stories and a celebrity of sorts - their names and backgrounds being of interest to both researchers and the curious. This first

aspect then, affords the viewer of these portraits an insight into an inner being, even if it is one imposed by virtue of our common culture.

The second aspect is that of the face itself. Although Warhol mindfully eschews the traditional need to depict an 'inner self' he is, none the less, very much engaged with the face as a marker of the portrait; and these faces are displayed at slow speed -16 frames per second instead of the 24 frames they were shot at slowing the footage to over 4 minutes long. As Wayne Koestenbaum said "A face is interesting, but so is the time we spend looking at it. Seeing a Warhol screen test, we compose a conceptual sculpture: an empty box, containing our time-of-beholding" (2003). They are enquiries into both the sitters' 'inner self' *and* the viewers' act of looking because rarely is it that we are able to scrutinise a face with such lingering, unashamed attention. Perhaps more importantly, they were shot in close-up. Most film theorists would agree with Jean Epstein when he said that "the close-up is the soul of the cinema... the close-up is drama in high gear...the close-up is an intensifying agent because of its size alone" (Epstein, 1977, p. 9-13). There's no escaping that some of these closely filmed and slowed-down faces, can and do reveal emotions to a viewer in a way that is impossible to be viewed under normal circumstances. The face becomes a reflecting surface of light and shadow, each small movement becoming as expressive as any artist's painted line. We can move in to the screen, peer intensely and see what the slowly unfolding face reveals as each movement becomes an expressive event potentially full of meaning. Rarely in any portrait, can we see the act of slow thinking so intimately captured. So it is through these culturally encoded elements: the proximity of the face in close-up, the slow motion that allows time for the viewer to encounter the face in a transcendental way, the archival information attached to each portrait, that define these as 'portraits' in the traditional sense and give them their power.

Warhol's films were enormously influential throughout the 20th Century and still his legacy lasts today. Warhol removed his films from circulation in the early 1970s until his death in 1987 and only a few remained in collections, so they were rarely screened in his lifetime, and yet his films were so provocative that merely to hear about them was enough to create debate - "difficult to see, yet impossible not to think about, Warhol's cinema served as a rich site of projection and imagination for the avant-garde throughout the 1970s and 1980s" (Ahern, 2013), The debates fell into two camps - the mainstream that saw them as decadent and boring and the avantgarde that focused on

the structural aesthetics of a tripod mounted fixed camera and reel-long single unedited takes that emphasised duration rather than narrative. For the strict avantgarde however, Warhol was never accepted as a true member; his films were too concerned with glamour, personality and celebrity.<sup>20</sup> Callie Angell, the curator of Warhol at the Whitney Museum and consultant at MoMA, published a catalogue raisonné of his *Screen Tests* in 2006 which has given Warhol his long-awaited status as one of the most important artists and arguably the most influential avantgarde filmmaker of the twentieth century. In looking at the catalogue raisonné it becomes apparent that it is the *Screen Tests* that are undoubtedly Warhol's greatest contribution to the genre of portraiture rather than the screen-printed portraits for which he is most famous. (Angell, 2006) In the *Screen Tests*, Warhol transposed the idioms of still photography to film, and in so doing, created a hybrid object - part living sculpture, part photograph, part film that was able to access emotional truths of an individual self. By using temporal film, he shifted and extended the focus of portrait making from the static captured moment that it had been for centuries, to the more psychologically revealing process involved in composing one's 'self' for a camera and the viewer, over time.

Contemporary fine art video portraiture certainly has a debt to pay to Warhol's groundbreaking *Screen Tests*. I list a small selection of silent fine art video portraits that owe such a debt in the footnote below.<sup>21</sup> I also list a small selection of fine art video portraits that incorporate sound.<sup>22</sup> The defining line between fine art video portraits and documentary portraits can be slim (or not) and can often be defined simply by the viewing venue as either a gallery setting (usually played on continuous loop) or suitable for broadcast. Whether defined as documentary portraits or fine art video portraits, it is none the less historically rare for music/sound to be prioritised.<sup>23</sup> Certainly for documentary portraits and to a lesser extent fine art video portraits, the sound is more

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<sup>20</sup> It wasn't until after his death that their queer sensibility became a major part of the reading of Warhol's films.

<sup>21</sup> Melita Dahl, *e-motion* (2000); Bill Viola, *The Passions* (2000); Sam Taylor-Wood, *David* (2004) taken almost directly from Warhol's six hour *Sleep* (1964); Fiona Tan, *Corrections* (2004); Petrina Hicks, *Ghost in the Shell* (2008); Luke Willis Thompson *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries* (2016), *autoportrait* (2017).

<sup>22</sup> Examples of fine art video portraiture that include sound are Margaret Tait, *Portrait of Ga* (1952); Bruce Baillie *Mr Hayashi* (1961); Margaret Salmon *PS1998* (1998); Ben Rivers *A World Rattled by Habit* (2008); Eevee Rodbro *I touched her legs* (2010); Phillippe Parreno & Douglas Gordon, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006); David Rosetzky *Sarah* (1997), *Luke* (1998), *Justine* (2000) *Portrait of Cate Blanchett* (2008); Douglas Gordon *K.364* (2010) and *Portrait of a Displaced Person* (2016); Angelika Mestiti, *Citizen Band* (2012); Charlotte Prodger *Bridget* (2016).

<sup>23</sup> Two portraits that feature prominent music/sound are Carla Thackrah, *Sex Drugs and String Quartets* (2003); Scott Hicks, *A Portrait of Glass in Twelve Parts* (2007).

often focused on words and diegetic/ambient sound.<sup>24</sup> The lists are far from exhaustive however I offer them as context for the artists reviewed in the following pages which are divided into those works that are silent and those that incorporate sound.

**Luke Willis Thompson *autoprotrait* (2017) and *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries* (2016)**

Luke Willis Thompson's *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries* (2016) which are portraits of two men, Brandon and Graeme, and *autoprotrait* (2017) which is a portrait of Diamond Reynolds, are two examples of silent fine art video portraits that owe a debt to Warhol's *Screen Tests*. These are two of the three works that make up Willis Thompson's entry into the Turner Prize at Tate Britain in 2018. Both works feature silent, black and white 16mm and 35mm filmed portraits that very directly reference Warhol's *Screen Tests*. Thompson explains it was when reading Warhol's *Screen Tests* catalogue raisonné by Callie Angell he learned they were originally inspired by the mug shots of the 'most wanted' criminals, usually African-American men, and yet the *Screen Tests* themselves were almost exclusively of white sitters. He said

There are so few people of colour, or so few people who were not white, in Warhol's archive of *Screen Tests*, that it made me think that this omission was more significant than the racial exclusion within the underground scene in New York at the time. Warhol's *Screen Tests*, unconsciously or not, draw some of their power by taking this lineage of black image production and applying it to white and privileged subjects (Staple, 2017).

Thompson formulated the idea that the series was intentionally unfinished and his task was to finish the work replicating exactly Warhol's film stock, camera and set ups but using African-American sitters. These sitters, like Warhol's, have celebrity; but it is celebrity by virtue of their political status as people of colour living within the conditions that gave birth to the Black Lives Matter movement. (Costou, Godfrey, Whitefield, &

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<sup>24</sup> There are many more documentary portraits with sound than fine art film portraits however documentary portraits more often focus on words as the only prioritised music/sound such as Shirley Clarke's *Portrait of Jason* (1967); Jonas Merkel *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1976); Michelle Citron, *Daughter Rite* (1980); Sam Scoggins *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1983); Maxi Cohen *Anger* (1986) and *Intimate Interviews* (1984); Mona Hartoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988); Su Friedrich, *Sink or Swim* (1990); Jem Cohen's *An Elliot Smith Portrait* (1997); Agnes Varda *Beaches* (2008); Sarah Polley, *Stories We Tell* (2012).



Young, 2018, p. 81) Brandon is the grandson of Dorothy Groce who was shot by police in her home in Brixton in 1985; Graeme is the son of Joy Gardener who was killed by police in her home in Crouch End during a raid to deport her in 1993; and Diamond Reynolds is "a celebrity (because of) the worst day of her life" (TateShots, 2018). In 2016, Diamond Reynolds broadcast via Facebook Live, the moments immediately after the fatal shooting of her partner by a policemen during a traffic stop. It was 74 seconds of video that has amassed a huge global audience of over 6 million and counting.



Figure xx: Luke Willis Thompson *autoprotrait*. Installation view. Image Carla Thackrah



Figure xx: Luke Willis Thompson *autoportrait*. Installation view. Image Carla Thackrah



Figure xx: Luke Willis Thompson *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*. Installation view. Image Carla Thackrah

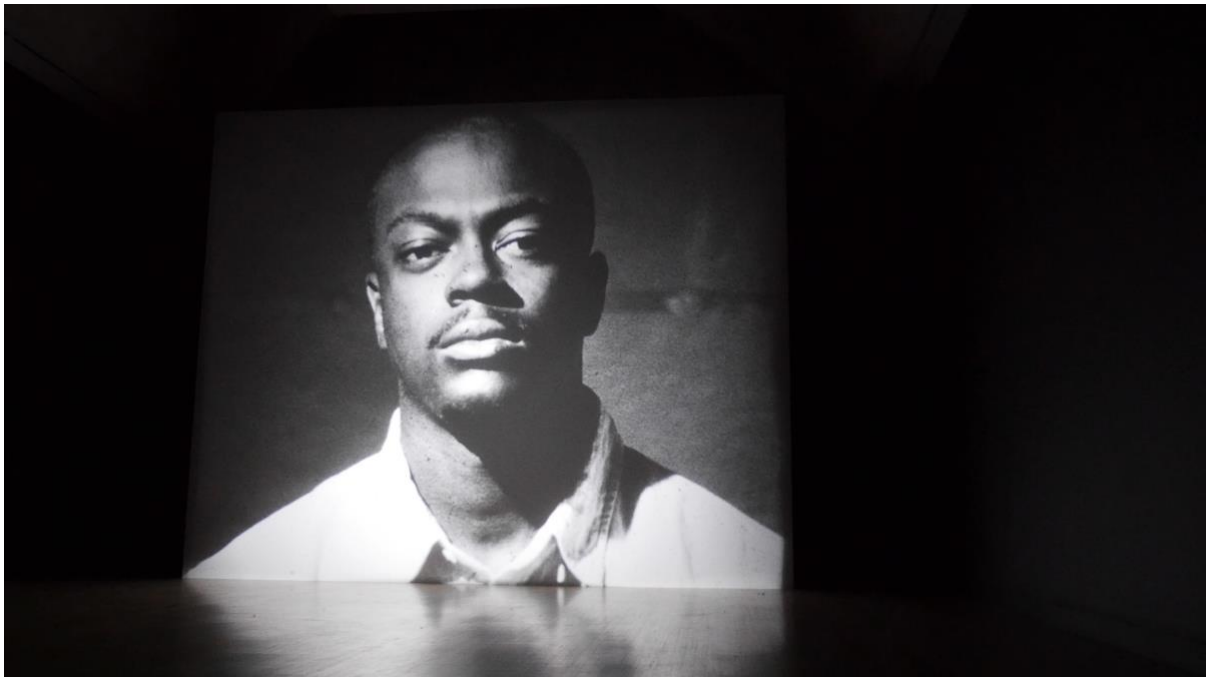


Figure xx: Luke Willis Thompson *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*. Installation view. Image Carla Thackrah

Like Warhol's, these portraits have a gravitas due to the combined action of the intertextual information provided by their celebrity and the set-up of the filming itself; the carefully constructed and directed stillness of the sitters filmed and presented in larger-than-life close-up. For Brandon and Graeme, who are otherwise unknown, their

celebrity is explained on plaques at the entrance to the exhibition. Both these men silently "stare the camera down" with a potent strength reminding the viewer of the injustice that gave them their celebrity. In Diamond Reynolds case, in addition to the exhibition texts, many knew her story from news broadcasts and the large amount of footage of the killing. This grainy, unedited, digital phone footage of a traumatised woman speaking to the policeman who had just shot her partner who is seen dying beside her, and her daughter, broadcast live on Facebook, is the "sister" footage to *autoportrait*. Thompson says he responded to the "call" (Staple, 2017) of the footage and asked her to collaborate with him to create a very different image; Diamond is silent, still and closely shot on crystal clear 35mm film and the film stands as a monument to the resilience and grief triggered by the events and their aftermath.<sup>25</sup> As Willis Thompson himself says in interview "this means that while one site for the work is clearly what's visible on the screen here in the museum, another is its interplay with other representations of the narrative that she's tied to out there in the world" (Costou, Godfrey, Whitefield, & Young, 2018, pg. 82).

Like the vast majority of fine art video portraiture, these works are silent.

It's interesting for me to note that on my first viewing of Thompson's work, I knew nothing of the intertextual story of the sitters. I entered the room and was both confused and annoyed by the mechanical rattling of a large projector, the size of a small room itself, in the centre of the dark space; I wondered why we were forced to sit here with this intrusive noise and what did it have to do with the sitter? And who were these unknown staring faces and why should I be interested?

I went away and watched Diamond's phone footage and the importance of the intertextual information in silent portraits became clear; without some form of additional information, the portrait could be meaningless. The phone footage was frenetic and noisy; gun shots, a policeman yelling, Diamond speaking emphatically. In contrast when viewing its sister footage in *autoportrait*, the rhythmic mechanical monotone of the projector pulled the frenetic memory of that moment away from her, highlighting the stillness of her now silent image, amplifying that silence and engulfing

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<sup>25</sup> Thompson has also received criticism for his work since his nomination for the Turner Prize. Some critics see it as an example of the aestheticisation of black trauma with white artists using black pain as raw material, thereby turning suffering into spectacle. Nick Scammell wrote "What will not go away is the sense that this is yet another artwork in which black trauma functions as ready-to-wear cultural clothing... Diamond Reynolds is known because she refused to be silenced. Yet *autoportrait* sees her both speechless and distanced into black and white film". (Scammell, 2018)

the real events shown in the phone footage. As Thompson said, "everything was already said in Diamond's live streamed video" (Staple, 2017); there really was nothing more that was needed to create a sense of the sitter's 'inner self' at that moment. The impersonal machine sound was the sound of the image - of the portrait itself - not of the sitter, and that sound acted as a complement to the silent sitter, like a fine brush stroke, amplifying her 'inner self'. The important point however, is that without the extra intertextual information the portrait and its noise is meaningless.

One could imagine the *Screen Tests* would also have had the same sound if the portraits are projected as Warhol first intended; there were no DVDs, data projectors or online platforms in the 1960s. It would have been the noise of the projector, the "history machine" as Thompson called it, that would have dominated (TateShots, 2018) and it would have acted to focus the attention on the mechanically reproduced image while still leaving space for the viewer to reconstruct the sitter's 'inner self' using the known intertextual information.

### **Bill Viola *The Passions* (2000-2002)**



Figure xx: Bill Viola *Dolorosa* video diptych. Image: J.P Getty Museum Malibu  
Retrieved from <http://newyorkarts.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/DolorosaCrop.jpg>



Figure xxx: *Bill Viola Quintet of the Astonished* single screen video. Image Kira Perov Retrieved from <https://nga.gov.au/viola/passions.cfm>



Figure xx: *Bill Viola Six Heads* six channel video.  
Image Kira Perov.  
Retrieved from <https://nga.gov.au/viola/passions.cfm>

Bill Viola is probably the best-known fine artist working exclusively in video today.<sup>26</sup> His *Quintet of the Astonished* (2000), *Man of Sorrows* (2001), *Six Heads* (2000), *Silent Mountain* (2001), *Dolorosa* (2000) are all part of a major series based on the representation of human emotions as a universal phenomenon, called *The Passions* (2000-2002). First exhibited at the J.P. Getty Museum in 2003, the works combine both established painterly traditions of early Renaissance religious paintings, and new media technology, showing on LCD and plasma screens. They would appear, on the surface, to be portraits; the sitters are captured from the waist up, either turned slightly from the camera or front on and the images show a clear facial likeness. Each piece is of a single person or a group of people in the throes of an extreme emotional experience: Viola says "the theme of *The Passions* is human emotion as a living force. I was interested in documenting... the passage of an emotional wave through a person" (Sassoon, 2003, p. 40). As a result, they appear to be expressing an interiority however, they are not representations of specific individuals; they are actors representing portrayed emotions; it is the experience of the emotion itself that is portrayed. They were closely directed by Viola in a process where he thought of the various emotions as his 'primary colours', directing the actors to use them to create the trajectories of feelings (Muchnic, 2003). He asked the actors to move fluidly through these emotions, either by working from the outside in or from the inside out as in Method acting (Walsh, 2003, p. 12). Technically, they are similar to the Warhol *Screen Tests* in that they are filmed in close-up, in one take with a fixed camera on 35mm film and then slowed for presentation.<sup>27</sup> The slowing in Viola's videos is so extreme however, we could conclude that what we witness when we observe them is not only *not* a real person, but the movement of their bodies is not real; they are digital photographic reproductions of real bodies manipulated in post-production to appear in a way that would never be seen in reality (Noland, 2007). In this respect, they are the opposite of Warhol's portraits; while Warhol told his sitters to sit still and stare blankly thereby depicting the surface representation of a named and

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<sup>26</sup> Viola himself has said he wants to create works that are readily accessible and this has at times caused negative criticism with one critic claiming his works "veer close to pastiche" (Cooper, 2003), and another that the philosophy behind the works is "a goo of world religion and a pot-pourri of thought-for-the-day bons mots that I really don't want to hear about... whoever it was that called him the Rembrandt of the video age. He isn't" (Searle, 2003)

<sup>27</sup> Shot on high speed 35mm film with frame rates up to 384 frames per second instead of the normal 24 and then transferred to video. In the case of *Quintet of the Astonished*, one minute of filmed action was slowed to a 16 minute presentation. The extreme slow motion makes the image appear somewhere between the motion of film and the stillness of a painting. The movements of the sitters are so slowed that the viewer needs to remain still in front of the art work, to see them.

known individual with little interiority, Viola depicts the emotional interiority as an 'act' without the surface identity of a real individual who is experiencing the emotion.

Viola's *The Passions*, like the *Screen Tests* and Thompson's portraits, are also silent. Although they look like portraits, they are lacking that vital element of an 'inner self' and so cannot be defined as portraits in the traditional sense. Rather they are representations of universal human emotions and given there is no invitation to delve into the individual causes of the emotions themselves, the images supply all that is required; there is no unique interiority that needs to be understood and portrayed. Sound would be unnecessary and superfluous. That's not to say, however, that it would not add to the portrayal.

## Discussion

In 2010 Dean Wareham and Britta Phillips, former members of Luna who were associated with the Velvet Underground, were commissioned to create soundtracks for thirteen of Warhol's *Screen Tests* called *The Thirteen Most Beautiful... Songs for Andy Warhol's Screen Tests*. Warhol himself, had presented some of the *Screen Tests* with live music provided by the Velvet Underground in his *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* multimedia performances throughout 1966 and 1967 so their commissioning by the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh and The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust to be recorded on DVD and to tour live as a multimedia presentation, had historical precedent. While the songs have a fine sense of the era with, as one critic said, "*that familiar narcotic haze*" (Wallace, 2010), the music itself adds nothing in the way of intertextual information to the portraits or the sitters depicted there. Given the viewer is already familiar with the sitter's story, that is, the intertextual information has been delivered via other methods, nothing more need be said. One reviewer noted that some of the songs were too literal; for Edie Sedgwick's *Screen Test*, Warham opined '*Oh my god you are so beautiful*' to an image that clearly contained the information already. (Morrow, 2009) For those who did not know the celebrity stories, both the DVD cover notes and Dean and Britta in live performance introduced each *Screen Test* with information about the sitters which, as one critic confirmed, gave the show "a further layer of emotion". Tellingly she added that the viewers focus was sometimes distracted between the film and the music (Bray, 2010). This, to my thinking, is a vital point; the music/sound needs to be a significant conduit of information that is otherwise lacking. If it is repeating

information already provided by some other means, it can become either too literal, an obvious overemphasis, or a distracting ornament. If the image has enough intertextual information, silence can be preferable. On the other hand, if an image has no accompanying intertextual information, music/sound can provide it most effectively.<sup>28</sup> For example, if the image is lacking in information such as fine art video portraits of unknown individuals, then it is imperative it be provided somehow. In *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*, the gallery text on the wall of the exhibit provides the information. In *autoprotrait*, there is significant intertextual information provided in the form of the 'sister' phone footage, police footage and the gallery text. In addition, the silence of the film acts as a counterfoil to the excess of noise in this extra footage. In this case, the silence is conveying significant intertextual information of its own; it is articulating a quiet and devastating critique of the institutional control that explosively kills. Music/sound that is 'added-on' to the image for no meaningful reason can also be problematic. "Meaning should neither be imposed or denied" (Minh-ha T, 1990, p. 96) and music/sound laden with its own cultural information paired with image can, as has been explored, have the potential to impose meaning to the detriment of the work as a whole.

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<sup>28</sup> A narrative feature film is an obvious example of this. The images alone, if we are not aware of the story or the characters, are at best confusing, or meaningless. It requires the essential intertextual information provided by the music/sound - predominantly dialogue in narrative films - to make the film a meaningful experience and a true portrait of the characters.



## Portraits with Sound

### Bill Viola - *Five Angels for the Millenium* (2001)



Figure xx: Bill Viola *Ascending Angel* from *Five Angels for the Millenium*. Image Kira Perov.  
Retrieved from <https://nga.gov.au/viola/details/Angel.cfm>

When Viola was studying art during the 1970s he took a course in electronic music and after graduating worked with the composer and long-time John Cage collaborator, David Tudor and the avant-garde music group *Composers Inside Electronics*, from 1973 to 1980. *Composers Inside Electronics* was a collective of composers dedicated to the performance of electroacoustic music. Viola toured with them performing Tudor's famous *Rainforest IV* which used electronic manipulation of natural sound to create a complex acoustic environment. He said "There was a period when I was working exclusively with sound, and my main interest was the science of the acoustic, the behaviour of sound in space" (Dama, 2015). This period of working with Tudor's chaos-based music was extremely influential for Viola, particularly "the notion of making music with found objects...taken from the real world, transformed and returned back to the world changed" (Ross & Sellars, 1998). It is not surprising then, that Viola has an innovative and informed approach to music and sound in his video works. Following from Cage and Tudor in their explorations in the 1950s with the first performance of the

'silent' 4:33, Viola is interested in the "undersound" as he calls it - that sound that constantly exists, the "background sound of the world" and it is this, carefully chosen, recorded and manipulated, that forms the sound for many of his films. His *Five Angels for the Millennium*, while not a portrait of an individual, still offers a good example. The work uses literal sounds from the real world, usually fire and water, that are manipulated and mixed to create the "undersound". The fire and water are identifiable but with it is mixed a deep long tone - a "tone of being". Viola goes on to say "even my pieces that are silent have a kind of sound because you can feel the movement as a kind of chord" (Lund, 2013).

### **Angelica Mesiti - *Citizen's Band* (2012)**



Figure xx Angelica Mesiti *Citizens Band*. Image Angelica Mesiti. Retrieved from <http://www.angelicamesiti.com/selectedworks#/citizens-band/>



Figure xx Angelica Mestiti *Citizens Band*. Image Angelica Mestiti. Retrieved from <http://www.angelicamesiti.com/selectedworks#/citizens-band/>



Figure xx Angelica Mestiti *Citizens Band*. Image Angelica Mestiti. Retrieved from <http://www.angelicamesiti.com/selectedworks#/citizens-band/>



Figure xx Angelica Mestiti *Citizens Band*. Image Angelica Mestiti. Retrieved from <http://www.angelicamesiti.com/selectedworks##/citizens-band/>

Mesiti has long been interested in creating cinematic video installations that centre on real events and people often expressed through the language of music and sound.<sup>29</sup> Juliana Engberg describes her work as having a particular emotional register that produces feelings of empathy and connection for the viewer (Stephens, 2018). Mesiti creates this emotional space without the use of words but rather they are felt in the body through music and sound and a strong sense of place.

Where narrative film relies on script and acting, I am more interested working from 'real' events and the live moment. The 'script' comes from lost stories or a sites history and then action is developed in collaboration with people from that place engaging in activities that are part of their everyday experience (Mesiti, 2010, p. 7).

*Citizen's Band* is a work in this tradition; it features portraits of four individuals making their music in a public place. Each of the four are linked to place - both the place where they have been filmed performing, and the place from where they originated which is far from where they now reside. Through music and image alone, Mesiti has

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<sup>29</sup> Her work *Assembly* (2018) which engages with music, sound, performance, choreography and moving image, was chosen for the Venice Biennale in 2019.

exposed the distance between these places, imparting to the viewer the sitter's sense of longing for home.

Mesiti's 'band' is made up of four individual films, playing sequentially on four screens surrounding the viewer in a single space. We witness each performer individually, before a cacophony is produced by playing the four soundtracks together. These films document the performances of musicians who work outside official structures and venues of presentation. From Cameroon, Geraldine Zongo drums the water in a Parisian public pool, drumming that is traditionally done by groups of women in natural waterways. Blind musician Mohammed Lamourie from Algeria sings and plays his battered Casio keyboard in the Paris Metro system, ignored and shunned by the commuters. Asim Goreshi from the Sudan whistles; a poignant sound echoing in his Brisbane taxi cab parked alone late at night. And Mongolian, Bukhchuluun Ganburged (Bukhu) plays the Mongolian *morin khuur* (horse head fiddle) and throat sings, busking on a dirty, noisy Sydney street corner. Each player delivers a distinct and beautiful sound with a particular technique that is inflected with its cultural origin and present place of performance.

According to the Art Gallery of NSW, "Mesiti was not directly concerned with creating portraits of these performers" because she wished to move away from the emphasis on individual cultural 'actors' to a reflection on the language of emotions as they express the migrant experience of being dislodged from home (Art Gallery NSW, 2012).

However, by my definition they certainly qualify as meaningful portraits. The sound is simple, containing no words, rather a purely diegetic recording of the sitters in situ, performing music of their own choosing. It conveys all that needs to be said given the context and themes the artist wished to capture.

**David Rosetzky - *Justine* (2000) and *Portrait of Cate Blanchett* (2008)**



Figure xx: David Rosetzky *Justine*. single channel video stereo sound.

Image David Rosetzky.

Retrieved from [http://davidrosetzky.com/work\\_old/justine/](http://davidrosetzky.com/work_old/justine/)

David Rosetzky is considered one of Australia's finest video artists producing both film and photographic portraits that explore identity and selfhood, authenticity and artificiality; he describes his work as an extension of portraiture. (Fisher, 2014) He often draws on the visual language of mass culture - the hyper-gloss world of advertising, magazines and contemporary screen culture to explore the anxieties of a transitional identity within a consumer-focused society. As he has said, his subjects are "almost like animated cut outs from the pages of glossy lifestyle magazines" (Cass & McFarlane, 2013, pg. 8). A significant feature of his work is his collaborations with other professionals and artists from the fields of theatre, dance, film and music/sound particularly in his more recent cinematic long-form films.

His portrait *Justine* (2000) is an early work that only credits an editor in addition to Rosetzky (Rosetzky, 2019). It follows in the tradition set by Warhol of filming photogenic friends however Rosetzky highlights quite explicitly the artificiality of the glamour captured in the process. He says "these earlier works - *Justine*, *Luke*, *Commune* and so on, are in one way aimed to encourage audiences to consider their relationship to images from television, advertising, fashion and cinema and ask how they may influence and inform their lives, and their sense of self" (Cass & McFarlane, 2013).

*Justine* is a short film of five minutes containing four shots, three of them being tightly framed tableaux of the sitter posed like a photo from a glossy magazine.<sup>30</sup> The framing underscores Justine's disconnection and artifice as she confesses such banal insecurities as "I feel like I have to create my whole lifestyle but there are too many variables to coordinate. Does the music match my mood? My decor? My hair? Does it matter?"<sup>31</sup> The voice-over scripts are taken from interviews with the sitters, edited and re-recorded and Rosetzky confirms, all the statements made in his portraits are honest accounts of an interior 'self'. The music behind the voice-over is a simple synthesiser pad playing a muzak-style repeated four bar sequence of chords. It is effective in so far as it is surface music portraying a surface identity; the 'music *does* match her mood'. Given we have no other intertextual information about Justine, the music/sound effectively provides significant information for a portrait that could otherwise convey limited meaning.



Figure xx: David Rosetzky *Portrait of Cate Blanchett*. single channel video stereo sound.

Image David Rosetzky.

Retrieved from [http://davidrosetzky.com/work\\_old/justine/](http://davidrosetzky.com/work_old/justine/)

His *Portrait of Cate Blanchett* (2008) is a later work with much collaborative input and a celebrity sitter. The National Portrait Gallery commissioned the portrait and understandably, given those factors, it has garnered a lot of attention. An edited hour-long interview with Blanchett provided the script for the ten-minute portrait and Blanchett then re-recorded it to form the voice-over. Rather than being an exploration of the artificiality or lack of authenticity in finding and being one's 'self' like his works *Sarah* (1997), *Luke* (1998), *Justine* (2000), and even his later works *Nothing Like This*

<sup>30</sup> One of the shots is different to the other three; taken with a moving camera in a poorly lit restaurant, the gamma was adjusted in post-production thereby losing the gloss and tight control of the other three shots.

<sup>31</sup> She has an interesting elongated face; in one tableau she is filmed with an elegant Siamese cat, reminiscent of Leonardo's *Girl with an Ermine* (1490)

(2007) or *Think of Yourself as Plural* (2008), Rosetzky is looking at an individual who consciously finds and becomes other selves in a professional capacity via the craft of acting. To approach his theme Rosetzky says "I did not want to attempt to reveal 'the real Cate Blanchett' ; the person behind the mask, but rather look at the mask itself" (Rosetzky, 2012, p. 77). None the less, Blanchett herself is revealed in the process.

There are two features of all Rosetzky's later portraits that need to be highlighted. The first is his close collaboration with other artists. He worked with choreographer Lucy Guerin, cinematographer Katie Milwright and composer J David Franzke and a list of fifteen other collaborators and crew on *Portrait of Cate Blanchett*. This large film crew is clearly an important part of his working method:

Lines are more often blurred than demarcations suggest, and people tend to crossover from their particular fields of expertise. What I love about working with professionals from different artistic disciplines to my own ...is not only that they can provide a good performance, a compelling piece of choreography, light a scene or a photograph to a particular effect, but what I can learn from them, and how they can bring different ideas to a project or challenge my way of thinking (Rosetzky, pg. 8).

To my thinking, this weakens Rosetzky's contribution as the single credited artist of the portrait. While it can of course still be seen as a legitimate and fine work of art, it raises the question, 'can the portrait be seen as solely David Rosetzky's work?' We are moving into the territory of film making and auteur theory which I will not venture into here principally because this work sits firmly in the genre of fine art and not film, and it is within this context that the question becomes imperative. Certainly it could be said that because of the number of artists involved in the making of this portrait, it could never be seen as a single artist's conceiving of the subject or as Matisse said, "a projection of the feeling of the artist in relation to his model" (quoted in Freeland, 2010, p. 156) and therefore the contract between the sitter, artist and viewer is disrupted. When so many artists have significant creative inputs into the portrait, one must question whose 'feeling' is being portrayed and therefore *who* is being portrayed?

The second point also involves the dilemma of collaboration. The music/sound is a significant intertextual feature of the portrait and is not by Rosetzky but by J David



Franzke. Given Blanchett is a celebrity, it would be possible to have no music/sound, however Rosetzky's states his aim is to understand the craft of acting rather than focusing only on the beauty of her face. Consequently, the music/sound, particularly her words, are essential to provide the information required to achieve this. Franzke's contribution, in this situation, then becomes a significant one. The opening sequence with music alone and Blanchett's hands is quite beautiful and reminiscent of Renaissance hand studies or Bill Viola's *Four Hands* (2001). It is accompanied by a simple synthesiser pad sequence with momentary bursts of clarinet synchronised to each time Blanchett mechanically moves her opposite hand. Franzke uses prominent diegetic sound of the chair and lens changes that work to bring us into the studio with Blanchett. This diegetic sound stops at 4:50 where she says "You've got to get to a place of neutrality. It's like a neutral mask that doesn't betray any emotion". Throughout these sequences Franzke's music is largely unobtrusive, much like a film score until toward the end where the voice over stops and the music takes a central role. At this point Blanchett performs an unexpected dance sequence. As she begins she says "I realised anything you do could and would be received in a completely different way and you can't control it - you have to give that over - interpretation - you have to give over". The music too, becomes contrived and culturally laden, forcing us to ask the unanswerable question 'how are we meant to interpret this consciously 'quirky' tune and dance?' The answer is unanswerable in part because so many people are involved in the creation of this sequence; is it Rosetzky commenting on Blanchett's statement or is it Blanchett, Guerin, Millwright or Franzke's 'feeling' or some combination of them all, that we are witnessing?

### **Conclusion: Points of difference**

All these portraits focus primarily, as does my work, on the face; often shot in close-up, expressionless (apart from Viola's *The Passions*) with neutral backgrounds and a few significant props. Each of these works allows reflection on the two pivotal areas I am exploring in my creative work - music/sound's role in intertextuality and the question of the artist's subjectivity in portraiture. The best way to approach this might be to look directly at the use, or not, of music/sound in these fine art video portraits, and by extension other video portraits not covered here. Most film portraiture, like photographic portraiture, is silent. There are good reasons for this and one is the distraction that can occur if the image and additional intertextual information offered by

the artist competes with the information and emotional content conveyed by any potential music/sound. This was seen most clearly in Dean and Britta's *13 Most Beautiful ... Songs for Andy Warhol's Screen Tests*. If there is information already provided by the image or some other intertextual means - common community knowledge, celebrity, written text, news media or something else, as is the case with the *Screen Tests*, *autoprotrait* and *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*, music/sound, unless it is handled very carefully, can be superfluous. Viola's *Five Angels for the Millenium* is an example of music/sound that extends the image without being distracting or superfluous because the sound is derived from the real world in which the images are embedded. The emotional content of the music/sound is minimal because there are no strong culturally laden tonalities used - only real sounds manipulated to create a drone or pedal point. The music/sound is created by Viola himself which also allows for a coherent overall structure to the work. If, however, the visual element is strong and makes a complete meaning in itself as in *The Passions*, again, music/sound is not required.<sup>32</sup>

This, however does not mean music/sound would not extend the portrait, it merely points to the fact that great care must be taken. In the instance of an artist wishing to convey more than a powerful image, music/sound can act as an effective conveyer of the necessary intertextual information. Mesiti's *Citizen's Band* is an example. Mesiti conveyed the larger theme of loss caused by the displacement from one's homeland by means of the music which was deeply embedded in cultures far from where the sitters were filmed.

The use of music in Rosetzky's portraits is more problematic. In both portraits discussed, the words are clearly essential because as well as being portraits of an individual's interiority, they are attempting to portray larger themes concerning the performative and anxiety-producing nature of contemporary identity, and words were used to convey this idea. The music is unnecessary but, in the case of *Justine*, is appropriate given the 'muzak' quality which matches the artificiality of the identity being portrayed. For *Portrait of Cate Blanchett* the music seems redundant; not distracting, merely superfluous. I believe this is amplified because of the collaborative

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<sup>32</sup> I note here that high quality photographic portraiture of unknown sitters falls into this category (Diane Arbus, Rineke Dijestra, Bill Henson photographic portraits as examples) because the sitter and framing is chosen specifically for its visual impact alone and the silence allows time for the viewer to contemplate, reflect and imagine.

nature of the portrait. The "I see another" (Soussloff, 2006, p. 122) which is part of the complex interaction of portrait making - the double-act that increases the 'being-ness' of the artist and the sitter, is lost when there are many different creative inputs into the process.

For the purposes of my research, exploring the differences between a portrait created via a collaborative process and portraits created by the single artist-originator is imperative. It is equally imperative to look at works that engage with music and sound as their central conveyor of meaning. While the sample of fine art video portraits I have just discussed have sound, in none of them is the music and sound prioritised. What then would be the status of a portrait that utilised music/sound as the *only* conveyor of meaning? While sound portraits are missing the identifying visual element, the embodied 'good likeness', they are equal in effectiveness to visual portraits (that are also missing intertextual elements) because they are able to offer an intimate sense of an individual. To understand the effectiveness of music/sound in identifying an 'inner self' several sound portraits are explored.

### **Sound Portraits**

Unlike visual art portraits for which there is a general understanding of the various categories of portraits, sound portraits are less commonly experienced and understood. The title 'sound portrait' is well used, as the multitude of sound portraits that appear in a simple google search attest, however the array of styles and quality is large and bears some unpacking via this short preamble. They can range from journalistic radio portraits to a group that create sound portraits via improvisation directed by God, through to a man with an antenna implanted into his head who can turn the colours of a person's face into audible sounds.

A challenge with regard to many audio works that call themselves sound portraits is to determine the features that define them as 'fine art portraits' for the purposes of the research. One half of the defining feature of a 'portrait' is the portrayal of an interiority, and music/sound can do this effectively. In many radio and commercial sound portraits there is a sense of an inner identity however it is conveyed via a 'closed' narrative told by way of interview or in the third person where voice and words dominate. Here music

and sound (usually diegetic) are treated as incidental rather than as part of the complete assemblage of elements making up the portrait.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast, acousmatic or electroacoustic narrative, sonic narrative or radiophonic portraits can be different to the above sound portraits in that they incorporate voice in the form of present-day interviews and archival recordings; soundscape which can offer literal or symbolic narrative themes via a range of recorded sounds from real-world to abstract; and music, which can convey emotional and metaphoric content. All this is delivered to the listener via audio speakers, in the form of a symbiotic assemblage of equal parts intended to evoke an experience; the music and soundscape recordings are not merely an interlude between the storytelling voice but all elements are 'composed' in the studio to form a cohesive, hybrid form.<sup>34</sup>

Acousmatic storytelling centres on the recorded spoken word as a means for telling stories in conjunction with a composed world ... verbal narrations and sound objects coexist in the formation of a hybrid... the symbiosis of verbal narration of stories and the composed acousmatic sonic environments play a significant role, through the ability to simultaneously transmit parallel stories with other kinds of sonic development and drama (Amelides, 2016, p. 213-215).

### **John Young - *Riccordiamo Forli* (2005)**

New Zealand composer John Young created the acousmatic sound portrait *Riccordiamo Forli* about the meeting of his parents in the Italian town of Forli during the second world war. More than a personal reminiscence, it is about the larger human themes of death, particularly the innocent victims of war, and hope. It was premiered in 2006 on Radio New Zealand and has won two major electroacoustic awards.

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<sup>33</sup> A sample of radio sound portraits include *This American Life*, *The Moth*, *Radio Portraits Australia*, *Public Radio Exchange New York Sound Portraits*. Quirkier examples include Neil Harbisson's sound portraits where he registers the colours of a person's face via a receptor placed in his skull that translates the colours into musical chords; *Epiphany*, a sound portrait musical ensemble that creates personalised improvised sound portraits inspired by their Christian faith; ASCAP, an American music rights organisation that creates sound portraits of the musicians they represent; soundportraits.ca, a business specialising in sound portraits with prices ranging from \$1500 to \$5000.

<sup>34</sup> Other examples of acousmatic, electroacoustic or sonic music/narrative or radiophonic narrative are Delia Derbyshire *The Dreams* (1964); Trevor Wishart *Red Bird* (1980); Hildegard Westerkamp *Kits Beach Soundwalk* (1989); Luc Ferrari, *Dangerous Voices* (1998), *Far West News* (2008); Robert Normandeau *Rumeurs* (1990); Panos Amelides *Alexandros* (2012);

The work's sound palette consists of a narrator, archival recordings, soundscape and music composed with a collection of transformed sounds with a strong tonal centre. While not strictly the portrait of an individual, it is a portrait of a place and time and two individuals who were caught inextricably in its events. He uses several voices: a narrator's voice, archival recordings from the BBC and Radio New Zealand and, toward the end of the work, his father's personal reminiscences. At over 53 minutes, it is a long work, and it appears to be quite randomly structured with sections of narration interspersed with musical 'interludes' of sorts, however the overall work uses a limited number of sounds as recurrent motifs, giving the work a compositional coherence.

The composed world he creates works on two levels: firstly, the environmental recordings of street sounds, footsteps, wind, rain, voices, marching feet, feet on snow, recognisable at times or transformed sometimes radically, in the studio, often accompanying the prominent narrator's and historical voices; second is the composed 'music' as such, which tells another parallel, more visceral and emotional story. Young uses transformed bells and an out-of-tune piano to form tonal centres and chords that lend a strong musical quality to the work that is still largely free of the cultural imposition of Western tonality and rhythm. The exception to this is the musical quotation played on piano, from Verdi's *Otello* - the "bacio" love duet that occurs at the end of the second act as Desdemona and Otello kiss and that is repeated before he kills her and again when he learns of her innocence. While the Verdi theme was chosen principally for narrative reasons - the poignancy of love and death expressed in a uniquely Italian way - the theme also served to unify the work musically: "the theme is presented complete at various points in the work but the notes are also recorded into a new thematic identity that seeps through much of the work" (Young, 2007). This transforming of the theme is both a fragmenting of Otello's music and a transformation of the notes themselves via the out-of-tune piano, moving it away from a familiar Western scale. Young linked the Verdi theme to the other main sound, the bells of the Duomo that he recorded in Forli, via the note C-sharp which was a significant tonal centre of both the bells and the theme (Amelides, 2016, p. 219). The bells, in many transformed incarnations, play a central role both "as a specific icon of the town, but also for their more general symbolisms - a call to worship, sounds which define space and distance, sounds which express lament or jubilation" (Young, 2007). Sometimes he creates drones and screeches using the attack and decay resonances of the bells, and

this combined with the piano, returns again and again as the consistent reoccurring 'leitmotif' signifying love, death and hope, throughout the work.

This palette of sounds, recorded, sculpted and layered by the composer, allows the listener to experience past events in a new, imaginative way and thereby explores the potential of recorded audio information to trigger imagination and emotion for the audience.

I wanted to try and connect aspects of my direct experience of Forlì with the impressions made on me through my parent's stories ... as well as 're-experience' historical events through the use of war correspondence recordings and my father's reminiscences. As well I wanted to amplify and dramatise the emotional web of the events that are described and suggested, through electroacoustic music derived from my own recordings made in Forlì and from the historical material. The resulting work is therefore part documentary, part radiophony and part electroacoustic drama (Young, 2007).

### **John Cousins - *Doreen* (2007)**

Also born in New Zealand, Cousins has been a maker of sound sculptures and sonic art since the 1970s. Like Young, his work often involves vocal narrative together with recordings of real places and events that are juxtaposed with a sonic world that uses digital technologies to sculpt and construct sound, the aim being to explore intimate human stories and memories. This portrait of the artist's mother is part of a larger audiovisual work *Speak Memory* (2007) which he says, despite the use of images in the work, always prioritises the audio (Cousins, 2019). It tells the story of wartime London, when Doreen met and married Cousin's father. He uses many acousmatic devices: interview, Doreen's voice narrating in first person, object and instrumental sounds, both untreated and digitally transformed in the studio, as well as unexpected, spatial and temporal incongruity to tell the story and to carry us into deeper abstract realms of imagination and metaphor. As the work opens, sound introduces us to the three protagonists: London in wartime (the sound of fire), an elderly Doreen (telling the story of Cousins' birth in wartime London) and Cousins himself (singing *London's burning*). It cuts abruptly to Doreen singing an old song which fades to piano alone, over which her voice begins the story enticing us into the world created by Cousins and his mother.

The work is structured in some ways, like a piece of music with various sounds used as reoccurring themes: fire, explosions, metallic sounds, a deep drone, a high-pitched whine, a piano playing an old song, Doreen's laughter and cough. Cousin's uses the studio to cut these sounds together in abrupt ways to create strong signifying sonic gestures; firework explosions become Doreen's cough (8:06) or her laughter (14:10); the sudden explosions cut immediately to an unexpected high-pitched tinnitus sound like the after effects of the explosion, reminding us of Doreen's story of her first orgasm "a roaring in my ears and my whole body exploding" which again cuts to loud metallic scrapes and transformed screams. Just as unexpectedly these sonic events are interspersed with musical quotations of Doreen singing with piano and long stretches of stasis. Throughout, reverb and volume changes create an uncomfortable sense of unreal space. All these elements are combined into a cohesive whole by the composer to create parallel lines of narration expressing emotion, metaphor, time, location, space and a strong sense of Doreen's inner world.

### **Hildegard Westerkamp - *MotherVoiceTalk* (2008)**

Westerkamp calls herself many different names: soundscape composer, radio artist, and sound or acoustic ecologist. She was an early and influential member of the *World Soundscape Project* at Simon Fraser University, led by R. Murray Schafer (1973-1980) (Woloshyn, 2013). Her works are intrinsically located within the environment. Andra McCartney says of Westerkamp "a sense of place is intrinsically entwined with her sense of home and identity"; by making sound work about place she is portraying a sense of her 'self' (McCartney, 1999). In this way, all her compositions that intimately and personally describe an experience of place could be seen as portraits. She says, "Soundscape composition is as much a comment on the environment as it is a revelation of the composer's sonic visions, experiences and attitudes towards the soundscape" (Westerkamp, 2002, p. 53). Many of her works specifically utilise language, the voice and autobiographical narrations that allow them to be marked more explicitly as portraits. *MotherVoiceTalk* is one such work. It is a fifteen-minute sound work that took Westerkamp on a journey to find her "resonance with the work and life of the Japanese Canadian artist Roy Kiyooka". Even though he had died fourteen years before the work was made and Westerkamp had never met him, she listened to his and his mother's recorded voices, his poetry reading and music making with zither and whistle in a mission to "listen to his personal voice on all possible levels and bring them into

dialogue with the musical and sonic tools of my own compositional and personal voices" (Westerkamp, 2008). Not only did Kiyooka's mother's voice feature on the completed work, so too did the voice of Westerkamp's German mother, Kiyooka and Westerkamp herself. All this, to my thinking, marks it very much as a portrait, by Westerkamp's own words, of both Roy Kiyooka and herself (Westerkamp, 2008). Like Young, she has created sounds with strong tonal centres by using recordings of Kiyooka's zither and whistle taken from his collection. This music has a sense of Japanese traditional music with the plucked and transformed zither and whistle mirroring the koto and shakuhachi..

Westerkamp's compositional choices reinforce the notion it is both a portrait and a self-portrait. The concept of dialogue is important to her in all her works "going on a participatory soundwalk...means to establish a natural dialogue between the surroundings and ourselves" (Westerkamp, 1974, p. 24) In some ways the idea of dialogue forms the central unifying idea in *MotherVoiceTalk*. There is dialogue between the many human voices of the work; the soft, reverberant voices of the mothers who never met and are gone are always in the background gently passing each other across the speakers; the voices of Westerkamp and Kiyooka, are dry, close and intimate, perhaps Kiyooka's voice a little less so than Westerkamp's, marking his status as also in the past; and finally the voice of the raven, Kiyooka's 'spirit'.

The piece as a whole begins with Westerkamp repeating, via studio edits, Kiyooka as he says the words 'my mother' several times, interspersed with the call of a raven she recorded on Salt Spring Island, where, as she says in the work "I went here to have a meeting with you". The raven call mimics his words 'my mother' and Westerkamp repeats this sound regularly throughout the work as a metaphor for Kiyooka - almost like his reincarnated voice. In the background we hear the sound of a deep drone, the water, itself a metaphor for the spiritual, transformed zither notes, his mother's voice quietly speaking in Japanese and his shakuhachi-like whistle piercing through the gentle soundscape.

This piece on one level is a reflection on the importance of a mother's role in forming identity. As Westerkamp said, "Roy seemed to connect frequently and strongly with his mother in her old age, just as I have been connecting with mine for many years now - connecting in other words, with their powerful female presence in us, their stories and



thus the language of our childhoods" (Westerkamp, 2008). Both Kiyooka and Westerkamp had a need to record their mothers' voices and stories as they grew older, and Westerkamp has used both of these mothers' voices in disembodied dialogue with each other, layered, slowly panning from right to left, throughout the work. Their voices are in a different space to Westerkamp and Kiyooka, always moving across the background of the sound work, speaking two different languages, as symbols for the central figure of 'mother' in the formation of who they became. As Westerkamp says of both herself and Kiyooka, "for those of us who carry a first language and culture inside us, different from the second language and culture in which we now live and function, our ears are alert in a specific way, always trying to decipher the meanings of the culture and environment we joined later in our lives, trying to negotiate our way through it" (quoted in Woloshyn, 2013). This idea is emphasised with another significant phrase that Westerkamp repeats via editing; it is Kiyooka's phrase 'umeiboshi throat'. While it literally refers to a traditional Japanese pickled plum, in this case Westerkamp takes it to be a metaphor for "Kiyooka's own voice, born and steeped in a strong Japanese tradition" (quoted in Woloshyn, 2013). We also hear Westerkamp herself repeat the words, signalling that she, like Kiyooka, also has deep feelings about heritage, first language and their shared immigrant status.

Westerkamp creates sonic journeys in her compositions around place, time and the human psyche. She weaves a multitude of complex layers into her work, expressing many parallel stories of events, past and present, places, people and emotions. Her own voice throughout, calm and untransformed, places herself into a portrait that communicates not just the inner journey of the portrayed, but the inner journey of the composer.

## **Conclusion**

The two points of departure for my research are highlighted in this selection of artists for review.

1. This research will explore the use of music/sound as an initiating and prioritised element in portrait making. In none of the samples of fine art video portraiture I have detailed, is the music and sound prioritised or used as an initiator of the portrait. The chosen sample of works is reflective of the vast majority of fine art video portraits in this respect. As the sample of sound portraits researched has shown, sound is highly

effective in creating emotion, mood and imparting information in a multi-layered and nuanced way. An exploration of the use of music/sound as a significant intertextual element combined with moving image promises to significantly extend the portrait form. Each of the above sound works use, as one of their principle devices, what Andean calls textual narrative - that is, the use of the voice. First, the power of the word will drive meaning. The voice also, can be 'musical' with its variations of timbre, tone and rhythm. And equally important for sonic portraits, the human voice is identifiable and will generally results in the listener conjuring a subject even if the voice has been transformed into a relatively abstract sound via processing. (Andean, 2016, p. 199)

However, the voice is only one layer of the multiple layers of sound used to convey many parallel aspects of a narrative, or in the case of a portrait, an 'inner self'; multi-layered sound works can convey many ideas simultaneously and show how powerfully expressive the parallel lines of acousmatic sound can be. Viola's sound for *Five Angels of the Millenium* uses similar techniques of transformed natural sounds as the sound portraits discussed, however with only a single layer of transformed sound, the meaning and emotion that can be expressed is limited. These acousmatic works, instead, with their many layers of sound - environmental, electronic, voice, music, all edited and transformed in the studio, can convey meaning and emotion on an altogether larger scale. Integrated compositionally within one wholistic work, voice, real world soundscape recordings, traditional musical elements, abstract sounds transformed in the studio and electronically produced sounds, can allow the listener to imagine the inner world of the individual in a way not possible with image alone.

2. For the purposes of my research, I will also explore the differences between a film and sound portrait created via the collaborative process, such as Rosetzky engages in, and portraits created by the single artist-originator. While there are many fine examples of art films where the use of music/sound is significant and inspiring, it is rare for a single artist originator to create both music/sound and image. Toro Takemitsu & Masaki Kobayashi *Kwaidan* (1964); Louis Andriessen & Peter Greenaway *M is for Mozart* (1991); Maria de Alvear & Isaac Julien *Ten Thousand Waves* (2008); no credit & Daniel Crook *Static 12* (2011); Felicity Wilcox & Rachel Dight *Threading the Light* (2014) are some examples of fine art films with significant music/sound however in all of these, the artist responsible for the image is not the composer of the music. Music video is also a popular form of art film that prioritises music/sound as its initiating media, however it is rare for a single artist to create both media, David Lynch with his music videos *Crazy*

*Clown Time* (2012) and *I'm Waiting Here* (2013), is an exception. Carla Thackrah's *Circus Sweet* (2004); Jacob Kirkegaard *4 Rooms* (2006); Yannis Kyriades *Dreams of the Blind* (2007); Felicity Wilcox *Snow* (2016), *Yurabirong* (2016) and *Gouttes D'un Sang Etranger* (2014) are a small selection of fine art films where the image and music/sound are created by the one artist however none of these could be defined as portraits. Visual Music is a specific form where music and moving image are equal partners and often created by a single artist but the form is not used to depict human identity or narrative but rather to explore the computer manipulation of both sound and image as an end in itself. The work is often highly synesthetic and synchronised. For example Oscar Finschinger *An Optical Poem* (1938); Norman McClaren *Dots* (1940); Jean Piche *Australis* (2011); Diego Garro *Patah* (2010); Ivan Zavada *Eureka* (2012).

Given the complex interaction of artist and sitter in the process of portrait making, a gap is open to further explore the outcomes of portraits created by a single artist-originator who works with the many layers of music/sound and image. The use of voice, soundscape recordings in the real world, musical quotations, abstract sounds transformed in the studio and electronically produced sounds, in one wholistic work allows the listener to imagine the inner world of the individual in a way not possible with image alone. Combined, music/sound and image, produced by a single artist-originator, could effectively and powerfully extend the art of portrait making and the definition of the portrait itself.

#### **CHAPTER 4: The methodology overview:**

**Summary:** I aim to create portraits that conform to the traditional definition of portraiture; that is, to portray an external likeness and a subjective 'interiority'. However this is done within the context of a postmodern view of an inner 'self' as fragmented, fluctuating and formed by mass culture and relationships, mediated through language. **CITATIONS!!**

Music/sound is an initiating and significant intertextual element in these portraits. The sitters are unknown hence it is music/sound that provides essential intertextual information. An array of object sounds, instrument sounds and human voice is used, manipulated and composed in the studio similar to electroacoustic or acousmatic sound.

The sense of interiority and likeness that is portrayed by the music/sound and image is uncompromised by the collaborative process. In this way, I believe the portrait is a portrait of both the sitter and the artist; a portrait and a self-portrait at the same time.

As artist and interpreter, I evaluate the success of the outcomes based on how effectively I am able to create meaningful self-portraits based on portraits of the 'other'; how effectively I am able to capture an external likeness of my sitters; how I am able to effectively use music/sound as the significant intertextual element portraying an individual 'inner self' within the context of contemporary ideas of identity.

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As a method of materialising ideas, research is unavoidably creative (Carter, 2004, p. 7).

The methodology incorporates both theoretical investigation of the research context alongside practice based creative outputs. The area of research has been initially investigated from a theoretical perspective as detailed in earlier chapters. This theoretical investigation has been informed by and has informed the creative practice outcomes in a circular fashion with the theoretical research and writings continually intersecting with the practice based creative process. Research, invention, reflection, creation, review and evaluation inform the other with the outcomes being both completed artworks and a written exegesis that is at the same time 'about' and 'of' the work; that is, an explanation of the ideas behind the creative works *and* itself part of an opening field of enquiry; "not to write about art but to write of creative research, to document the making of a new social relation through a concomitant act of production" (Carter, 2004, p. 10, emphasis in original) As is customary in a creative research doctorate, the creative work carries the principal weight of the research.

**The creative outcomes:**

*Self-portrait 1: Fragments of Presence and Absence (2018)*

*Self-portrait 2: Multiple Heads (2019)*

I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what a person was until I had not many things but one thing (Stein, 1974, p. 103).

The two creative works are both portraits and self-portraits exploring different elements of the research questions; in summary, the significance of music/sound as an initiating intertextual element in portraiture and the artist's subjectivity in the process of portrait making.

For much of Western art history a trend can ... be detected; while music imitated 'men's characters, feelings and actions' (Aristotle, 1965), fine art imitated the appearance of things (Shaw-Miller, 2013, pg. 34).

The portraits start with music/sound: a sonorous medium chosen specifically to represent the intangible and uncanny in our human psyches; the sound that cannot be touched or seen and unless the source is present and obvious, we could be fooled into thinking it an hallucination. In this way I re-present the elusive 'inner self'.

To the sound is added vision; temporal digital film which, as traditional portraiture has for centuries, re-presents the tangible bodily presence; the 'good likeness'.

Portrait traditions encapsulating the definition of portraiture that has already been outlined, inform all the works. In both creative works I have constructed myself via a series of intimate portraits of the other, thereby creating a self-portrait with post-structural theory of the self as its framework. The Cartesian ontological dualism which formed the Cartesian view of self, and the radically different postmodern thinking around self, truth and reality (Martin & Barresi, 2006), are the lenses through which we create and also through which we observe, analyse and criticise the visual arts and music/sound. The broad conceptual framework of my practice has been to use the theories of Barthes, Derrida and Baudrillard as a lens through which to view the ways in which theories of identity from the Renaissance and the twenty first century, have grounded portraiture. In particular, I have created portraits that use the traditions of portraiture that saw their first stirrings in the Renaissance and have attempted to extend my creative work through the lens of postmodernism.

### **The portrait, self-portrait and autobiography:**

An essential feature of my methodology is to be the single artist-originator of the portraits, thereby endeavouring to explore the notion that all portraits created in this way become self-portraits within the context of a postmodern definition of 'self' as being formed by our constantly fluctuating relationships and mass culture, mediated through language. Also my determination to create the work in this way is a desire to more closely align with the defining elements of the visual art self-portrait which is always created by a single artist-originator.

Within the context of film portraits and by extension fine art video portraits, the single artist-originator is more often, not the creator of the work. Rather, they are created by a crew or team of collaborators.<sup>35</sup> To better explain the context I'm exploring, I will look first at the literary autobiography; it is here that the form has been comprehensively studied. Philippe Lejeune's definition sees it as a retrospective story created by a real person concerning her own life and personality.

Autobiography (narrative recounting the life of the author) supposes that there is identity of name between the author (artist), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about (Lejeune, 1989, p. 12).

A self-portrait is different in only one element; it does not necessarily have a retrospective temporal narrative. Rather, in the case of a visual self-portrait, only a moment in time is captured. In the definitions of both autobiography and self-portrait, the clear indication however, is that the process calls for a single artist-originator who produces a work about his or her life (Haverty-Rugg, 2006). I will generally use the title 'self-portrait' to clearly identify my work as part of the genre that I am attempting to extend - the visual art self-portrait. However, given my work involves both image and music, it is temporal in nature and so could be equally aligned to autobiography. At times I use both these descriptions interchangeably.

Film, in many ways is perfect for autobiography; the referential power of the camera is unequalled; the 'having been there-ness' of film is undeniable, which enables an

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<sup>35</sup> As in David Rosetzky's *Portrait of Cate Blanchett* and the vast majority of documentary portraits. See Chapter 3

unparalleled ability to reference the external characteristics of an individual. However, Elizabeth Bruss claims the use of film or multimedia to create autobiography, given the large scale production needs of most films, can make satisfying this definition impossible; the person in front of the camera - the protagonist of the autobiography - cannot also be the person behind the camera (the artist) let alone the person editing the film, composing the score, the designer, sound recordist and all the other personnel required in a multimedia production.

Where the rules of language designate a single source, film has instead a disparate group of distinct roles and separate stages of production.... There is ... no way of discriminating a shot of the director from the shot of any other, indifferent individual (Bruss, 1980, p. 304-305).

Theorists have attempted to open the definition of multimedia autobiography to embrace the 'collaborative' (Haverty-Rugg, 2001) or 'interactive' (Egan, 1994) nature of contemporary selfhood thereby allowing the creative input of others in a multimedia autobiography. I consider this an unnecessarily artificial adjustment; as Renov and Gernalzick have pointed out, it *is* possible to create an autobiography according to the classical definition if the multimedia autobiography is one that is not acted but rather created and performed by the single artist-originator (Gernalzick, 2006; Michael Renov, 2004).

As a consequence of not including single-person-produced films, ... scholars ... continue to deny the possibility of filmic autobiography because a technological division of autobiographical subjectivity in the person before the camera, the cinematographer, the editor, and the narrator is assumed to be irreducible (Gernalzick, 2006, p. 3).

I choose to maintain this essential feature of autobiography in my work - the protagonist, narrator and creator of the work are the same individual. In all my work, it can be argued that the person behind the camera as well as the creator of the sound and music heard is both the subject of the autobiography and the single artist-originator.

None the less, the late twentieth century deconstruction of a stable self has indeed changed the landscape for the autobiographical act, but not in the way suggested by

Haverty-Rugg and Egan. Contemporary thinking sees the self as elusive and recreated in every moment; the self is defined by how the other sees it; the self is defined by social relationships and mediated through language; the self is never defined except as forever shifting moments of perception. It would be easy to conclude as many have, that this deconstruction of a stable self means there can be no such thing as a self-portrait or autobiography (Doy, 2005). Instead my research will explore the idea that the self-portrait is the generic form of all portraiture because all portraits capture both the other (sitter) and the self (artist), simultaneously and by this action artists are capturing a self that is mediated via social relationships and the constantly fluctuating dialogue of perception and language between the self and the other. Integrated into my autobiographical work are portraits of the other and it is through these portraits of the other that I, as a single artist-originator, have constructed many moments of myself.

### **The process:**

To conduct research is, in the first instance, to explore, to wander about, without any itinerary in place, or any necessary destination in mind, but to do so with a fervency, an intensity of focus, that would not ordinarily be associated with an aimless stroll (Briggs & Lucy, 2012).

This method of research, wandering either aimlessly or with only a broad context in mind and with little solid plan as to how or even what final outcome might be reached, describes well the method chosen for this creative research. This method is very much concerned with the 'process' in the first instance, the 'outcome' being an almost surprising gift emerging from the intensity of focus. Both the creative works have been created in this way. While both are clearly multimedia works involving sound, music, filmed image and editing, they defy the usual characteristic of multimedia by being a single artist produced work and so are able to unfold via a subjective process. Single artist produced works follow in the tradition of visual art portraiture; that is, as the paint is applied and layered over time the continually evolving work is considered by the artist and decisions are made as part of that ongoing, circular process. This process is time consuming, highly subjective and intensely focused. The process undertaken for this creative work is detailed in following chapters.



## CHAPTER 5: MINOR PROJECT - *Voyeur Series* (2015)

### Creative research exploring intertextuality and the identity of the portrayed

My initial research experiments were attempts to clarify the first defining principles of visual portraiture to contextualise my research. It was essential to understand not just the scholarly definitions of portraiture but to absorb the defining principles as they applied to my practice. The first project was the *Voyeur Series* (Thackrah, 2015).

This series of short portraits was edited during 1st semester from raw footage that I had shot in Buenos Aires in 2007. I wasn't concerned with the sound at this stage as I was looking solely at the visual to ask several questions, the most pressing question being at the time - what is a portrait? While there are many scholarly definitions already discussed, it was important to understand the implications and answers that would emerge during the personal creative process of portrait making. The *Voyeur Series* of portraits were shot on the street with a small camera and no crew so the subjects were unaware of my presence. I wanted to capture those who lived on the street in this huge and poor city. They were shot on the edge of San Telmo, a barrio that borders the dangerous 'no-go' area of La Boca and houses many of the inner city's poor. I had been thinking about the distinction between a portrait created as a negotiated contract between the artist and the subject, and a portrait, such as these, that were shot anonymously, without any knowledge of the sitters. Are the sitters merely observed 'objects' if there is no knowledge or contract between sitter and artist? Is it still a portrait?

As Benjamin asserts in *A Little History of Photography*, a sitter has a contract with a portrait artist and so presents a different nature to the camera; the long exposure time of early photography afforded the sitter time to formulate this; they 'developed' into the image as they sat, immobile. The same could be said of film and Warhol's *Screen Tests* well portray the effort expended by a sitter as they construct a self-image for the camera; the sitter's pose is foregrounded in these works throughout the 3 minutes they knowingly 'pose' as themselves. As Barthes says in *Camera Lucida*, "once I feel myself observed by the lens everything changes; I constitute myself in the process of 'posing' ... I transform myself in advance into an image" (Barthes, 2000, p. 10) and this is what is observed in Warhol's *Screen Tests*. If, however, the sitter had no knowledge they were being filmed, they have no option to create themselves. I would maintain this doesn't

mean there is none displayed; 'ordinary' shots capturing the sitter un-posed can often be the ones that capture the most profound 'air' as Barthes finds when he describes an ordinary photograph of his mother at five years of age photographed in the garden, as having captured "the impossible science of the unique being" (Barthes, 2000, p. 71).

Barthes of course, knew the identity of the sitter in this ordinary photograph as his mother Henrietta Barthes. The sitters in the *Voyeur Series* were anonymous - they had no known names. Richard Brilliant believes an essential defining feature of a portrait is the proper name. "Real faces without names, when naming was no longer a necessity, should not be considered portraits". However he adds this caveat "There are works of art however, that have been accepted as portraits because their faces appear so idiosyncratic within a well-known artistic convention that they are assumed to be portraits for whom good, appropriate names must be provided" (Brilliant, 1991, p. 54-55). Generally a name is provided by the artist and the assumption is that the sitter is named correctly, based on information provided by that sitter. And if the sitter cannot provide us with their names, who is to provide these "good appropriate names"?

Catherine Soussloff references contemporary philosophers when she states that a portrait is a triangulation of perceptions between the sitter, artist and viewer; it is as much the *viewer's imagination* that is responsible for structuring a satisfying portrait, as it is the artist and the sitter; the important thing to note is that the subject is not *in* the portrait but in the viewer (Soussloff, 2006, p. 14). Sartre calls this the "illusion of immanence" (Sartre, 2004, p. 5). Hence, it would appear that it is finally the viewer who gives and/or accepts a name.

Therefore, I decided to experiment with the different ways the viewer might be presented with the *Voyeur Series* of portraits. The first display option was to show the work on multiple LCD screens in a gallery setting, playing simultaneously and looped repeatedly to amplify the sitter's anonymity. In this display setting the portraits are more akin to an endlessly repeated Warhol screen print portrait with little interior life portrayed. They have no names and naming is not a necessity because these repeated anonymous portraits are more about image-making itself than the person represented; the individuals have been de-personed into stereotypical representatives of street life. In this format, they correspond to Brilliant's contention that without names, they are *not* portraits.



Figure 1 Screenshot showing *Voyeur Series* in the repeated display format. View [here](#).

These portraits were shot in the style of guerrilla documentary filmmaking or the historically named direct cinema<sup>36</sup>, creating a grittiness heightened by the hand held camera and minimal editing. The sitters were chanced upon accidentally and they were shot without their knowledge as I stayed largely hidden, shooting from a distance. This meant that I as artist, was also at the same time a viewer to the individual unfolding on the street before me. In this double role of artist and viewer, I allowed myself to name these sitters. The second display option explores this idea further; I displayed them individually rather than repeated and attached to each portrait was a name and a short textual story. Both the name and the story were inspired by my experience of the sitters while I was filming them. In this way, I as artist and viewer, gave the sitters names and

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<sup>36</sup> As smaller and less obtrusive camera and sound equipment was developed in the 1960s, direct cinema in the United States developed as a style and with this technical development film portraiture flowered. These portraits privilege uneventful scenes in which script and crew are dropped in favour of an experience of real life that unfolds in the present. As Paul Arthur explains "Longer takes and relatively straightforward handling of the camera are preferred over the use of montage . . . [while] temporal arrangements of shots or scenes abjure dramatic development or rhythmic articulation" (Arthur, 2003, p. 95).

a back story even though it was speculation. In this presentation they correspond more closely to Brilliant's second definition which would allow them to be portraits because "their faces appear so idiosyncratic within a well-known artistic convention" and I have provided them with "good, appropriate names." This raises the final dilemma to be grappled with in my creative research - are they portraits of the artist (myself) or the sitters?



Figure 2 Film still *Pole Woman* [here](#)

The old woman was intent on her 'job' cleaning the poles of their remnants of advertising posters. Why had she made this the focus of her life? Where did she sleep? How did she survive? I was fascinated by the old brown slippers on her feet and the softness in her face; the street was her living room and she was fastidiously keeping it clean.



Figure 3 Film still *Demon Man* [here](#)

The young alcoholic in the street; fighting so many demons in his crazed state. What were they saying to him? The existential isolation of his world seems to be mirrored in the crossed out 'E' sign - it translates as 'no parking' but looking at him it seemed to be demanding 'existence not allowed'. The hard, hot, toxic truck grill and the gaping garbage bin; everything seems to be waiting for him to finally falter.



Figure 4 Film still *Graffiti Man* [here](#)

I noticed this man only because I was filming the wonderful bit of graffiti on the wall which translates to "music for your eyes". As I filmed the graffiti, my attention was drawn to the man sitting on the step. He appeared calm, until slowly, as I filmed, I became aware of his disturbing facial tics.

## Conclusions leading to significant points of departure for the creative work

Significantly, two important issues emerged from this initial experimentation with the creative portraits; one was the issue of *intertextuality* and the second concerned the question - *when a portrait is created by a single artist-originator who is portrayed?* These two issues became the points of departure for the subsequent research emerging from the creative work.

The *Voyeur Series* portraits certainly have recognisable faces and offer a limited depiction of the life, space and culture the sitters inhabit despite the fact they were filmed anonymously and we have no knowledge of them or their names. If the intention was to draw attention to the stereotype rather than the individual, to deprive the portrait of much of its referential content, then the repeated presentation format is effective. However it would be difficult to define them conclusively as 'portraits' in the traditional sense. With the addition of intertextual story including a name and a concentrated focus on each individual portrait, I believe this viewing format creates a space where a richer reflection and interpretation of the inner psyche of the individual sitter is enabled for the viewer, thereby fulfilling the requirement for a portrait to depict a named individual with an inner life.

### Point of Departure 1: Intertextuality:

As has already been discussed, a basic definition of a portrait requires a depiction of both an outer manifestation of face and/or body as well as a sense of the 'inner being' of the sitter; their moral quality, their state of mind, their worldly preoccupations. It's clear that this can't be achieved by looking at a depiction of a face alone. Art history however, has framed various ways in which we are able to glean such information via an interpretation of the portrait's image - the clothes and posture, the expression, the surroundings and objects incorporated in the image, the way in which the artist characterises the sitter and produces the image and most importantly for this discussion, the 'archival data' as Berger calls it or the 'intertextual' as Wendy Steiner names it, that is used to fill out the data offered by the image itself; that is, historical information or speculation about the lives of the sitter and the artist (Berger Jr, 1994, pp. 87–88). This equates with Mulhall's idea of the 'internal' and 'external' subject which co-exist in all portraits; the internal subject being the image itself with no additional intertextual information (an old woman with grey hair wearing slippers) and the

'external' subject being any additional archival information that relates to the actual worldly life of the person depicted in the image (Mulhall, 2008, p. 648).

Such archival information is easy to obtain or is part of community knowledge in the case of celebrity sitters and artists or historical figures. For anonymous sitters such as those depicted in the *Voyeur Series*, no such information is available so a text was written incorporating it as an intertextual element within the portrait. In this way a concentrated focus was placed on each individual portrait, allowing space for a richer reflection and interpretation of the inner psyche of the individual sitter for the viewer. The text was a creation of my subjective imagination and this raises questions as to the subject of the portrait, the implications of which I discuss in the next section.

It is apparent then that these intertextual elements; titles, narratives and other signs can become the defining element in portraiture (Steiner, 1978). This observation is confirmed by theorists including Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin. For Barthes, the text forms the 'anchor' to the image, directing the reader to 'see' the portrait in a certain way, adding meaning to the text. It is a "parasitic message designed to connate the image" (Barthes, 1977a, 1977c, p. 25). For Benjamin, the text turns all images into literature and without this, the image can remain meaningless.

This is where the caption comes in, whereby photography turns all life's relationships into literature, and without which all constructivist photography must remain arrested in the approximate... Will not the caption become the most important part of the photograph? (Benjamin, 1997, p. 256)

The conclusion drawn from this is that the intertextual elements can quite successfully fill out a portrait so that it meets the definition even when it is empty or lacking in other information.

### Point of Departure 2: Who is portrayed?

In the case of the *Voyeur Series*, the sitters were not celebrities and there was no personal information available to me as an artist that could be offered to the viewer apart from information gleaned from the setting of the sitters and the characterisation and means by which the artist captured them; there was no archival information to fill in the gaps, not even a name. Instead, a text was written focused on my experience of

the sitters. Because these texts were about the sitters via my experience of them, we are also gaining some insight into the artist. This raises the question - who is portrayed? Is it the sitter or the artist; a question that has been asked by many including Wendy Steiner:

On the one hand the work focuses on its represented subject: on the other it expresses the artist's conceiving of that subject and hence the artist *per se*... one might claim that the portrait rests on a competition between sitter and portraitist as to not only which in the true subject but which is the true author (Steiner, W 1987, p.171).

Portraits are interpretations of their sitters by an artist for which one must assume both artists and their sitters are responsible. Van Alphen says both the portrayer and the portrayed exist as an original reality and as this double act, they create a special relationship that increases the 'being' of the represented *and* the representation. It is the double act itself that authenticates the portrait and that makes us as viewers believe that the signified (sitter) and the signifier (portrait) form a unity that conveys a true reality. (Van Alphen, 1977) In that sense portraits then, are representations of both the sitter's and the artist's self. This follows from an intuitive view many artists would share, encapsulated by the words of Matisse early last century:

I believe, however, that the essential expression of a work depends almost entirely on the projection of the feeling of the artist in relation to his model rather than in organic accuracy (quoted in Cynthia Freeland, 2007, p.156).

In other words, portraits are not only indexical documents of identification and recognition in that they evidence a person's interior and exterior existence, but, as works created by an artist, they are also works of fiction with an aesthetic form and an interaction that can act to intensify the 'being-ness' of both the person represented and the artist, who is also represented. By this interaction they "take us away from the passive state of 'It is painted'" as one would claim when viewing a painting to, "the complex action of 'I see another'" (Soussloff C. M., 2006, p.122).

It is my subjective 'I see another' that is explored in this work and gives rise to the point of departure for all the creative works that followed. Given the paucity of intertextual information offered in these portraits the defining element becomes the perspective of



the artist. What is created, in essence, is a self-portrait of that artist. Like Deleuze's rhizome, the filaments of the multiple fragments spread far and wide; no one individual has solid borders but rather we are conjoined "always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo" (Deleuze, Guattari, 2005, p.25).

## CHAPTER 6 - Major Project One

### Self-portrait 1: Fragments of Presence and Absence (SP1)

With these conclusions pointing the way, I was now ready to move on to replace the intertextual written text with intertextual music/sound. Hence, the next portrait created was the music/sound for the first self-portrait which went on to form the basis of *Self-portrait 1: Fragments of Presence and Absence*<sup>37</sup> (Thackrah, 2018) As can be seen on these links, each of the works that make up the final *SP1* began life as individual stand-alone portraits.

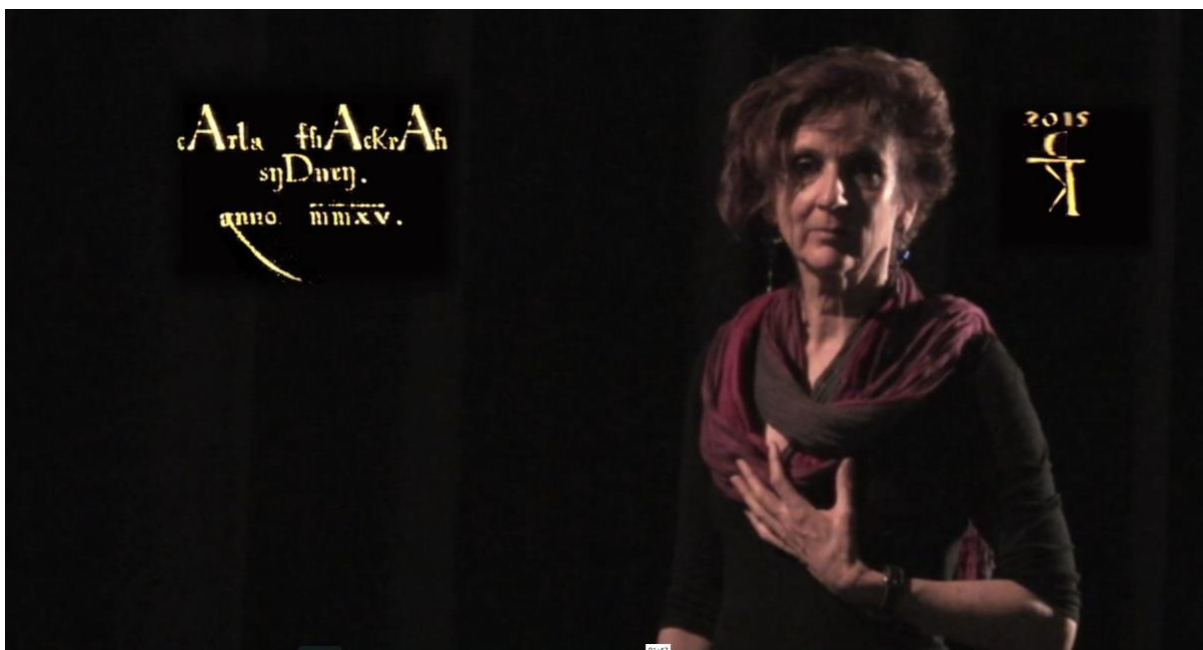


Figure 5 Film still from *Self-portrait 1* (Thackrah, 2015) [view here](#)

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<sup>37</sup> From now on referred to as SP1



Figure 6 Film still from *Self-portrait 4* (Thackrah, 2018b) [view here](#)



Figure 7 Film still from *Last Portrait of Moshlo* (Thackrah, 2015a) [view here](#)



Figure 8 Film still from *Portrait of Ange* (Thackrah, 2017) [view here](#)

The music/sound and visual edits of all the above early drafts were developed over time as outlined in the following sections until what began as many disparate fragments, of myself and the other, became a 26 minute completed and continuous *SP1*.

### **The intertextual:**

In addition to the backstory offered either as intertextual music/sound, text, words or common community knowledge, titles also offer an important intertextual element.

Few paintings of any period are ever received by the public without a title, and moreover one with the authority of the modern, intentional label. Generic or subject titles thus gain considerable importance in the work's reception (Wendy Steiner, 1985, p. 57).

This work is titled *Self-Portrait 1: ...*

The title is placed to be the “parasitic message designed to connate the image” (Barthes, 1977c, p. 25) or at the least to force the viewer to ask the question - who is the subject?

### The presentation:

The work has been edited in two formats, the choice of which is dependant on the viewing venue. The first iteration of the work, both the music/sound and film, has been created and edited specifically to show in the Data Arena at UTS.<sup>38</sup> The aim in choosing this venue is to escape the single broadcast-format and stereo sound, thereby moving the viewers preconception away from the TV documentary into another context for viewing. As well, playing as an installation on a continuous loop with no specific start or finish aims to amplify this end. As Basanta suggests, a work changes its form when the artist is no longer in control of the start or end points; the form is set by the viewers/listeners movement in and out of the work (Basanta, 2015). In this venue the movement is limited by the fixed arrangement of the screens and the need for the sound to be played as an unchanging but repeating sequential 26 minute work.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 9 *Self-portrait 1: Fragments of Presence and Absence* playing in the 7 channel audio, 6 channel video format at the Data Arena, UTS. Image: Carla Thackrah

[view here](#)

The work has also been edited for stereo sound and single screen broadcast format video to play on web and other platforms, principally for reference purposes.

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<sup>38</sup> The arena can play 16 channel 360-degree audio and 6 repetitions of a single broadcast format image projected by six video projectors on a 360-degree cylindrical screen 4 metres high x 10 metres around.

<sup>39</sup> The second project for this doctorate is presented on individual large screens set throughout an exhibition space where the viewer will be able to navigate freely through the room hence altering the form the work takes in a more radical way. As well, the sound for each portrait will be played simultaneously rather than sequentially, again altering the final sound work the listener experiences, depending on where they stand or move in the room. See Chapter 7



Figure 10 Film still from *Self-portrait 1: Fragments of Presence and Absence* playing in the stereo audio, single channel video format. [view here](#)

### **The process:**

As already outlined in Chapter 3, the creative work emphasised process rather than outcomes to bring it into line with single-artist-produced visual art portraiture. The work's first layer was music/sound that provided the important intertextual element; it was edited through many drafts, layering the new sounds as they were collected - words, vocalisations, object (environmental) music and instrumental music. Once the sound layers were complete, the portrait image was shot, sometimes with additional words and object music to be layered into the already completed sound track. The image was edited through several drafts. Finally other image layers were added, in this instance, the picture frames and signatures.

Every creative decision, from conceiving the work in its entirety through choosing sounds and images, to editing multiple drafts, was informed by the subjectivity of the single-artist-producer (myself) in the moment that each decision was taken.

From within this process the work *Self-portrait 1: Fragments of Presence and Absence* emerged.

### **The genesis:**

An important part of the process is illustrated by the genesis of the work itself. This work came about because of an unexpected event, two months into the research. Rather than being the result of careful planning, it emerged because of that event; an event that defined my identity for that period of time and continues to play a part in the fluctuating portrait of 'who I am': my ex-husband attempted to kill himself. Afterwards he asked me to make his portrait. Two weeks after I filmed this, he made another attempt on his life and succeeded. I chose to respond to this by placing my planned research aside and using this event as impetus for a new direction. Prior to his death I had already filmed a self-portrait; I chose then to record a portrait of the friend who found his body; I followed with another self-portrait touching on the abuse and difficulties I suffered at his hands during my marriage and then, a portrait of my present partner who was close to my ex-husband and was with me throughout the events of his death. I had answering machine recordings of my ex-husband and many emails between us from the last weeks of his life, all of which combined to connect the work as a whole.

### **The music/sound:**

Although I have already stated the definition of music/sound I'm employing, it's worth repeating at this point. The 'instrumental music' (including the voice as instrument) I employ, mixed with the worded voice, vocalisations, electronic and object music<sup>40</sup> will be named 'MUSIC/SOUND'. I will name it thus because no single element will take priority but rather each of these different sounds are used as instruments in my composition, the overall outcome being the sound track to which the film images are finally added. Each sound, whether it is produced by an instrument, an object, electronically or vocally, is of equal definition and weight in the overall composition which is ultimately 'musical'. As needed for explanation in my text, I will call each of these sounds by their different denotations at times, but the overall composed result is always musical 'music/sound'.

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<sup>40</sup> I am naming the sound heard that isn't obviously created by a musical instrument or voice, 'object music'.

I quote Shaw Miller from his work, *Eye hEar*, whose definition of the word 'music' is synonymous to my 'music/sound':

I take 'music' to be a concept that includes what most conventional use excludes. When I use 'music' I mean a discursive practice, not isolated autonomous sound; a complex of activities and ideas, a network of cultural practices that act together to signify the musical (Shaw-Miller, 2013, p. xiii).

### **A note about fragments:**

Out of the broken pieces of the self will come a subjectivity that acknowledges the fragmentation process, but which encompasses and embraces the parts and brings them into dialogue with each other (Spence, 1988, p.198).

There is nothing solid, there is no clear delineating walls defining a single 'who we are' in the postmodern identity; all we have is the multiplicity of our own fragmented thoughts. Paul Mumford comments on the fragmentation of postmodern society in reference to his own fragments of visual music: "time no longer unfolded in a linear way and space was no longer governed by Cartesian laws ... the present was being understood from a bombardment of multiple perspectives of singular moments". As discourse theory tells us, our personalities are assemblages of stories, beliefs, networks of connections that require a hyper-narrative to tell; that is a "collection of small story pieces designed to be arranged in many different ways or told from different points of view. The production of these stories are a logic of reverse deconstruction - a reconstruction" (Mumford, 2009, p. 155). The postmodern, constantly fluctuating identity, according to Jonathon Kramer, is best expressed by the 'vertical time' of 'moment music' and sound, as described by Stockhausen in 1963:

Every present moment counts, as well as no moment at all: a given moment is not merely regarded as the consequence of the previous one and the prelude to the coming one, but as something individual, independent, and centred in itself, capable of existing on its own." (quoted in Kramer, 1998)).

Moment music reached its pinnacle in the middle of the 20th Century with Cage, Glass, La Monte Young, Stockhausen, Reich and Feldman to name a few, and certainly they

owe their lineage to the Futurists and later Musique Concrete. These movements cleared the way for a radical deconstruction of musical thinking and gave composers access to a new field of sound, not exclusively created by traditional musical instruments, making conventional distinctions between music and sounds increasingly irrelevant. Not only was an infinite sound palette unlocked but also the structure of musical time was rethought. Kramer calls the time created in Western art music in this period "vertical time" where "a single present is stretched out into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite 'now' ... the music exists between simultaneous layers of sound, not between successive gestures" (p. 55). It is defined by stasis rather than process; that is, it is going nowhere, it just 'is'; it is 'being' rather than 'becoming'; it doesn't 'begin' it 'starts'; it doesn't 'end' it 'stops'. Amid the flowering of "moment music" Noel Burch called for atonal music/sound to take its place within the film industry specifically to break its inescapable linear temporality and hierarchical structure and to allow the form to become open and less dominated by the narrative, as film so often forced it to be. (Burch,1969)

With these ideas in mind, *SP1* is initiated by the coming together of many fragmentary moments of music/sound chosen from a broad palette incorporating vocalisations, object and electronic music and conventional instruments - at times related but often, not - at times reaching an end but often, not - and layered vertically.

#### **A note about sparsity in the music/sound:**

While the music/sound is often layered, my aim was to maintain each line as a sound separate to the simultaneously occurring lines of music and sound that are occurring simultaneously. There is no sense of a melody line with harmony or a controlling rhythm, but rather I embrace sonic polyphony; that is, the amalgamation of separately existing moments of music/sound with single lines of layered vertical instrumental music. These single lines of melody, intertwining at times, are metaphorically mirroring the single voices of the subjects as they recount their story. Worded vocalisations were placed with the pacing of the whole music/sound work in mind. Other sounds were chosen for their evocative qualities or personal connections to the sitter and placed as individual moments in time, again with both rhythm and tonality of the sounds impacting on the work as a whole. There are many moments of extended silence as there are, in the film image, many moments of black screen. I do this to break from the



dominant habit of film and sound which is to fill the gaps, to leave no room for boredom or thought. I quote Laura Marks, whose reference here is to intercultural cinema but can also be applied to *SPI* and other experimental cinema:

The new combination of words and things that cannot be read in terms of the existing languages of sound and image but calls for new, as yet unformulated languages. To read/hear the image, then, is to look/listen not for what's there but for the gaps - 'mind the gap!'... here the importance of absent images (often video black or black leader), barely legible image, and indistinguishable sound (Marks, 2000, p.31),

Audio signals even when sparse, have a peculiar intensity because we have little choice but to hear them - we cannot shut our ears. The combination of silence and sharp or significant sound then, can create a powerful affect. "Unlike seeing, where one can look away, one cannot 'hear away' but must listen ... hearing implies already belonging together in a manner that one is claimed by what is being said" (Gadamer, 1975)

### **The instrumental music:**

I aimed to create a new context for the instrumental music I wrote and layered into the work. I neither wanted to use the 'film music' context where music is seen as a subordinate accompaniment to the work's visual and narrative needs, nor the abstract 'high art' context of 'absolute music' which separates itself from other media and senses. To counter both these defining contexts of instrumental music, I have endeavoured to make the instrumental music layer equal in weight to the other layers of music/sound - the worded vocals, vocalisations, electronic and object music. In this way it offers us another representational text that in combination with the other representational elements of music/sound, adds meaning.

### **The object music:**

I am naming the sound heard that isn't obviously created by a musical instrument or voice, 'object music'. The more common name in the film context would be foley,<sup>41</sup> however, I'm using and placing these sounds as part of the music score and not separate to it as foley would be treated within a typical film sound design. Toru Takemitsu's music, in particular his score for the collection of Japanese horror stories *Kwaidan* by the director Kobayashi Masaki (Takemitsu, 1964), has for many years lived in my 'inner musical library' (Folkestad, 2012) as a fine example of object music. Being largely self-taught and isolated within a Japanese tradition, Takemitsu was, in his early years, free of the constraints of the Western music canon and had developed his own form of musique concrete quite separate to Pierre Schaffer in Europe. His use of evocative and unexpected percussive object soundscapes have been an influence on my use of object music, particularly in the second portrait in *Self-portrait 1: ... (Portrait of Ange)* which was the last portrait fragment I completed. I have carried through and developed object music for *Self-portrait 2: ... (2019)*



Audio 1 Toru Takemitsu *Kwaidan* (1964) screen music excerpt

### **The vocalisations:**

The clean edit - the sound that is free of any sense of either the space within which the sitter is being recorded or the fact that the voice is emanating from a body - the sitter's body - is more usually the sound that the engineer is aiming for. Hence, it is usual in post-production, to edit out the guttural, unintended sounds that are produced by the body. "Sound editing can become an obsessive quest to wash away this troublesome grime" (Norman, 2004). I have instead chosen to keep and emphasise these sounds as musical. I sense that Barthes is referring to this embodiment of sound when he bemoans the loss of "the 'grain' of the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" (1977 p.188). Rather, he says recorded sound has been 'flattened out' into perfection. He claims that it is in hearing the obvious corporeal sounds that emanate from "the throat, the place where phonic metal hardens and is segmented" (p. 183) that

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<sup>41</sup> Sound effects created and edited to be placed on a film soundtrack

the 'significance', the third meaning, explodes. Throughout all the recordings, these personal, intimate vocal sounds created by the body such as tongue clicks, 'umms', groans, tight throated, audible breaths, sighs etc - are retained and in fact emphasised by repetition and increased volume. Deeply personal, always emerging involuntarily much like dreams from the subconscious, these sounds to me reveal the inner psyche where the listener can enter between the cracks of the words.

### **The worded vocalisations:**

The use of words, particularly in the stated postmodern context of this work, is laden with connotation, implication and questions. It was always intended that words would be used, none the less this work, coming as unexpectedly as I have already described, uses more words than I had originally intended for this research. I was aware this would have the effect of closing the structure and setting the audience on a more predetermined narrative line. I lessen the impact of this closed structure by fragmenting the temporality of the narrative both within the work's structure and by the presentation of the work playing on a continual loop with the audience free to come and go at any point. This has been done intentionally to compare and contrast with the second creative work completed for this doctorate.

### **The edit of visuals to music/sound:**

The visual edit points were always chosen to correspond with one of the layers of music/sound occurring in the moment. It was chosen because I wanted the visual edit to emphasise or draw attention to that particular layer of sound at that moment, not, as is usually the case, for the sound to be created to draw attention to the vision or story. I have created static, simple, repetitive visual imagery. Music/sound is the priority and although we may find ourselves intensely 'watching' as is our habit, there actually isn't much to see; the aim is to draw the attention to the music/sound.

### **The image references:**



Figure 11 Albrecht Dürer *Self-portrait* (1500) oil on panel

The impetus for the visual design of the portrait images was taken from Renaissance portraiture, in particular Albrecht Dürer, who was at the centre of a flowering of self-portraiture during this time. The choice of Dürer's landmark Munich portrait of 1500 as the point of reference for all my creative works is a significant choice and one that I elucidate in Chapter 3. The framing, referencing Dürer's *Self Portrait*, with face and shoulders front and centre against a black background was used consistently throughout *SP1*, as was the style of clothes worn by the sitters. This was carried through in all the portraits except for *Portrait of Mosh* which was shot under conditions over which I had little control. The signature also references Dürer's quite explicitly and it is in the form most common during the Renaissance after Dürer's example, placed as a significant feature within the canvas or on the frame. I filmed the original frames surrounding significant Renaissance portraits in the National Gallery and Portrait Gallery in London and the Louvre to make my collection for the work.

### **The repetitions of the film image:**

It's impossible to avoid the observation that the repetitions in *SP1* as it shows in the Data Arena at UTS, recall Warhol's strategies in his screenprinted/painted portraits. As Walter Benjamin claimed many years prior to Warhol's work, the mechanical reproduction acts to destroy the illusion that the portrait holds in any way the subject's

'aura' (Benjamin, 1936). The repetitions in a Warhol portrait demonstrate this claim exceptionally well. They are clearly not concerned with the traditional need to portray some manifestation of an inner identity of the sitter, rather they are machine-like, revealing not a real 'self' but rather only surface signs or simulacra in endless repetition (Berg, 1989; Brilliant, 1991; Foster, 2010). This was made more apparent because the sitters in Warhol's portraits were actual celebrities "*Liz*", "*Jackie*", "*Marilyn*", "*Elvis*"; they are so familiar to us that a first name is all that's required. "Repetition adds up to reputation" Warhol was said to have observed (Finch, 1968, p. 150). Clearly he understood how celebrity was made and by transforming the constant references to these celebrities in the media into a spatial repetition or design, he was making us see what were originally portraits as something else entirely. We admire the design but we are certainly not close to the 'real self' depicted there nor the hand of the artist; we see only the 'self' as image and the artist as a mechanical operator. Even if the sitter is not a celebrity, functionally, the repeated image trivialises the image and the person behind the image and the artist copying the image, making the image merely a succession of well-designed reproductions devoid of humanity.



Figure 12 Andy Warhol *Self-portrait* (Warhol, 1966) silk screen & polymer paint

The repetitions in my work are aiming for the opposite. Rather, they are intended to intensify the actuality of the inner subject, to overwhelm the viewer with a larger-than-life representation of the sitter. Being film, they embody Benjamin's claim of the reproduced frames having lost their 'authenticity' and yet, being repeated frames that are then repeated yet again, in larger-than-life format, I aim to reinvigorate their aura and actuality in much the way Jean Mitry describes the filmed close-up of a face as being truly "experienced and felt" (Mitry, 1998, p. 131); the closely filmed face can reveal its emotions in a transcendent way, so that each movement becomes an expressive event potentially full of meaning. Gertrude Stein in her literary portraits, also used repetition to achieve the opposite ends to Warhol. She called her use of repeating phrases "insistence", claiming that each repeated phrase captured a new and deep moment of her subject's essence; their "bottom nature" (Stein, 1974 c1935). The difference in *SP1* is compounded by the sitters themselves who are the traditional stuff of contemporary portraits - friends or family of the artist - not in any way sharing the celebrity status of Warhol's sitters.

### **The frames:**

There were several reasons why I used picture frames so extensively. The first and most obvious is as a reference to traditional portraiture. According to Derrida, the frame is placed to delineate the outside from the inside; the work of art from the non-work of art. In the case of art, that which is "not art" is excluded in order to shape and form "art" as an entity that is transcendent. (Derrida, 1987) For my purposes, it reinforces that this work, although in the form of temporal moving image and sound, is referencing the transcendent aims of visual art portraiture.

They are created as solid and highly detailed, shot in close-up with 4K resolution, almost with the appearance of having been scanned rather than filmed, creating a sense they exist in a different space or reality. This is intentional. I wanted them to appear as unmoving frames; both as picture frames in the traditional sense but also, with a moving image rather than painted image within, they become metaphoric window frames through which we look at the constant flux of life. The unmoving solidity also has the effect of emphasising the softer, fluctuating individual, 'framed' or held captive by the vagaries of life's events and this event in particular, as well as captured or framed via the process of portrait-making.



Figure 13 Francis Bacon *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne* (1967) oil on canvas

To further illustrate the 'capturing' in the process of portrait making, I'm reminded of Francis Bacon's *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne* (1967) which could be seen as an allegory on the nature of portraiture, in particular, being 'nailed' to the wall; failing to be completely 'seen'; and being 'captured' and distorted by the frame. Here Bacon seems to be dissecting the themes of 'inside' and 'outside', subjectivity and objectification, reality and representation, with the sitter both inside and outside the frame and the door. At the same time, with her back to the door betraying a sense of discomfort - perhaps not wanting to acknowledge the partial 'self' trying to push her way out, she is attempting to either let her 'self' out or lock her 'self' in within the portrait. The third portrait-in-a-portrait sees her literally 'nailed' to the wall via the act of portrait making; the artist's representation of the sitter seeming to nail the 'self' down in an act of mortification or crucifixion. Each of the portraits within the portrait become increasingly cut and distorted and it is this fragmented nailed face that bears the sense of violence and pain. Her shadow on the door makes for a fourth disquieting, featureless fragment of herself. To finally capture the self within the frame of portraiture, Bacon creates a further frame within a frame with the wall on the far left of the painting looking very much like a classic wood frame moulding. As well, solid black and white vertical lines divide each of the studies. Bacon used the frame within frame as a visual

device throughout many of his paintings. The most obvious of these is what he called his 'space frames' - lines or 'wires' that surround his figures - but he also often cut his paintings either physically into a triptych or within the painting itself as in this *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne*. To accentuate the internal framing, Bacon inevitably places his paintings into solid external picture frames; behind a sheet of glass, within a wooden surround. As Bacon said these are "figures boxed into cage-like structures... confining them within a tense psychological zone" (quoted in Mulhall, 2008, p. 656). Barthes confirms Bacon's view when he writes in relation to being captured or objectified within the frame of photographic portraiture:

In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art ... In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph ... represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death ... : I am truly becoming a specter... I feel that the photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice" (2000, pp.13-14, 82).

The final rationale for the frames is to do with the requirements and constraints of the viewing venue for which this iteration of the work was specifically edited. The six repeated screens that surround the audience are stitched together by software and the resulting blended edges, depending on the framing of the original image, can look unintentionally jarring. A single frame down one side of the filmed frame creates a naturally complete frame that both justifies and connects the repeated images turning them into six framed portraits.

### **The signature:**

In some lengths of footage the signature used references Durer's quite explicitly and it is in the form most common during the Renaissance, placed as a significant feature within the canvas often with other explanatory text. In this work it has usually been placed at the beginning and end of each portrait only when there is a frame present. Again, this is a reference to traditional portraiture, the importance in this context being that the film is signed to differentiate it as a visual art work rather than a documentary claiming to



be objective truth. These works are the highly subjective work of the artist; the signature mark gives permission for the single artist-originator to be wholly present, even to the point of sacrificing truth.

### **A note about sparsity in the film image:**

As in the music/sound, the film image is intentionally sparse and perhaps by film conventions, boring. Music/sound is the priority. To accentuate this, I placed long stretches of black screen in the original single screen edit. In the Data Arena edit I have replaced these with empty frames because at those moments the Arena itself became too present and we were transported away from the imaginary space elicited by the portrait. The continuous frame instead, tends to hold us almost literally within the framed portrait and yet still performs the function of the black screen; perhaps even more so because we are more consciously aware of the now empty frame that a moment ago, held a person.

### **The materiality of the digital image and sound**

Problems are encountered in a single person produced film that are unique simply because there was no other crew except the filmmaker to perform several tasks. The need to have the camera set to auto focus in the *SP1* meant the camera couldn't make up its mind what part of the image to focus on leading to soft focus at times. The not perfect lighting in Rom's Portrait in particular was also due to this; I couldn't monitor the subject in camera and move the lights into optimal positions at the same time. The transparency/loss of solidity of the keyed composite images of *SP4* was emphasised as signifying the loss of solidity of the subject's body; and the naked and almost transparent body emphasised vulnerability in the face of the abusive partner and his traumatic death. The poor quality of Mosh's portrait, shot on an iphone due to circumstances, was emphasised to act as a signifier of his real absence. I chose to add filters to the digital image at the end of several of the shots to deteriorate the image; it flickers and dies much like each of Warhol's *Screen Tests* finish with the spotted flickering tail end of the film reel. The sitter is 'passed away' as is the material presence of his deteriorating digital image. In post-production I also desaturated the image to black and white both to match the design of the other portraits but also to differentiate it from the other portraits; to distinguish between the monotone of absence as opposed

to the life-filled still present. Poor audio quality in both Mosh's and Ange's portrait (3rd and 2nd portraits) were due to the unexpected, and hence uncontrolled, circumstances of both recordings and each were emphasised and ameliorated with processing.

The final issue is to do with what is often the bane of a musician's life - the limitations imposed by the quality of the sound equipment. Certainly, for live performance the skill of the sound mixer and the quality of the PA equipment can make or break a performance. For the showing of the work in the Data Arena, I was faced with the limitations of the speaker system in the venue. The speakers are Genelec 8030B. (<https://www.genelec.com/support-technology/previous-models/8030a-studio-monitor>), Despite having fourteen of these high quality speakers placed around the arena, given the size of the space and the fact that these speakers are the babies of the range, they were prone to distort with certain frequencies. To get any volume, it was necessary to play each of the 7 channels through 7 speakers rather than 2, hence losing some of the spatial sense intended in the mix. Even with this configuration, the volume level was less than I would like for a work focusing on sound and some frequencies distort momentarily.

#### **A note about audience:**

Another aspect of single person produced film portrait that moves the work away from more conventional filmed portraits toward visual art portraiture is the issue of audience appeal. This topic, a personal exploration of an intimate partner's suicide and its impact, is not one that would have broad appeal to a viewing public. It is a private and personal portrait that I expect will hold limited interest to anyone outside those involved. I don't intend to issue invitations to view the work except to those who have an interest; after all, I joke, 'who is interested in the portrait of Great Uncle Arthur hanging in the hall except a few family members?' I will instead treat it within the context that many traditional portraits have been placed - a work that can have a deep impact on a small audience and as such is created to be shown inside a home only to those who are family, intimates and friends. This could be seen to be antithetical to the portraits that might be made to be viewed by the general public particularly within the film and TV industry and the highly publicised visual art portrait competitions and exhibitions, which require a broad, often commercial, appeal to justify their creation. I find it interesting to be aware of how uncomfortable I feel creating a work that goes against all I have accepted

to be 'good' film or art making, judged by the audience size, but I observe and instead celebrate this as being an aspect of the traditional portrait.

## CHAPTER 7:

### UNFINISHED

#### 2nd PROJECT - *Self-Portrait 2: ... (2019)*

## CHAPTER 8:

### CONCLUSION

#### UNFINISHED

"The subject is not an individual plenitude which one is or is not entitled to pour off into language (portrait) but on the contrary, a void around which the writer weaves a discourse which is infinitely transformed...so that all writing (painting) which does not lie, designates not the internal attributes of the subject, but its absence" (R Barthes, 2004, p. 85)

Oscar Wilde says

"Every portrait that is painted with feeling is the portrait of the artist not the sitter. The sitter is merely an accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself." (Wilde, 2006, p. 40)

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