CHAPTER 7 - Major Project Two

Self-portrait #2: Multiple Heads (SP2)1

This series of portraits emerged from a major recording project undertaken from August 2018 and completed in February 2019. While the individual sound and visual portraits of SP1 emerged from the experiences of the individuals that each in their own way, witnessed and narrated the same unexpected event, the portraits in SP2 had a different genesis. The individual portraits that make up SP2 emerged from the process of improvising music - the artists who were part of the creation of the music/sound were the subjects of the portraits, and their relationships both personal and musical, became the central uniting element in the series SP2. This led to a more conceptual basis for the music/sound in that it was not narrative based. Rather it was the relationship that was formed between the artists while collaborating to create music/sound that was being portrayed and in the process of portraying that relationship, the individual 'inner selves' were likewise revealed.

In this way SP2 adheres even more strongly to the research imperative that music/sound be the initiating media in the portraits created - not only were the sound portraits completed before any visual element was created but the genesis of the portraits themselves emerged from the intense relational act of improvising music.

The ensemble is *The Elektra Collective Unconscious* (ECU)² and is made up of Carla Thackrah sound producer, editor and performing on flute and vocals, Romano Crivici on keyboard, Rudi Crivici playing electric viola, Jess Ciampa, percussion and vocals and Andy Rantzen is the poet and speaker.

The major pieces recorded *The Ouroboros, The Hydra as a Model of Bureaucratic Dysfunction* and *Ecclesiastes: Strangers on a Train*, will be released on a European label in 2020. The full album can be heard <u>here.</u>

However, these improvised works were not used as a whole in any form for the portraits that make up the SP2 series. Rather, only fragments of the music/sound have been

¹ From now on referred to as SP2

² From now on referred to as ECU

chosen, effected, edited and layered with words and other object sounds in the manner of acousmatic composition, to create the completed sound portraits.

Images

The video images were all shot in the studio with 4K video and two different lighting set-ups. The first was with a bright wash of LED lights against a green screen and the second set-up was with softer 3-point lighting and orange gels against a black screen. This gave the filmed faces a starkly different colour grade. Footage was taken with the camera set in both landscape and also turned for portrait mode to give greatest flexibility for editing into the final display formats. The sitters were shot from the waist up, often while listening to their own sound portrait for the first time to capture their reactions. Otherwise long takes were shot - up to 5 minutes - in silence. Directorial intervention was kept to a minimum to capture what a sitter would do most naturally in what could be an uncomfortably long silence; the only direction given to the sitters was to not talk.

Frame

Like SP1, the use of the frame is significant in this series. As Derrida claims, the frame is placed to delineate that which is 'not art' from that which is 'art' (Derrida, 1987) and the placement of the temporal sound and moving image of these portraits within a frame places them squarely within the transcendent aims of visual art portraiture. As well, the solid, unmoving frame emphasises the fluctuating individual 'framed', or held captive, via the process of portrait making. Most of the portraits of SP2 are framed within the tradition of Renaissance polyptych altarpieces ³ and this adds a further dimension to the framing which harks back to Dürer's significant historical departure with his Munich self-portrait of 1500 - that of the importance of individual human self-

³ A polyptych altarpiece is a several panelled painting or sculpture made to adorn altars in churches, chapels or religious institutions. Gothic altarpieces dating from the thirteenth century usually displayed a major religious figure in the central panel, the Madonna and child or the crucifixion, with various saints depicted in full length in the side panels, all set on a flat golden background. The frame of altarpieces was integral to the work and was made in the Gothic architectural style - "indeed, the frame is integral to the conception of the altarpiece, and in this respect the work differs profoundly from later paintings, where a rectangular panel or canvas was conceived and painted prior to framing" (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982, p. 4). As Renaissance painters took up the form, the Renaissance taste for the classical Greek style as well as more naturalistic renderings utilising perspective, changed both the framing and the paintings. The ornate Gothic arrangements were eschewed in favor of the unified field of the Renaissance altarpiece (Crum, 1998, p. 10) and many older Gothic altarpieces had their frames removed and classical rectangular frames added. At times, the classical frame was rendered as a painted fresco rather than built, and the rectangular external frame was added afterwards to create a frame within a frame. The figures, instead of being painted against a flat golden background, were placed in natural scenes or interiors. The effect was that we as viewers, were peering through the proscenium arch of the frames into the other-worldly scene beyond.

hood elevated to the level of God. Like Dürer's, the works are portraying insignificant men and women and everyday relationships and yet they are captured inside polyptych altarpieces. While I would not claim these works are in any way marking a great transition of eras, from Mediaeval to Renaissance as was Dürer's, they are at least acknowledging Dürer's contribution as the first painter of self-portraits and in a small way, posing similar questions.



Figure X: The Demidoff Altarpiece (polyptych) by Carlo Crivelli (Crivelli, 1476) tempura on lime

Edit

In all the portraits the palette of sounds is matched by the palette of images during the editing process. What do I mean by this? The advantage of being the creator of both the music/sound and image is that I can consider the palette of images within the same context as the sounds and as a consequence the editing of both sound and image can be treated within that same context or thought process. The most obvious parallels that I consider are below, with each feature of sound having its equivalent image feature:

Principle Palette of Sounds	Principal Palette of Images
silence	black video
timbre	lighting or colour grade
tonality	expression of faces/bodies
words	'narrative' action
pace/rhythm	pace/movement
Editing Sounds	Editing Images
layering of timbres	layering of colour grades
choice of tonality/feel	expression of faces/bodies
words	real movement of bodies
pace of rhythm and cuts	pace of movement and cuts

There were no rules as to how an image edit should be treated when paired with a particular music/sound; black video was not necessarily paired with silence or choice of facial expressions did not have to match tonality, however each sound quality had its equivalent in image and this context was considered throughout the editing process. For example, the different colour grades for the fragmented faces in the portraits reflect the timbres of the music/sound, with the colour tones of the faces overlaid, fragmented and treated in the editing process in the same way as the tones, timbres and harmonies of music/sound are mixed. In this way it could be said that the creation and editing of both the music/sound and image is a process of complete equality of medium - neither the music/sound nor image dominates nor is either treated in a unique way.

The Works:

Multiple Heads: Adam & Eve (2018-2019)

Two channel video, stereo sound



Figure X: Film still from Multiple Heads: Adam & Eve (Thackrah, 2018)

The first work finished in this series of portraits was <u>Multiple Heads: Adam & Eve</u> (2018 - 2019) for two channel video displayed on life size screens, each screen synchronised to the same stereo sound.

Music/Sound

Listen to sound portrait here

The fragments of music/sound used for the sound portrait were edited from the first recording completed in August 2018 called *The Ouroboros*. The recording was an improvisation by the ensemble based around the concept of the Ouroboros, an ancient symbol of a serpent eating its own tail, with the words for the original recording written and spoken by Andy Rantzen. None of these words were used for the portrait however the concept of the Ouroboros was the basis of the music that emerged from the

improvisation and finally, the basis of this portrait which, rather than being a portrait of the individuals whose faces and bodies we see, was conceptually a 'representative' man and woman portraying the birth of all human individuality. The oldest image of the Ouroborus found to date was in the funerary texts in Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt (Hornung, 1999). Carl Jung saw the tail-swallowing serpent as the archetypal image of the psyche, the nature of which derives from its containment within the polar opposites of base instinct and archetypal spirit. Jung considered it was the conflict between instinct and spirit that was the primary dynamic responsible for the creation of the individual. The image of a serpent feeding on its opposite, the tail, thereby symbolised the union of those opposites. At the same time the circle it created was a whole unto itself. It was this powerful image that represented the birth of the individuated whole 'self' (Jung, 1960). Jung's student Erich Neumann sums up:

"the uroboros, the circular snake biting its tail, is the symbol of the psychic state of the beginning, of the original situation, in which man's consciousness and ego were still small and undeveloped. As symbol of the origin and of the opposites contained in it, the uroboros is the "Great Round," in which positive and negative, male and female, elements of consciousness, elements hostile to consciousness, and unconscious elements are intermingled" (Neumann, Manheim, Liebscher, & Liebscher, 2015, p. 18)

The music/sound is sparse and spacious, creating a sense of the primordial beginning; effected key clacks, vocalisations and singing. Layered on these sounds is effected piano and viola. Words were the final layer conceived and added:

In the beginning
there was the word
one word
who
him, her, I, myself, mine, you
one
there was the word

These words were literally referencing words themselves that, within the post structural view, are the originator of our knowing self. Foucault saw that an individual, rather

than having a discoverable and special nature, is constantly being reconstituted via discourse as a subject and object for herself: "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" (Foucault, 1984, p. 118). Hence the idea of the word as the original creator of the first individual man and woman, was the focus for the text.

Image

A diptych portrait of Adam and Eve by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1528) in the Uffizi Gallery Florence was the inspiration for the video images. I visited Florence in September 2018 and was struck by the two paintings and their relevance to the research. The images of Adam and Eve, like the music/sound, represent the birth of individual human identity - the Cartesian idea of a self-hood with free will, separate to God, that flowered in the Renaissance. As an artist, Cranach was interested in and stimulated by the work of his contemporaries, including Albrecht Dürer who painted an earlier version of Adam and Eve in 1508 (D'Ors, 2008, pg. 111-112). Cranach's friendship with Martin Luther, the support given by patrons both protestant and catholic, and the Renaissance fascination with the Old Testament story of Adam and Eve's awakening (Mier, 2015, pg. 176), led to his painting many versions of Adam and Eve but this one was particularly suitable for my purpose because both were painted on their own life-size panel which matched my display preference for the completed work two separate life-sized screens. Unlike the other portraits in this series, there is no additional frame added to these two portraits because the Cranach portraits as they hang in the Uffizi have a simple black wood surround that acts merely to mark the edge of the painted board. In a similar way, the edge of the LCD screen will mark the delineation of the inside and outside of the work.

For the work *Multiple Heads: Adam & Eve*, Cranach's images of Adam and Eve were fragmented, inter-cut and layered with images of the individual sitters in the series. The skulls featured in Adam's portrait were shot in the catacombs in Paris juxtaposed with the skull painted by Holbien that features in his masterpiece portrait *The Ambassadors* (1533) that hangs in The National Gallery London. The image used for the lower section of *Adam* was video I shot in the Uffizi Gallery of anonymous visitors looking at the actual paintings. This footage, like the other images, was fragmented, slowed and overlaid.

The editing process for the image mirrored that of the music/sound. The work begins with the unmoving images of the original paintings mirroring the non-tonal primordial object sounds created by key-clacks, the bow on strings and vocalisations. As the music/sound becomes more overlaid, structured and tonal, the fragmented filmed faces are cut into the Cranach images. The different colour grades for these fragmented faces, like all the portraits in this series, reflect the timbres of the music/sound and are fragmented, overlaid and mixed in the same way.

Multiple Heads: Rom (2018 - 2019)
Single channel video, stereo sound



Figure X: Film still from *Multiple Heads: Rom* (Thackrah, 2019c)

This work <u>Multiple Heads: Rom</u> (2019) is for single channel video in broadcast landscape format with stereo sound. It is a simple portrait of one individual member of ECU.

Music/Sound

Listen to the sound portrait <u>here</u>.

The music is a layered and inter-cut mixture of fragments of four works intimately connected to the sitter. <u>Crystalline</u> and <u>Hydra as a Model of Bureaucratic Disfunction</u> both recorded by ECU feature the sitter on piano with the artist playing flute; In <u>Tongues of Insects</u> written by the sitter and performed by him with his string quartet Elektra; and the sitter improvising on solo violin. Overlaid is the sitter speaking about

relationships interspersed with the sound of static and his vocalisations - loud breaths, howls, snuffles, groans and unexpected exclamations. These intimate vocalisation sounds have been repeated and their volume increased. The slow pace of the speaking voice is as it was recorded and this combined with the other music/sound chosen, gives an accurate sense of the sitter's mode of thinking, speaking, creating and playing music.

Image

The framing and occasional background image are by the sitter's favourite Renaissance artist, Carlo Crivelli (1430-1495). The background image is the foot of St Sebastian from *The Virgin with St Francis and St Sebastian* (1491) and the sitter is seen sitting at St Sebastian's foot on one of the broken arrows used to torture him. The painted frame within the gold wood frame that 'captures' and holds the sitter is from Crivelli's *The Annunciation with St Emidius* (1486) as is the final full image that we see when the sitter has 'escaped' the frame.

Multiple Heads: You & Me (2019) Three channel video, stereo sound



Figure X: Film still from Multiple Heads: You & Me (Thackrah, 2019d)

This work <u>Multiple Heads: You & Me (2019)</u> is for three channel video synchronised to stereo sound. It is a portrait of the relationship between You and Me. At the same time it is a portrait of Me (in relationship with You) and You (in relationship with Me). With Me as both sitter and artist, the portrait also becomes a self-portrait of Me.

Music/Sound

Listen to sound portrait <u>here</u>.

The music/sound was structured in two parts representing two different ways human individuals relate, with layered words separating the parts. In the first half we hear the music You and Me created together by improvisation. It is fragments of ECU featuring Me playing flute and vocals and You improvising on piano. Both *The Hydra as a Model of Bureaucratic Dysfunction* and *Ecclesiastes: Strangers on a Train* were used, overlaid multiple times with additional percussion and flute fragments added to the original versions of the pieces. (The original versions of *Hydra* and *Ecclesiastes* can be heard on these links). While both You and Me offer their own unique contribution to the finished work, its genesis was in the interaction between both musician/sitters.

The second half of the music/sound is taken, overlaid and merged, from two earlier completed sound portraits; one a draft portrait of Me and the other the music/sound from *Multiple Heads: Rom* already discussed. Rather than being the two sitters performing within the same ensemble, both these sound portraits are self-contained and solely performed by the sitters alone; they are not responding to each other in the way they would as improvisors. In this way we are hearing two separate individuals reflected via their sound portraits, playing simultaneously via layering. The music/sound performed by Me is sound taken solely from my out-breath as it creates tonal resonance in a flute and across my vocal chords to create singing. In this way the sound is personal and intimate. This is fragmented, overlaid and edited with music created by You, both solo improvised violin and music written by You and performed by his string quartet Elektra String Quartet.

The layered words of You and Me are interspersed in sections throughout the work, with longer sections of layered words introducing the work and marking the division between the first half and the second. These words are edited from the extended raw footage (approximately 2 hours) recorded when filming the middle screen of the portrait - the 'kitchen' section.

For the completed sound work, I, as acousmatic composer, become responsible for the finished amalgamation, marking me as both a sitter (Me) and artist of this relational (self) portrait.

Image

The images were divided into three screens; the left screen is Me, the right screen is You and the middle screen is the domestic and intimate relationship between You and Me filmed from edited footage taken over many days and nights in the kitchen of their shared house.

The left and right screen took their lead from an earlier work not included in the series, *Fragments of a Face* (2016) which is <u>linked here.</u> This work took Pablo Picasso's increasingly fragmented and flattened surrealist faces from 1936 onwards as its visual inspiration, particularly the portraits of Dora Maar, painted between 1936 - 1943.



Figure X: The Yellow Jersey (Dora Maar) by Pablo Picasso (Picasso, 1939) oil on canvas



Figure X: Film still from *Fragments of*Face (Thackrah, 2015)

For both the left and right panel, the faces are fragmented, like these surrealist portraits, allowing the facial features to be distorted, highlighted and reconfigured to create and accentuate meaning. The first half of the portrait shows the fragmented faces exclusively within their designated screen. The second half of the portrait shows the faces becoming increasingly intermingled in the same way as the edit of the music/sound, with different contributions layered and joined - sometimes an eye that belongs to You sits beside an eye belonging to Me or You's mouth joins the nose of Me.

For the central screen, the kitchen footage, the camera was set in a fixed position and allowed to run over many days, capturing the everyday mundanity of a domestic relationship - arriving and leaving the house, cooking, cleaning, chatting. This footage was shot with the camera set vertically in portrait format and while it was not fragmented, it was highly edited, contracting several days of life into eight minutes.

Despite the visual inspiration for the captured faces being the twentieth century surrealist portraits of Picasso, the overall work is in the form of an early Renaissance triptych altarpiece. As already discussed, framing the portraits in this traditional form is significant, particularly so for this portrait because it is depicting an everyday domestic relationship - what shall we have for dinner; how much money do we have; are you ok - and yet this banality is raised to another level via the framing. The frame is the one that surrounds Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks*, which was the central panel for a triptych altarpiece in the National Portrait Gallery London. ⁴

As is often the case with Renaissance altarpieces, the central screen contains the main narrative image, rendered in a naturalistic style with deep perspective. In the case of *Multiple Heads: You & Me*, it is a real interior shot down the length of a long room. The two side panels are rendered against a flat background, which is black instead of the golden we see in the Gothic altarpieces and show only the faces and bodies of the two sitters in fragmented form.

⁴ I used the internal section of the frame which is a genuine sixteenth century frame from Italy purchased and restored recently by The National Gallery in London (The National Gallery, 2019)

Multiple Heads: Andy (2019)
Single channel video, stereo sound

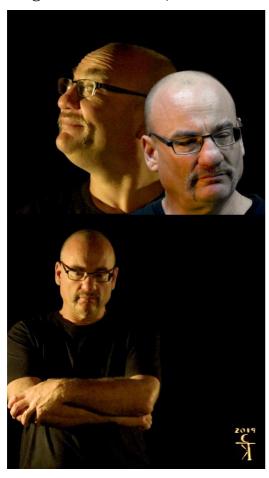


Figure X: Film still from Multiple Heads: Andy (Thackrah, 2019a)

Multiple Heads: Andy is a single screen portrait of ECU's wordsmith Andy Rantzen.

Music/Sound

The sitter is himself an electronic recording artist who is most well-known as part of the duo Itch-E and Scratch-E, hence I had his work to draw on, his words written and spoken for the ECU recording as well as the music created by ECU in response to those words. I asked the sitter to choose which of his own music had most meaning for him and the three works I drew from were <u>Battery Operated</u>, <u>Flailing Metal</u> and <u>Black</u> <u>Smoke</u>. The titles themselves, as well as the words he wrote for *Ouroborus*, <u>Ecclesiates</u> and <u>Hydra</u> suggested the feel of the portrait - grungy and dark, almost dystopian. I chose an excerpt from <u>Ecclesiastes</u>: <u>Strangers on a Train</u> (<u>full work here</u>) as the most appropriate musical feel for the portrait, it being a-tonal, other-worldly and foreboding. This section features flute playing overblown shakuhachi-style sounds, deep slow tom

and viola beats and single piano chords. It sets up an opposition to the thumping beats that feature in the sitter's electro sounds that are layered on top. I layered various object sounds that also suggested a dark, broken space - a single crow, a smashing metal gate, a creaking floorboard and a broken guitar. Andy's vocalisations featured prominently suggesting in my mind, an intimate vulnerability. These sounds - swallowing, various grunts, fast in and out-breaths were recorded during the takes and are usually the sounds an editor would delete; I increased their volume and repeated them at various points. Finally individual words were selected from the sitter's extensive spoken text and edited into the work, chosen because they suggested a personal state of mind that might have elicited the writing of these texts. The state of mind suggested however, could apply to any individual.

There is a point

Each head

Yeah I know you need to slow down. Oh hi! Ok. Oh my god

No, no, no!

injury, disputes, withdraws, displeasure, lashes out, irritation, anxiety, hunger, paranoia, violence

Beautiful

There is internal conflict

Between living and dying

Between here and there

Between then and now

but

movement, stillness

All forms are subject to creation and destruction

Concepts are dependent on their opposites

Simplicity expands into complexity

but

and

Images

I asked Andy to bring in an object or objects that were important to him; he chose to bring his hand written book of personal writings. The first film take was to capture his reactions as he listened to the sound portrait that had been completed prior to the shoot.

As with the other portraits, the faces were cut and overlaid on each other, suggesting the multiple layers of an individual. The background at 3'10" is from Carlo Crivelli's work *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (1489) and this was chosen because of the placement of the beautifully rendered bible, which mirrored Andy's chosen object, against the frame. This is the only reference to a frame in the work. I chose to leave the remainder of the work frameless simply because it is not a panel of a polyptych altarpiece - it is a stand-alone portrait in portrait format.

Multiple Heads: Elektra Collective Unconscious (2019) Five channel video, stereo sound



Figure X: Film still from *Multiple Heads: Elektra Collektive Unconscious* (Thackrah, 2019b)

<u>Multiple Heads: Elektra Collective Unconscious</u> is a pentaptych (five panel altarpiece) portrait of the music ensemble Elektra Collektive Unconscious (ECU) and their relationship reflected via the intense relational activity of music improvisation.

Music/Sound

For the re-edit of this sound portrait I went back to the original recordings to find the out-takes of the band members talking and joking between takes and to reconstruct some of the sections, particularly the vocal recordings between myself and Jess Ciampa focusing on the words 'multiple heads' and words that represent feelings. The works were originally recorded with each instrument separated to enable flexibility in the edit, so it was quite possible to re-construct some sections. These reconstructed sections were interspersed with fragments of the completed *Ecclesiastes* and *Hydra*. The portrait opens with an unaltered section of *Ecclesiastes* but Jess's overlaid vocals and the out-

take words quickly enter as we joke and talk among ourselves. This relating via words reoccurs throughout. There are abrupt and unexpected fragments of music occurring throughout the portrait, with each member of the band having moments where their playing features. Rudi Crivici on electric viola thumps out the Hendrix-style viola solos with Jess on percussion. We hear Romano Crivici on piano throughout the portrait but particularly in the extended solo with myself on flute that is taken from a section of *Hydra* overlaid with *Ecclesiastes*. The portrait finishes with the band members relating to each other via words rather than music.

Image

The work is a five screen pentaptych altarpiece with each member having their own screen; Jess Ciampa (far left panel), Carla Thackrah (next left), Rudi Crivici (far right panel) and Romano Crivici (next right). In the tradition of altarpieces, the centre panel contains the main narrative which is their collective relationship as it is mirrored in words. The edit was such that the faces generally appear in their screen when their playing is featured. If it is a duo or trio with other members of the band, those members might join them in their screen or, if it is a significant contribution to the music, might appear in their own screen simultaneously. Consistent with the table placed at the opening of this chapter, words were matched with real movement of bodies so when the band members were relating with voice, either sung or speaking, they were featured in the central panel.

All the band members were filmed only in bright light against green screen so I had maximum editing flexibility given I was working with several sitters in the one portrait. This meant to achieve the different colour tones required to match the sound timbres, I adjusted the colour in post-production. Each member was filmed individually and together as a group, often with the completed sound portrait playing in the background to capture their reactions. They were filmed in both portrait format and landscape to fit the final tall framing. The direction to remain in silence was difficult to achieve with this portrait because the sitters were used to joking with each other. None the less, I maintained the minimum intervention rule as director/artist and what was captured was a faithful rendering of this relationship and the individuals that are part of it. One of the sitters bemoaned the fact that his unique way of coping with discomfort was captured when he wrote "still think makeup for some (Me) would have helped and coaching for facial expressions! (Me) Default idiot uncomfortable looks!"

The frame is the central section of the frame surrounding *St Michael* (1476) which is one panel of a Carlo Crivelli altarpiece in the National Gallery London. The central image is also from Crivelli - his *Annunciation with Saint Emidius* (1486) which was selectively desaturated, leaving the golden bolt of grace from the heavens untouched.

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