

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

You Have the Eyes of a Stranger

The Distancing Effect of the Digital Photographic Portrait

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Massey University, Wellington,

New Zealand.

Olivia Taylor

2011

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable support I received from:

My family, Evan, Ruth, Rachel and Ben, and additionally Emma Langlands, Devon Lazelle and Jed Corlett for your tireless understanding, interest and support.

The staff at Massey University School of Fine Arts, with special thanks to Deidra Sullivan, Jeremy Diggle, Peter Miles, Caroline McQuarrie, and Jane Wilcox and in particular to my supervisors Wayne Barrar and Jenny Gillam.

My fellow MFA students, in particular Bonny Stewart-MacDonald and Andrew Beck, I look forward to watching your bright futures unfold.

Lastly, I offer gratitude and recognition to my extensive collection of subjects. Whether featured in this exegesis or not, this work would not have come to light without your untiring generosity of time and enthusiasm.

Contents

List of Illustrations	p. 4
Abstract	p. 5
Introduction	p. 6
- You Have the Eyes of a Stranger	
Section One: <i>From a Stranger Past</i>	p. 8
- Perfect Strangers	
- A Strange Relationship	
Section Two: <i>Recontextualising the Stranger Effect</i>	p. 13
- Brecht and the Stranger Effect	
- Benjamin and the Distancing 'Aura'	
- Ruff and the Stranger Effect	
- Developments for the Stranger	
Section Three: <i>A Grotesque but Beautiful Stranger</i>	p. 19
- Defining the Grotesque	
- Man Ray and the Grotesque Photograph	
Section Four: <i>Digital Photography – a Strange Time and Place</i>	p. 23
- Digital Distance	
- Within a Strange Time	
Section Five: <i>A Closer Look at the Stranger</i>	p. 26
- The Stranger Relationship	
- A Strange Type of Subject	
- Cindy Sherman and the 'Self' as a Stranger	
- Viewing Strangers	
- A New Way of Looking	
Concluding Thoughts: <i>Pause</i>	p. 38
Image Appendix One: <i>All the Strange Men</i>	p. 39
- Documentation of the eleven 'untouched' portraits	
Image Appendix Two: <i>You Have the Eyes of a Stranger</i>	p. 50
Reference List	p. 61
Bibliography	p. 63

List of Illustrations

Fig 1. Taylor, O. (2009). Ashley 2009 (chromogenic colour print). 48 x 59 cm. From Taylor, O. (2009). *Perfect Strangers*. Collection of the artist.

Fig 2. Taylor, O. (2009). Fay 2009 (chromogenic colour print). 42 x 34 cm. From Taylor, O. (2009). *Perfect Strangers*. Collection of the artist.

Fig 3. Taylor, O. (2009). Rachel 2009 (chromogenic colour print). 74 x 92 cm. From Taylor, O. (2009). *Perfect Strangers*. Collection of the artist.

Fig 4. Taylor, O. (2009). Ben 2009 (chromogenic colour print). 74 x 92 cm. From Taylor, O. (2009). *Perfect Strangers*. Collection of the artist.

Fig 5. Horn, R. (1994-1995). You are the Weather (details) (silver gelatin and chromogenic prints). 26.7 x 21.6 cm each . From Horn, R. (2009). Roni Horn aka Roni Horn. New York : Whitney Museum of American Art ; London: Tate Modern in association with Steidl, Gottingen. Exhibition Copies.

Fig 6. Ruff, T. (2006). jpeg nt02 (chromogenic colour print). 242.6 x 184.8 cm. Edition of 3. From *Jepgs* in Ruff, T. (2009). Jpegs. New York: Aperture.

Fig 7. Ruff, T. (2001). Porträt (K. Eckert) (chromogenic colour print). 210 x 165 cm. Edition of 4. From *Porträts* in Winzen, M. (1997). Thomas Ruff : 1979 to the present. Paris; Arles; New York : Centre national de la photographie; Art Publishers, Inc. Collection of the artist.

Fig 8. Taylor, O. (2010). Kenny, distancing experiment.

Fig 9. Taylor, O. (2010). Olly, distancing experiment.

Fig 10. Cross, D. (2005). Closer, screen shot. Retrieved davidcrossartist.com 19/01/2011.

Fig 11. Ray, M. (1922). Marquise Casati (silver positive on glass plate). From Hoving, K. A. (2003). Modern Art and the Grotesque. Cambridge; New York; Aldershot; Burlington: Cambridge University Press

Fig 12. Taylor, O. (2010). Steve, distancing experiment.

Figs 13 &14. Woods-Jack, V. (2008). Josh and Holly, layering experiments. From Woods-Jack, V. (2009). The Empty Portrait: Encounters with a Photographer. School of Fine Arts. Wellington, Massey. Master of Fine Arts.

Fig 15. Todd, Y. (2006). January (lightjet print). 135 x 107.3 cm. From Leonard, R. (2007). Dead Starlets Assoc. by Yvonne Todd. R. Leonard. Brisbane, Institute of Modern Art.

Fig 16. Sander, A. (1928). Unemployed, Cologne (silver gelatin print). From Sander, A. (1977). August Sander. Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture.

Fig 17. Todd, Y. (2002). Counter Manager, Clarins (lightjet print). 90 x 72.6 cm. From *Bellevue* in Leonard, R. (2007). Dead Starlets Assoc. by Yvonne Todd. R. Leonard. Brisbane, Institute of Modern Art.

Fig. 18. Todd, Y. (2002). Clinique Consultant (3) (lightjet print). 82.5 x 66.9 cm. From *Bellevue* In Leonard, R. (2007). Dead Starlets Assoc. by Yvonne Todd. R. Leonard. Brisbane, Institute of Modern Art.

Figs 19 & 20. Taylor, O. (2010). From *Developments with the Self, Series One*.

Figs 21 & 22. Taylor, O. (2010). From *Developments with the Self, Series Two*.

Fig 23. Horn, R. (2009). You are the Weather, installation view at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. 26.7 x 21.6 cm each. From Horn, R. (2009). Roni Horn aka Roni Horn. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art ; London: Tate Modern in association with Steidl, Gottingen.

Abstract

You Have the Eyes of a Stranger considers digital portrait photography as a medium that invites distance between subject, viewer and photographer. The images critique the use of a technology that is immediate, affordable and obtainable, and considers the power of control it affords its beholder. The work explores how subjects are perceived and used as a result of a medium where memory, imagination and fantasy are allowed to co-exist. The male is the subject scrutinised, while the (female) photographer's influence visibly becomes part of the images.

Walter Benjamin argued that due to their accessibility, and their ability to be reproduced and distributed to a mass public, photographs shatter capitalist, bourgeois tradition by destroying the 'aura' of the sacred, authentic and original art object¹. Through the methodologies employed, *You Have the Eyes of a Stranger* exemplifies how digital photographs have the ability to create distance and mystique, resulting in an 'aura' of their own.

¹ Benjamin, W. (1973). The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. . The Photography Reader. L. Wells. London and New York, Routledge: 42-52.