Master's thesis "Red is for Reconstruction"

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But because my mother is a warrior and a go-getter and I am very happy to admit that the visual thesis approximated us and improved our mother-daughter relationship. I only wish my grandmother **Evdokiya Kolesnikova** were alive to experience this magical metamorphosis the way my mother and I did.

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To Barry Kornbluh

Introduction

This thesis reveals a reflection on trauma in a personal photographic project and focuses on the relationship between photography and memory, and photography and trauma. It aims to answer the question how a visual project created in the format of a reconstructed family photo album can provide insights into issues addressed in theoretical debates on those relationships.

The idea of this thesis started from the diagnosis that I have received earlier this year: post-traumatic stress disorder and dysthymia.[1] It means that for quite a long time in my life I have been carrying a constant feeling of guilt enhanced with low self-esteem and chronic depression. Before starting a Master's thesis, the origin of these conditions has never crossed my mind. It can be explained by my constant repression of the negative memories that played the role of a defense mechanism. However, when this year I finally started psychotherapy, as it would be expected, the question: "when did all begin and why?", came into light. During the Master's programme in Film and Photographic studies, I naturally got interested in the concepts and relationships of photography and memory, aftermath photography, photography and trauma and became familiar with the term "phototherapy" coined by the British photographer Jo Spence. While researching more on these subjects, I came across books and essays as "Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology" (1987) by Nicolas Abraham and Nicholas Rand, "The Photography of Trauma" (2002) by Ulrich Bayer, "Photographs as Objects of

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[1] "The American Psychiatric Association defines dysthymia as depressed mood most of the time for at least two years, along with at least two of the following symptoms: poor appetite or overeating; insomnia or excessive sleep; low energy or fatigue; low self-esteem; poor concentration or indecisiveness; and hopelessness", Harvard Health Publishing, 2014.

Memory" (2009) by Elizabeth Edwards, "Generation of Postmemory" (2008) by Marianne

Hirsch and "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" (1989) by Nora Pierre. This

literature gave me an insight into the key terms that I have mentioned earlier and clarified my

view on the idea of the topic that I am now approaching in the Master's thesis. Considering this

acquired material, I then decided to write about subjects of my interests: photography, memory

and trauma, and to provide insights into the core issues on the basis of visual and literary

research, in particular, specific theories of photography. Therefore, my thesis reveals the analysis

of the photo project that I have personally created by means of developing a new family photo

album with the help of already existent family photographs and other vernacular as well as art

photographs.

      This photo album consists of three parts: (1) photos excerpted from the personal family

album, the images of other photographers related to trauma, family albums and memory; (2) still

life photos and close-ups of the textures of the objects in my childhood home that belong to the

genre of late photography, and lastly (3), the portraits of my mother produced by me over the

course of three years (2016-2018) as a part of re-enactment phototherapy project. Back in 2016,

when my mother has only started posing for the images, it was not clear yet that the process was,

in fact, phototherapy. However, later on, when I began my research on the subject, I have

realised that this therapeutic technique proposed by Jo Spence has helped many women "to

explore their identities and issues through photography instead of just using photography at a

very superficial level to capture smiles".[2] Therefore, indeed, it has also helped my mother and me

to restore the connection that was lost in the photographs from the past and infuse my

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[2] Wells, 2002, 402 cited in Rutanen, 2015, 20.

reconstructed family album with humorous and entertaining moments. This latter method in my work plays a role of Hegelian synthesis, because it solves the conflict between the thesis: the transgenerational trauma has been haunting several generations of my family and antithesis: a difficulty to cope with the deep-rooted trauma even when engaging in a traditional therapeutic method by reconciling their common truths, and forming a new proposition, a synthesis - which is a possibility of reducing the effect of trauma and also of an affective experience of trauma by means of photography or mentioned above photographic re-enactment. In other words, the relationship between a person behind the camera and in front of it is constantly changing offering a possibility for "reflective participation"[3] as a mother and daughter, photographer and model, psychologist and patient. Here, I am mentioning the cinematic term affective experience or affect, because I would like to highlight that trauma is not always something intangible as it probably seemed to all female generations of my family.[4] It also can transmit to a traumatised person a bodily experience of fear, apprehension or terror.

With this project, I intend to provide an analysis that shows how three visually different and chronologically distinct photographic series, rearranged in one family album, can give an insight on a theoretical level into the relationship between photography, memory and trauma and draw a clear explanation on the three aspects: firstly, how people can be affected not specifically by the event itself or its visual representation but by connecting to the physical paper photograph. Secondly, how a family album can serve both roles: an object of repressed memory and, at the same time, an object of new, reconstructed memory. The third aspect is disclosing the process of reconstructing memory by experimenting with the reenactment photography which creates fresh

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[3] Dennett, 2009, 12.
[4] Rutherford, 2003 cited in Presence, 2012.

images charged with humour and positivity. These images, in comparison with the photos from the previous chapters, convey the change in human behaviour and make the viewer aware of the possibility of constructing the new family history with the help of photography.

Whilst collecting images from my family archive in order to execute this project, I stumbled upon an interesting phenomenon in family albums in general. The images that showed the moments of entertainment or those that captured the united family at some celebrations, together with portraits of happy family members, are always included in the main album that is kept somewhere in plain sight of the living room and served as the main attraction for the visitors of the house. However, there are always other images that for some reason were excluded from the privileged place in the album. Those are the photographs of daily routine, snapshots that were taken at unexpected moments, pictures where members of our family look sad, not sufficiently dressed up, tired or images that are connected to some sort of traumatic memory. In my house, those images were found hidden in the attic, where no one could ever discover their existence. This discovery made me understand that photographs can serve as both: the objects of pride, or trophies but also, as objects of shame and disregard. Although the latter objects possess negative connotations and are secluded from the eyes of non-family and family members, they continue to serve their duty as emotional and sentimental transmitters.

When this became clear, I decided to perform a close reading analysis to solve the mystery and come up with a coherent explanation why some photos were kept in the main album while others were sealed from the eyes of the curious. The experience of looking at the cardboard box with the photographs that did not enter my family album was almost an experience of looking at some sort of Pandora's box. One cannot possibly imagine what she will

find inside and how impactful the undisclosed images could be. When after long hesitation, I had

finally opened the box, many hidden in the family until that moment secrets were revealed in a

collection of black and white and colour photographs. There were, for instance, images of my

grandmother's four different husbands, my mother's wedding with a man who is not my father,

and an endless sequence of shots where my mother as a young child looks sad and forlorn, as she

was affected by some traumatic event. Moreover, there were also very few images that portray

me and my mother together. However, grave expressions that are stamped on our faces reveal

some invisible line of separation that was drawn between us. This specific moment of finding

these images, that can be compared to an act of unlocking the prohibited door, is a realisation

that the phantom of my family's trauma is not, in fact, a spirit of the dead but, as formulated by

Nicolas Abraham, a Hungarian-born French psychoanalyst: "the gaps left within us by the

secrets of others".[5] While gazing at the images, everything came together in front of me - the

phantom of my family trauma has been a denial of a traditional female role, a wife and a mother,

by the women of my family. Sadly enough, my mother and grandmother had to accept the social

norms of getting married at a very young age, not necessarily with people that they loved,

bearing children that they not necessarily wanted to have. These heavy traumas reflected in the

family photographs might be invisible and inexistent for non-family members who are just

flipping through the pages of the album. Therefore, in my thesis, I am performing the analysis of

juxtaposing my family photographs from the hidden box in the attic with the vernacular images

that are visually distinct and represent happy moments of other families. The custom of

producing only happy images would not be born without an influence of a big corporation like

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[5] Abraham, 1987, 287.

Kodak. Since the creation of user-friendly Kodak film cameras in 1888[6], which has become an irreplaceable item in every household, many families in the United States, affected by Kodak's fictitious, yet convincing and contagious advertising of "shiny happy people holding hands"[7], started to focus only on the moments of entertainment and celebrations. However, on the other side of the ocean, behind the iron curtain, my family photographs were still carrying traces of traumatic events. Therefore, in order to highlight how memories can be suppressed and reconstructed with the photographs of the same family album, I have decided to create a new physical family album with the addition of some recent personal and vernacular photographs.

The best way to heal trauma is to find a way of expressing it; the best way to visualise someone else's trauma is to see it presented in some form of graspable and coherent language. Social psychologist James W. Pennebaker, who focused his research on "how everyday language reflects basic social and personality processes" in "Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions" (1997) claims that trauma can be identified and possibly eliminated by writing about it.[8] Hence, it means that photography, being a form of visual language can also help to communicate a traumatic event and even eliminate its traces in human memory. According to Elizabeth Edwards, photographs express a desire for memory and the act of holding on to a physical photograph is the act of freezing the represented moment so it can evoke some feelings in the future.[9] Therefore, one of the aims within my thesis is to show how photographs in my family album can represent frightening and repressed memories not only to

[6] Bellis, ThoughtCo. Undated.
[7] "Shiny Happy People" is a song by the North American band R.E.M from the album Out of Time, 1991.
[8] Pennebaker, 1997.
[9] Edwards, 2009, 332,

the familiar with the album family members but to people who weren't affected by this trauma directly.

Hereinafter, I have decided to create something that can transmit not only the feeling of sadness and disquiet but an affect, similar to my personal embodied experience. Therefore, in my project, I intend to treat the photographs not as a mere representation of the events, but as physical objects and forms that can be touched, stroked or even torn in shreds as "photographs make the image visible through the nature of its materiality".[10] According to Carol Mavor, "to cut, tear or, worse, burn a photograph is, a violent, frightening hysterical action, which leaves behind indexical wounds and irreparable scars".[11] Thus, it means that in the same way as a physical photograph, a human body and mind is also able to undergo a similar negative experience when it is confronted by trauma. Moreover, a family album has always been considered an experience, a physical engagement that involves holding the album, feeling its weight, placing it on one's knees, turning the pages and even smelling the "scent of pastness".[12]

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will focus on explaining the relationship between the photograph and memory and how family photographs can be objects of not just a memory, but a traumatic and repressed memory that persisted in the family for several generations. Herein, I also intend to reveal the solution for the elimination of the traumatic memory and propose a creation of so-called "surrogate memory"[13], where the created photocollages substitute the grim images of the past, with this, initiating an empty of the trauma history. In the same chapter, I will explain how the use of collage in the family album images can be both: a tool of highlighting the

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[10] Edwards, 2009, 334.
[11] Mavor, 1997, 119 cited in Edwards, 2009, 334.
[12] Edwards, 2009, 335.
[13] Edwards, 2009, 332.

traumatic experience and a "pathway for healing"[14]. I will also elaborate on the choice of photographs and their sequence.

The second chapter will be dedicated to the images that belong to the concept of late photography, "evacuated of human presence although affected by human action."[15] In the series, these are the photos of inanimate objects that belong to my parents' house and representations of places and visuals that serve the role of cut-out repressed memories from my childhood. The question that I would like to answer here is how the absence of people in the photographs of the second part of my project "allow(s) space for a different, contemplative or absorptive, slow looking that reawakens a certain attentiveness, to counteract the lost and diminished spectator".[16] In other words, to what extent the photographs of the unknown objects and unusual textures, "in their failure to deliver a possible connection to the event, memory, and history, create space for interpretation and possibility of extension of the event".[17] The use of humanless photographs in the series highlights that the absence of people in a photograph is as meaningful as their presence.

The third chapter will be focused on re-enactment phototherapy and it will describe the part of the project where I have not used any vernacular material in order to create a narrative but used the self-made images that portray my mother in my childhood's house. The images depict my mother striking different poses, wearing different costumes and acting out different fictional characters in the same way as Jo Spence portrayed herself in the 80s in her personally developed photo project that had as a base the concept of therapeutic staging.[18] In her work, Spence

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[14] Hayes, 2015.
[15] West Brett, 2016, 5.
[16] West Brett, 2016, 5.
[17] West Brett, 2016, 5-6.
[18] Dennett, 2009, 11.

communicated the desire to narrate the story of her battle with cancer not through negative imagery, but on the contrary, with the help of humorous, confident and positive photographs. With this, she shows that photography can also serve the role of a so-called therapy because images can have an affect on a human body and if not change one's personal view on herself, then certainly, create an acceptance of the negative event occurred in the past. Moreover, these images give an opportunity to the photographer to look at the situation with fresh eyes by purposely erasing the past. This time, not by cutting the photographs out, but by simply picking poses and compositions of the not yet existent photographs.

Throughout the pages of the thesis the viewer will encounter the abundance of the red colour, which also brought the thesis its name - "Red is For Reconstruction". It appears in the choice of the colours of the garments of the portrayed subjects, in the red texture of the unknown objects that belong to the genre of still-life photography, and in the red rectangles of the collage that seals the eyes of the unwanted daughters. The red colour in the thesis stands for similar things once described by the Soviet cinematographer Sergei Eisenstein:

> *(...) the colour of the revolutionary flag. And the colour of the ears of a liar caught red-handed. The colour of a boiled crayfish - and the colour of a 'crimson' sunset. The colour of cranberry juice - and the colour of warm human blood.*[19]

This description explains that on the one hand red might stand for violence and shame but on the other, it also expresses rebellion, passion and a metamorphosis - just like all the images that were selected for my thesis.

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[19] Eisenstein, Sergei, "Colour", 1947. Cited in "Documents on Contemporary Art", ed. Batchelor, David, 2008, 101.

As a tiny suggestion for grasping the essence of this thesis, one can read the text first and after glance through its visual part in a separate album, following more academic and rational path or, contrarily - glancing through the pages of the visual part first, feeding the emotional urge of breathing the images in without any interference of the supporting photographic theories.

Chapter 1: Family and vernacular photographs

I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations - the 'ordinary', it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your studium: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound.[20]

In order to trace the relationship between the photograph and memory and to show how family photographs can be objects of not just positive, but a traumatic and repressed memory, it is important to perform a close reading of the physical photographs that are placed in the family album. Photographs have always been treated in a special way, being held in an album or displayed on the wall. Even those photographs that for some reason did not deserve their place next to the honorable images from the photo album were also respected and although hidden, would never be thrown away. Any physical act in relation to the photos that are kept in the house is usually restricted to, as argued by Elizabeth Edwards, to touching, turning, caressing with the fingers.[21] Any act of destroying a photograph could be compared to the encroachment on the life of the person depicted on the image and blasphemy against sacred visual family relics that have become a "focused form of contemplation".[22] Therefore, when recreating a family album, the decision was made not to use the real photos from the album but rephotographed copies of the original images. This choice is also empowered by the idea of being physically involved in the

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[20] Barthes, 2000, 73.
[21] Edwards, 2009, 334.
[22] Edwards, 2009, 335.

process of recreating the family's history - not just transporting the image from one place to another, but photographing it again, meaning physically recreating it. According to Elizabeth Edwards, since the creation of daguerreotype, "the relationship with photographs has demanded a physical engagement"[23], therefore many people are driven by an intense desire to touch or even stroke the image.[24] Following this process, helped to decide what images should be included into the new album, what is the best way to do this and how to present family photographs in a way that apart from myself, other people too could read the repressed and traumatic memory in them.

First of all, it is important to look into the etymology of the word trauma. As stated in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, trauma is "an injury (such as a wound) to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent" or "a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury"[25]. It is clear here, that in both cases it means a fracture: when something is broken, lost, withdrawn, displaced or damaged. This can be compared to the act of physically cutting something, or destroying something old - a good example here, a so-called technique of collage. However, a collage is not only about destruction, but it is also about creating something new with the old materials, it is the act of upcycling. This technique does not only reward the artist with a satisfactory final result in the form of a craft but also provides a reconstruction, transformation, and closure. In other words, by allowing a person physically patch a metaphorical wound, a collage becomes a form of psychotherapy, a "pathway for healing".[26]

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[23] Edwards, 2009, 335.
[24] Edwards, 2009, 335.
[25] Merriam-Webster dictionary. Trauma Undated.
[26] Hayes, 2015.

The visual part of the chapter starts with a photograph found in the main family album. From the first glance, there is nothing abnormal about the infant-with-the-doll representation. However, if looking closely, one might perceive the core of the trauma which I decided to highlight with a red rectangular glued over the child's eyes (fig. 1). The girl in the photo, that was age 2 when the photograph was taken, at this young age, was already unconsciously positioning herself as a mother with a doll that was reminiscent of her child. Roland Barthes in "Camera Lucida", on the other hand, opted only for a description of the photo of his mother as a child in the Winter garden (as quoted at the beginning of this chapter) and not for its visual representation, because in his opinion, a personal photograph from the family album in this context becomes "a bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of

Fig. 1 Photograph from the personal archive, 1951.

perception, true on the level of time".[27] Contrarily, what I did is opting for showing the photographs in my thesis, however obstructing the eyes of its protagonists with red rectangles that are made from another paper and glued onto the photographs. Due to the fact that the memory and the trauma exist only in the personal mind and vision, my challenge here is to unveil this damaging experience also to the readers. Different from Barthes, I do not believe that the photograph exists only for me and the other would not be able to grasp the essence and the

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[27] Barthes, 2000, 115.

depth of the picture. Contrariwise, the intention is to prove that people that have nothing to do with the trauma of the other, by physically connecting to the photo through stroking, touching and becoming deeply involved in its visual representation can also immerse in the traumatic event and experience its aftermath affect. Moreover, with the technique of collage, just in the same way as Barthes with the non-visual representation of his mother, I am showing that the photograph does not represent my direct memory as in the same fashion, the description in "Camera Lucida", does not represent Barthe's memory either.

The photo of a child with its eyes sealed was intentionally chosen to be an opening image of the album because it shows the opposite of what is expected to be seen in the family album. That absolute opposite to what it is expected to see on a superficially happy snapshot of Kodak propaganda. "You press the button - we do the rest"[28], says the slogan of the most popular photography company which features a happy family distracted by the camera presence, on an advertising billboard (fig. 2). Clearly, the girl in the opening picture of the thesis represents something completely different. One of the reasons for choosing this photo is the symbolic message it carries within - a little girl holding a doll, as she were already a mother. Therefore, the photograph here is not just an icon, in line with Charles Sanders Peircee's statement that there are no pure icons in the world.[29] In other words, it does not only refer to the physical

Fig. 2 Envisioning the American Dream. "Snapshots don't grow up". Undated.

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[28] Warner Marien, 2014, 166.
[29] Lefebvre cited in Elkins, 2008, 223.

representation of the subject, but has a deeper psychological meaning - an immature child has been placed into an adult role too soon without being able to enjoy her childhood. The rectangular glued to her eyes indicates an omission of identity, a denial, an erasure. If the viewer strokes the images she can feel that the rectangular does not belong to the image that it is a foreign body glued to the photograph. According to Roland Barthes, because memory is not just an image, but a sensation the photograph should be transformed into a visual synonym of taste and smell - "something that you can feel as well as see".[30] Geoffrey Batchen, agrees with him, claiming that "a photograph is a chemical fingerprint"[31], a combination of both haptic and visual, "an entanglement of touch and sight".[32] Thus, if this photo would only resemble a traumatic memory because of what is represented on it, it would not convey the same message to all the viewers, as the information read from the photo is very subjective. On the other hand, the physical photosensitive paper with the message on it becomes a memory itself, because by touching it and feeling the foreign bodies in it, it evokes emotional responses. The most common emotional response which is awakened when one enters in physical contact with the image is nostalgia. As stated by Batchen: "a warm feeling toward the past"[33], which is also considered a type of memory.

The next photograph that follows the sequence in the album is one of the wedding pictures from my family archive. Once again, it differs from the usual wedding photos that are commonly seen in the family albums, that depict a happy couple and smiley people around them

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[30] Cited in Batchen, 2004, 15.
[31] Batchen, 2004, 31.
[32] Batchen, 2004, 31.
[33] Batchen, 2004, 14.

(fig. 3). Everyone present on the image in the thesis looks grim and sad, including the bride and the groom, as it were not a wedding, but a funeral ceremony (fig. 4). The juxtaposition of the photo of a child next to a wedding photo indicates the act of firstly, conceiving a baby and getting married after, and not vice versa, which back in the day was considered immoral. The

Fig. 3 Wedding. Undated. stock.adobe.com/images

Fig. 4 Wedding photograph from the personal archive, 1949.

next photo, after the wedding one, is a black-and-white image of an older woman supposedly holding a baby in her arms (fig. 5). However, the identity of a baby is hidden by an overlayed photograph of an adult woman with a red patch on her eyes. The act of overlaying one photo with another transforms the piece into a photocollage or a photomontage, a technique originated in Germany, but adopted in Russian after World War I (1920-1930) by the artists like Petr Galadzhev, Gustav Klutsis, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova among others.[34] The technique itself was a call to change, as it combined the critique of contemporary society with

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[34] Warner Marien, 2014, 244.

the "joy of art making".[35] Moreover, it also brought into a sight of many artists, a Freudian

method of free-associations.[36] For instance, the collages of an expert in the photomontage field

and a founder member of the "Berlin Dada group", Raoul Hausmann, were composed as

assemblage of arbitrary cut pictures from magazines and newspapers pasted together and served

the purpose of "exercise in freewheeling mental associations".[37] His work did not oblige the

viewers to follow the artist's interpretation, therefore each spectator had a freedom to come up

with an individual judgement towards an art piece. Correspondingly, the personal symbolic

message applied to my photocollage is the feeling of neglect and its affect on the lives of the

female members of the family. Nonetheless, because the assembled with different pieces images

touch the human unconscious and with this, trigger the imagination, each viewer could see in the

image other possible meanings. These analyses are born out of several influential aspects

presented on the image. As for example, when looking at the specific photograph, the attention

of the viewer goes straight to the red colour of the border, sealed eyes, and the substituted

identity of the young child with the identity of an adult.

Fig. 5 Photograph from the personal archive, 1949.

However, when performing a close analysis of the images in the thesis, one should not

limit herself, as stated by David Green to "a process of reading or of understanding"[38] the hidden

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[35] Warner Marien, 2014, 243.
[36] Jones. Undated.
[37] Warner Marien, 2014, 243.
[38] Green cited in Elkins, 2008, 244.

symbolic messages, but should open herself to the process of feeling the image. This is precisely

what Barthes in "Camera Lucida" addresses as punctum, meaning that symbols or

free-associations do not define the analysis of the photograph. In fact, what defines the analysis

of the photos one is looking at is the gut feeling, that sort of reaction that directs the viewer's

gaze at a particular detail in the image. This detail, Walter Benjamin calls "the optical

unconscious"[39], an important element depicted on the photograph found by the viewer "as if by

chance".[40] For instance, the analysis of the photograph of Barthes' late mother, who had died just

before he started the analysis, implies that his interpretation is influenced by the occurred event

of death and therefore is subjective. This provides a conclusion that everyone perceives punctum

differently, according to their own life experiences and the resulting events. As a matter of fact,

it can be suggested that the applied meaning of the photographs in my thesis is not fixed, as each

viewer could see in the image a variety of interpretations. Apart from this, Barthes' discussion on

punctum brings up some interesting questions for the readers of this thesis to reflect upon. Is not

the focus on the transgenerational trauma of my family explains my denial of the acceptance of

brief human existence? Is not my desire to resolve the family trauma driven by the fear of losing

my mother, the last person carrying the family trauma that I have a connection to? Is not the

punctum of my collages, that of recreating the lost memories, to keep the people of those

memories alive? After all, there are other photographers who opted for dealing with the fear of

death by creating photo projects. One of the examples is a Mexican photographer Pedro Meyer

(1935-) who recorded a series "I Photograph to Remember" in 1991, on a CD-ROM, which

eventually became the first commercial CD-ROM with audio and images (fig. 7). In his words,

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[39] The Art Seminar in Elkins, 2008, 158.
[40] The Art Seminar in Elkins, 2008, 158.

all the photographs of the project were created as a way of dealing with death and inspired by the famous phrase by Jean Cocteau "Photography is the only way to kill death".[41] As stated by Meyer, "(t)he photographs have indeed allowed me to return many times to those captured slices of my experience, and flawed as those pictures inevitably are, due to the limitations inherent to the photographic medium, I do get a sense of the way it all happened."[42] Also, an interesting remark is the medium where the images of the project are inscripted. In Meyer's work, CD-ROM does not only stand for modernity, but also, for a transition of time and the impermanence of life.

Fig. 7 "I Photograph to Remember", Pedro Meyer, 1991.

Continuing with the motivation of my choices, another photo, this time in colour and of another child, with its eyes sealed is also included in the thesis. From the year stated underneath the image, it can be seen that the picture belongs to a completely different decade than the photo above. Precisely it was photographed, 39 years later. This photo is juxtaposed with the black-and-white straight image[43] (not manipulated) of an adult woman portrayed in 2016 (fig. 8 and fig. 9). The juxtaposition here is the intention to show the development of trauma in early

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[41] Meyer. Undated.

[42] Meyer, Undated.

[43] "Straightforward depiction" or "straight photography", Sadakichi Hartmann, "A Plea for Straight Photography"" reproduced in Beaumont Newhall, "Photography: Essays and Images" (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 185-88 cited in Warner Marien, 2014, 179.

childhood but its disappearance in adulthood. By now it is clear that a collage is an art form, however, it is important to acknowledge that such technique is also used in art therapy as a form

Fig. 8 and fig. 9 Photographs from the personal archive, 1989, 2016.

important to acknowledge that such technique is also used in art therapy as a form of shared communication "to express worries, concerns, thoughts, and feelings"[44]. Art therapist and trauma practitioner, Gretchen Miller claims that collage is one of the best ways to combine art with a psychological treatment of people with trauma. In "Art Therapy With Adolescents", she mentions an effective collage technique that involves altering old books. She encourages her patients to take old, discarded books and transform them in a way that they can "serve a new meaning and purpose".[45] The photos from the family album in this thesis are also subjects of alteration with an intention of finding a new function, therefore, they are the products of the therapy collage technique. This means that the images in the thesis imply that an ordinary photo album is not only a symbol of memory and an object of pride, but also, a representation of shame and fear.

Traditionally, family photo albums have always been very selective. They favor special occasions and undermine daily activities and present a lot of stories that can be fictitious. The

[44] Miller cited in Malchiodi, 2011, 244.
[45] Miller cited in. Malchiodi, 2011, 253.

creation of fiction with photography dates back to 19th-century photo studios which offered their

customers to pose in borrowed costumes in front of exotic backdrops that depicted famous travel

destinations.[46] However, these practices were not necessarily done to prove that the person

visited the portrayed destination, but to fulfill a dream of getting out of the routine into some

kind of miracle; to make a wish of touching a different reality come true. Therefore here, I am

performing both: including the photos that originally were not placed in the main album, in the

project and also, juxtaposing these images with vernacular photographs from image stock

websites that represent similar occasions, however, opposed reactions. This is done in order to

underline the traumatic event that occurred and had been represented in the photographs but also,

to show that a physical family album is a mutable entity. Meaning that it is indeed possible to

create a surrogate memory, which serves as a new, substitutional memory which is presented in

the thesis in a form of photocollages. These photocollages, by exposing traumas of the past

through the altered family photographs placed next to the vernacular images depicting the

opposed emotional environment, help the viewer to get familiar with my repressed memories and

read the images coherently.

     In conclusion, although I attempted to communicate a personal trauma through the

rejected photographs found in the attic by means of photocollage, the free-associations that come

with looking at juxtaposed arbitrary images in a non-linear order affect the viewer's unconscious.

This may lead to the act of not accepting the provided meaning, but creating a new personal

interpretation which is constructed by the individual experiences and a personal view of the

world of each viewer. Therefore, no matter how fiercely my view is imposed on the spectator, a

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[46] Zussman, 2006, 30.

background of the one who is looking at the photographs - her thoughts, fears, desires, and

traumas - will always dominate the interpretation of the photograph. Moreover, it is curious to

find out, that the analysis which originally only intended to reveal my family trauma to others,

through the transparent, however unconscious fear of forgetting and a strong desire to hold on to

the memories, underlines my vulnerable relationship with death and suggests another

interpretation of the visual thesis.

Chapter 2. Aftermath photography and its relationship with trauma

When the morning light comes up

Who knows what suffering midnight was?

Proof is what I do not need.

Brendan Kennelly, "Proof"[47]

The chapter focuses on the concept of late photography, especially on those photos that are empty of human presence but affected by human action.[48] However, the subjects of my analysis here are not just literal empty spaces but also ambiguous figures of human shadows and abstract parts of the human body which raises an important question whether absence and presence can coexist in the same image. The question to be answered in this chapter is how unfamiliar to the viewer spaces, objects or peculiar textures depicted on a photograph, can provide insights into the interpretation of the occurred traumatic event. Another interesting question that appears here is: if the subject of a photograph is a human shadow, or a part of a human body represented in an abstract way and not a landscape, can it also fall into the category of late photography, or is it, in fact, something completely different?

According to Marianne Hirsch, the most difficult concept to relate when looking at traumatic images is described by Susan Sontag as the "pain of others".[49] It is because there is a difficulty of understanding how a non-tangible hypothesis of memory can be transmitted to

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[47] Baer, 2002, 2.
[48] West Brett, 2016, 5.
[49] Hirsch, 2008, 104.

people "who were not actually there to live the event".[50] However, it is probably impossible to

find even one person in the world who did not experience pain or was not disturbed by a

traumatic event of some sort. Everyone probably went at least through one episode in the lifetime

that could cause, as Hirsch calls it "resonant aftereffects of trauma".[51] This strong, often negative

memory which is also known as postmemory, demonstrates itself in relating to the trauma of

others. What Hirsch communicates here is although the viewer did not live through the same

misfortunate occurrences as the subject, she can still experience the impact with the help of

images and the stories that accompany them. Thus, the events that happened in the past continue

their effect into the present. On the other hand, according to David Campany, it is worth

remembering that late photography is not the real evidence of the event, but "the trace of the

trace of an event".[52] Therefore, it can certainly help the viewer to remember something in the

past and feel its aftermath, however, it also "block(s) access to the understanding of the past".[53]

The explanation of this is the following: we are not looking at the viewer's memory and not a

photographer's direct memory, but at an (either obvious or not) evidence of the remains of the

event that happened in the past. Under those circumstances, it is possible to suggest that the

viewer cannot have a clear and unbiased understanding of the memory because what is left of

that memory is a paper or a digital trace of the trace of the suggested event. Whether it is

possible to get a clear understanding of my trauma by looking at the images presented in the

thesis, or on the contrary, confuse the gaze and create an obstruction towards grasping the truth

that lays in the photograph, the analysis will unveil.

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[50] Hirsch, 2008, 106.
[51] Hirsch, 2008, 106.
[52] Campany, 2003.
[53] Campany, 2003.

The chapter starts with the curious example: an image of the reflection of the light on the wall in a format of a window (fig. 11). This window is also accompanied by the shadows of different plants that are standing on its windowsill. There is no text or caption next to the image,
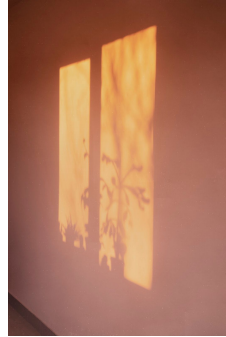

Fig. 11 Section 2, Photograph made by me in my parent's house, 2018.

but because it is a window, it indicates the entrance into a house and the flowers suggest that it is a place where someone lives and it is not an empty building. The example is mentioned as curious because it is not a direct representation of a window but a trace of it drawn by the light on the wall, which makes this photograph not just a trace of a trace as it was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, but the trace of a trace of a trace. This image perfectly represents my repressed memory because just like the traumatic representation somewhere in my head, it is present, but it is absent at the same time, as stated by Abraham, it becomes a "phantom", a "species of ghosts"[54] or simply a trace of an event that took place in the past and now only exists in my head.

The image that follows after is a table with many different cups and saucers, however, no one is sitting at it (fig. 12). The table is empty of human presence: almost as if someone prepared tea, but forgot about it and rushed away leaving the cups untouched on the table. So far, the first

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[54] Abraham, 1987, 288.

two images are not transmitting any strong emotions but only descriptively show someone's

Fig. 12 Section 2, Photograph made by me in my parent's house, 2016.

household. However this second picture is closer to the original concept of postmemory than the

first one presented. The third picture in the section is getting closer to the concept of traumatic

postmemory. It depicts a dirty wall that has scratches and big areas of chipped paint (fig. 13).

This image is juxtaposed with the image of a white wall with a huge dark female shadow

projected onto it (fig. 14). Here is when everything starts to get clarity. Shadow and light are the

most present elements in visual arts, especially in photography, where they are the essence of

this technique which translated from Greek means drawing with light. According to Batchen, the

camera does not only see the world, "it is touched by the world".[55] This claim can be interpreted

as touched by the light in the world and not just by the world itself. As the light, by bouncing off

Fig. 13   Fig. 14

Photographs made by me, 2016.

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[55] Batchen, 2004, 31.

an object into the camera activates a light-sensitive emulsion and creates an image.[56] Shadow, in the same way as the light, is another important element without which photography would not function. Since the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839, many photo artists made the interplay between shadow and light their artistic signature. Moreover, a shadow here, once again, appears quite ghostly and does not reflect the original idea of this chapter - a focus on late photography only, as it represents both, human absence and human presence within the same image.

An interesting and relevant example is approached by the Dutch photographer Vivianne Sassen (1972-) in her photographic series "Umbra" (2014) - a Latin word for shadow. In this series, the artist showed portraits of people that are half-covered in the shadow (fig. 15), communicating various metaphors of this word. Among these metaphors, there are some common ones described

Fig. 15 Viviane Sassen, "Umbra", 2014.

described by Sassen in her series "Umbra" as "anxiety and desire, memories and expectations, imagination and illusion that manifest in the human psyche".[57] However, Sassen's images, just like some of mine in this chapter, do not fit under the umbrella of late photography. Although the shadow in Sassen's images refers to a representation of traumatic memories, fears, anxiety and

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[56] Batchen, 2004, 31.
[57] Vivian Sassen, Umbra, 2014.

repressed emotions they are more likely to be described as "straightforward depiction".[58]

Different approach is chosen by Sassen's contemporary, North American photographer photographer Todd Hido (1968-). Instead of simply portraying empty of human presence places that depict spaces of some sort of traumatic event, he creates fictional universes where the viewer herself is confused whether she is looking at a real aftermath seen or a set-up scenery simulated by the artist (fig. 16). As a matter of fact, Hido, meticulously composes each of his photographs,

Fig. 16 Todd Hido. "Outskirts". Undated.

for him, "(i)t is a way of giving shape to a mental state, as opposed to capturing an actual setting."[59] With this in mind, when a viewer looks at one of his images, she might see a crime scene or a place where some sort of atrocity took place, although, in reality, this might be only a figment of her imagination. In a way it corresponds with what West-Brett calls a "different way of seeing and understanding place".[60] Meaning that although seemingly empty images are communicating my personal trauma, they also can trigger memories and generate associations related to past experiences on a personal level. Such images do not depict literally what the human eye is able to see, but go beyond this - they represent what a photographer wants them to

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[58] Warner Marien, 2014, 179.
[59] Tylevich, Roaming, Undated.
[60] West-Brett, 2016, 2.

be and what each viewer with her individual experiences, memories and views wants to see. This is why these photographs are associated with constructed images that are according to West Brett's definition "are constructing notions of place while being constructed by place".[61] The place plays an important role in the aftermath or late photography, as it discloses photographs of the locations where the event occurred before the photograph was taken. Therefore, going back to the thesis, the images of several empty rooms with absent tables and chairs that are encountered in the second section, may indicate the occurrence of traumatic events related to these premises, however, they also intend to carve these places in memory by means of the recording device, a camera.

Simon Faulkner citing David Campany in "Late Photography, Military Landscapes and the Politics of Memory" explains that according to Campany, late photography addresses "the traces of violent or catastrophic events, such as disasters, terrorism, and warfare, as well as picturing moribund military sites".[62] It might be understood that here Campany is addressing the events that affected a collective consciousness and not a personal one, for instance, horrific natural disasters, post-war or post-terrorism places, Holocaust sites etc. - the places that automatically create in the viewer's mind images of atrocities from the films, books and magazines. Considering this, it is in a way easier for the viewer to relate to those places and have a clear understanding of a heavy emotional weight of trauma that they carry within.

However, the photographs in this thesis possess only an individual trauma that is unknown to everyone but myself, which might confuse the viewer and make her interpret the work in the thesis as fictional. According to West-Brett, the horror in late photography is

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[61] West-Brett, 2016, 2.
[62] Faulkner, 2014, 123.

enhanced by the complete absence of the traumatic scenery. It can be explained with the absence

of visual distractions, apart from mere traces of an event that occurred at the site before the click

of the shutter, in the rather calm, empty place. This, as stated by West-Brett is "the essence of a

traumatic and astigmatic vision that draws on the tension between seeing and not seeing the

events and places of trauma".[63] The experience of seeing and blocking the vision, participating in

the event and observing its aftermath might be confusing and thus, more traumatic than gazing at

the photograph that screams with violence and anguish. All things considered, a couple of

questions to reflect upon appear: does this complete absence of the traumatic scenery mentioned

by West-Brett only apply to the place or also to the information that the viewer has about this

place? In fact, is there a trauma when there is no knowledge about it?

In this chapter, as a juxtaposition to colourful and seemingly vivid photographs, the two

black-and-white images that depict forest clearings at Sobibór and Ohrdruf (fig. 17 and fig. 18),

two big concentration camps during World War II photographed by Dirk Reinartz and Mikael

Levin are also presented. These vernacular images, analysed by Ulrich Baer in "To Give

Memory a Place: Holocaust Photography and the Landscape Tradition" communicate how the

Fig. 17 Sobibór, Dirk Reinartz, 1995.

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[63] West-Brett, 2016, 2.

2.2 Untitled. From Mikael Levin, *War Story*.
Munich: Gina Kehayoff, 1997.

Fig. 18 Ohrdruf, Mikael Levin, 1997.

absence of atrocities in the photographs creates a "new place of memory for those who consider themselves geographically, historically or culturally removed from the camps."[64] In his analysis, he explains that for some viewers these empty scenery might not trigger any emotions or feelings while others might see in this emptiness the complete devastation, the act of disappearance and the feeling of loss after a catastrophe. Next to these neutral black-and-white photographs, colour and graphic images of some obscure textures, photographed by me are presented. The first one (fig. 19) is a close-up of an open human mouth. Does this image belong to the concept of late photography or not? From the first glance at the photograph, the automatic answer will be a "no" as it clearly represents the human presence. However, it is not clear what human being we are looking at in terms of age, gender or general appearance, as this person is reduced to an abstract representation of a mouth. Therefore, in the same way as with the photograph of a human shadow above, a mouth represents a hybrid of presence and absence in the very same image. Nonetheless, it is not a trace of a trace of a trace like in the example with the shadow, but only a trace of a trace, like in the example of a fixed concept of late photography. The close-up of the mouth makes the image look even more claustrophobic and suffocating and its red colour creates a literal association, as mentioned in a quote by Sergei Eisenstein with "warm human blood"[65]

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[64] Baer, 2002, 83.
[65] Eisenstein, Sergei, "Colour", 1947. Cited in "Documents on Contemporary Art", ed. Batchelor, David, 2008, 101.
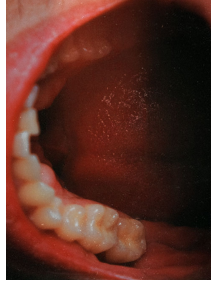
Fig. 19. Section 2, Photograph made by me, 2016.

and a metaphorical association with anxiety, distress, anger and pain; or with his depiction in

"Battleship Potyomkin" (1925) of the "Screaming Woman" (fig. 20), that until now is considered

one of the strongest portraits in the history of silent cinema. Although the film still is

black-and-white, it is as strong as it would be in colour. The screaming gaping mouth on a

close-up of a face that depicts human agony is such a strong symbol that it became a reference

Fig. 20 "Screaming Woman" ("Battleship Potyomkin"), Sergei Eisenstein, 1925.

of a powerful, yet disturbing artwork "Study for the Head of a Screaming Pope", 1952 by Francis

Bacon (fig. 21).[66] Curiously enough, it also might derive from another iconic painting "The

Scream", 1893 (fig. 22) - a symbol of "inner troubles and feelings of anxiety"[67] by Norwegian

Expressionist artist Edvard Munch.

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[66] www.francis-bacon.com.
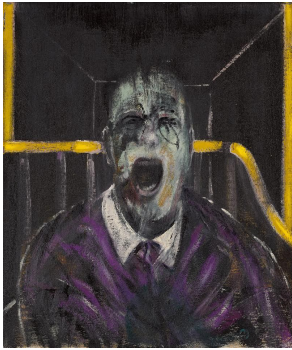[67] Shabi, 2013.

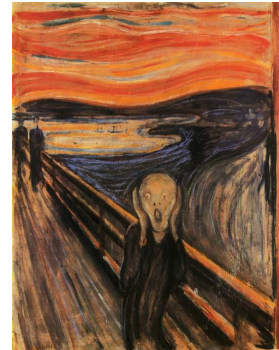Fig. 21 "Study for the Head of a Screaming Pope", Francis Bacon, 1952.

Fig. 22 "The Scream", Edward Munch, 1893.

Another image (fig. 23) taken by me in the thesis has almost the same pink-crimson colour palette and due to this, the stains from the unknown to the viewer liquid are reminiscent of blood. The comparison of silent images of concentration camps with shocking images of aggressive to the viewer's eye textures is created to highlight that images that depict trauma are comprehensible, obvious and "narcissistically satisfying"[68], the type of photos that you expect to
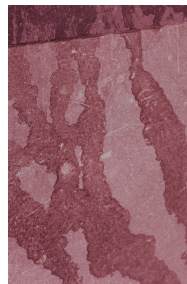

Fig. 23 Section 2, Photograph made by me

see when the subject is trauma. These are also the photos that you are supposed to avert your gaze and with this, escape obnoxiousness. They are also images that invade your memory forever. It is impossible to forget a screaming red mouth with crooked teeth and a scarlet surface

[68] Baer, 2002, 84.

with drips of blood in front of you. On the other hand, the photographs of Sobibór and Ohrdruf

by Reinartz and Levin respectively, are incomprehensible. According to Baer, they are not the

images to look away from, in fact, it is impossible to "alter or escape from the picture's

perspective".[69] With their emptiness, dullness and the absence of any action, they disclose the

fact that "the erasure was so complete that it never fully entered either memory or forgetting".[70]

In essence, it is possible to get a clear understanding of the personal trauma by looking at

the provided images, especially at the more explicit photographs that suggest the traumatic

experiences, as for instance, the surfaces with tripping blood or a screaming red mouth. Other,

more silent images of empty rooms are quite difficult to immerse in and therefore, to grasp their

interpretation of trauma. Moreover, because not all the images that are taken by me for this

chapter fit into the academic concept of late photography, for the viewer who is not familiar with

my family story, it is difficult to recognise the traumatic occurrences in the hybrid of absence

and presence of the traces of the past events.

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[69] Baer, 2002, 84.
[70] Baer, 2002, 84.

Chapter 3: Photography as a response to trauma

(...) the photograph does not really prompt you to remember people the way you

might otherwise remember them - the way they moved, the manner of their speech,

the sound of their voice, that lift of the eyebrow when they made a joke, their smell,

the rasp of their skin on yours, the emotions they stirred.[71]

This final chapter of the thesis focuses on showing to the viewer photographs taken by me of my

mother. All the photographs of the series were taken during the period of 2016-2018. The project

started in 2016, during the time when my father was recovering from an illness in the hospital

and I had to spend most of the time with my mother, supporting her during the difficult period.

As it has been mentioned earlier, my relationship with my mother was not very close. However,

during my stay in my childhood's house, all the memories started to re-appear, triggering both

not pleasant and pleasant feelings and emotions. The flow of memories created a confusion

between what really happened and what did not. In order to overcome the frustration, and to

distract my mother during the sad moment, I decided to ask her to pose in different outfits,

playing out different characters in several corners of the familiar environment of the house. This

process of recreating scenes and events that did not occur in the past, was documented and

resulted in a personal therapeutic method known as phototherapy. The question that is about to

be answered in this chapter is what is the role of photography in the memory reconstruction and

to what extent can overlayering of the past with the photographs from the present help to erase

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[71] Batchen, 2004, 15.

traumatic memories. Furthermore, the analysis shows what exactly triggered me to create this series. Is it really a desire to substitute the memories with more pleasant ones or is, in fact, a fear of not being able to hold on to any of these memories forever?

The term phototherapy was coined by a British photographer Jo Spence (1934-1992) in 1982, the year when she was diagnosed with breast cancer and therefore made a decision to use her photography therapeutically as a cancer treatment programme.[72] Although it might seem like such, however Spence never misrepresent herself as a therapist. She was only expanding her professional photography experience infusing it with the knowledge of alternative medicine and expertise in film and theatre.[73] Spence's idea with this approach was "to confront the silence and concealment, the denigration and commiseration that Western society employs to deal with diseased bodies".[74] The artist was especially focused on breaking the paradigm of rejecting and criticising the ill female body and only praising the vision of the healthy body. Being a militant feminist herself, Spence also did not aim to present her body in a stereotypical commercial way, the way it is usually shown in the advertisments and on magazine covers. She portrayed her body in a raw and unmasked way: vulnerable without clothes on, not unrealistically thin like on the Capitalists propaganda, with scars on her breast after a lumpectomy and body hair (fig. 24).

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[72] Dennett cited in Loewenthal, 2013, 31.
[73] Dennett cited in Loewenthal, 2013, 32.
[74] Martínez Oliva, 2014, 58.

Fig. 24 First image: Jo Spence and Terry Dennett. The Property of Jo Spence, 1982-86. Belonging to The Picture of Health? The middle image: Jo Spence and Terry Dennett. 15th October, 1984, 1984. Part of The Cancer Project. The last image: Jo Spence and Terry Dennett. Crash Helmet Portrait, 1983. Belonging to The Picture of Health?

In similar fashion, the idea of portraying my mother in the thesis is conveyed. However, the main concern here is not the battle with the terminal disease and how it is portrayed in media. The battle that it is shown in the thesis is the one with the trauma of the absent mother figure throughout my life. However, specifically in the last chapter, the Barthean photography's relationship to death and memory can be perceived along with the traces of trauma. In one of his interviews with Angelo Schwarz, Roland Barthes describes "every encounter with photography as 'a contact with death'".[75] In his words, every photograph depicts something that has died or eventually will die as wanting to be alive and remembered. Similarly, a North American photographer Nan Goldin (1953-) in her series "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency" (1979-1986) photographed her friends that were diagnosed with AIDS in the 80s, driven by fear of forgetting. In her words, "I used to think that I could never lose anyone if I photographed them enough. In fact, my pictures show me how much I've lost."[76] (fig. 25) Therefore, the images in the thesis can also be scrutinised equally. I grew up emotionally detached from my mother and only,

[75] Batchen, 2009, 9.
[76] Abrams, 2015.

Fig. 25 Nan Goldin, "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency", 1979-1986.

already in my 30s, realised how this has affected my life. When the daughter is 31 and the

mother is 70, it might be slightly late to create an emotional bond. Nonetheless, by reconnecting

with my mother by means of photography, the intention was to prove that the creation of the

emotional bond has no age limit. Contrarily, the fear of losing my mother and the fear of

forgetting her visual representation became a stepping stone in the creation of the series of

portraits that entered this chapter.

The visual series of the thesis starts with four images of my mother looking at her

reflection in the mirror (fig. 26). Curiously enough, a mirror is also an important

Fig. 26 Section 3, Photographs made by me

phototherapeutic tool in Jo Spence's work. For Spence, "the mirror enabled her eye to see itself without the intervention of the camera or having to wait for the prints to be processed"[77] and became a cheap way of staging and rehearsing ideas for photographic projects. Apart from this, the mirror for Spence is a "'reflective participation' with herself"[78] or a means where she could be transformed into "both patient and imaginary therapist, both self and other".[79] When talking about being both self and other it is worth remembering photographic performances by Cindy Sherman (1954-) in the late 70s. In the series of black-and-white photographs "Untitled Film Stills", the artist appeared imitating the clichéd B-movie heroines (fig. 27). In those photographs, Sherman seemed both in the present moment but also, not there at all. She is acting out a role and with this, "highlighting the masquerade of identity".[80] With this photographic performance, Sherman is addressing the common female clichés in Hollywood movies, such as a housewife, an innocent and puerile girlfriend or a femme fatale. Clearly, this series shows her criticism of Hollywood film directors who reduced a female figure in the Hoolywood films to these mere roles.

Fig. 27 Cindy Sherman, "Untitled Film Still" #10, 1978

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[77] Dennett, 2009, 12.
[78] Dennett, 2009, 12.
[79] Dennett, 2009, 12.
[80] Guggenheim.org. Undated.

On the other hand, the series photographed by me does something completely different. I have created many different identities of my mother (fig. 28) to indicate a personal non-acceptance of the mother-daughter relationship between me and her. By means of a camera

Fig. 28. Section 3, Photographs made by me

only, I transformed my mother into a woman I always imagined her to be: a housewife and a loving and a present mother. However, was not I imposing the traditional female roles on her in the same way as the criticised by Sherman Hollywood film directors did? The only reason I would not answer this question positively because my images, although they show some of the cliché female roles like praying, cooking or ironing, nonetheless, destabilise the commonly expected flow of a family album. The images of my mother photographed by me, depict scenes and poses that one would not usually expect to encounter in a traditional family album. In a similar fashion, Jo Spence in her series "Beyond The Family Album" from 1979 also broke the "idea of familial stability and certitude"[81] by introducing not "the carefully orchestrated images of union, celebration and occasion — the smiles and the laughs of a birthday or the joy of a seasonal holiday together"[82] but the unexpected and consistently omitted "tears, the screaming

[81] SPACE and Studio Voltaire, 2012, 12.
[82] SPACE and Studio Voltaire, 2012, 12.

fights, the untruths and illnesses"[83]. In "Beyond The Family Album", Spence included a peculiar

juxtaposition of two images (fig. 29): one depicts her as a nude child, in a classic pose,

positioned on her belly, and another, portrays her as an adult laying on a sofa, also naked and in

the same baby-like pose. With these two images, the intention of Spence is to show a child

nudity is totally accepted to be viewed by family and any house visitors, however, an adult

nudity in family albums is disfavored and positioned as something shameful. Summarising the

core concepts of different photographers that have been analysed in this chapter, it is possible to

Fig. 29 Jo Spence, 1979, Beyond The Family Album

conclude that with the last section of the visual thesis, the alternative to healing the personal

family trauma by means of substituting the photographs from the past with the recent one is

presented. My idea is to add to the family album, photographs of ordinary, however unexpected

and even humorous moments of the mother acting out different characters like a cook, a

housewife, a friend and a socialite. So to speak, these images can overlay the negative memories

from the past and construct a fictional but an ideal mother figure that I always wanted to have by

my side. However, what is revealed throughout the analysis is that not as much I try to

reconstruct the ideal mother figure, how to hold on to the existing mother figure by means of

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[83] SPACE and Studio Voltaire, 2012, 12.

constantly photographing her in different poses and costumes. The fear of losing the aging

mother together with losing the memories constructed between the mother and the daughter till

the present moment is precisely what triggers me to keep on photographing driven by the fear

that every next portrait could be the very last one.

Conclusion

It is interesting how the possible answer that I had in mind for my research question could possibly take a different turn in the process of writing and become something completely different, and, in fact, even more powerful. In the introduction, I have mentioned that my family trauma was a denial of a traditional female role as a wife and mother within the family and this is what motivated me to start the visual investigation on the subject and create a new family photo album with the help of already existent family photographs, vernacular as well as art photographs that I have found in online image databases, and personally taken photographs. In order to perform this analysis I carefully studied the theories from several books and articles about photography, memory and trauma such as "Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology" (1987) by Nicolas Abraham and Nicholas Rand, "The Photography of Trauma" (2002) by Ulrich Bayer, "Photographs as Objects of Memory" (2009) by Elizabeth Edwards, "Generation of Postmemory" (2008) by Marianne Hirsch and "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" (1989) by Nora Pierre, among some other essays that the reader will come across when reading this thesis.

My aim was to provide an analysis that shows how three visually different and chronologically distinct photographic series assembled in one family album under three different sections, can give an insight on a theoretical level into the relationship between photography, memory and trauma. Moreover, I intended to investigate how the viewers that have never experienced the suggested traumatic event themselves can be affected only by its visual representation or by an established connection to the physical photograph. Apart from this,

another goal of my thesis was to communicate how a family album can serve both roles: an object of repressed memory and, at the same time, an object of new, reconstructed memory. Lastly, I also aimed at disclosing the process of reconstructing memory by experimenting with the reenactment photography - a personally photographed series that depicts several curious, confronting and humorous identities of my mother.

However, throughout the analysis, I discovered something that made me realise that maybe consciously I conducted my thesis to find out how a visual project created in the format of a reconstructed family photo album can provide insights into issues addressed in theoretical debates on those relationships. But, notwithstanding this, on an unconscious level, I had something completely different at the back of my mind that was not clear to me until the moment I started writing the third chapter of the thesis. By looking in depth at text like "Camera Lucida" by Roland Barthes and "Forget Me Not. Photography and Remembrance" by Geoffrey Batchen, and scrutinising photo projects such as "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency" by Nan Goldin and "I Photograph to Remember" by Pedro Meyer made me realise that apart from being traumatised by the absence of a mother figure in my life (and wanting to find answers to this by means of photography theories related to trauma and memory) I also have another, maybe even a stronger trauma - the acceptance of human ephemerality. Therefore, the unconscious reason (and a personally important one) behind the creation of the series "Red is For Reconstruction", a project that highlights the moments of my grandmother's and mother's life, does not exactly serve the role of healing therapy or becomes a medium of communication of my trauma to others, whether it reveals the act of remembering. The last chapter that discloses the photos of my mother in the premises of my childhood house was a culmination for this realisation. It helped me to become

aware of that I did not take the photographs to comfort my mother, as it was originally mentioned, to recreate the memories of the family album, but in fact, driven by the fear of losing my father, who during the same time was in the hospital, to stop the moment of death. The numerous images of my mother taken in the period between 2016 and 2018 were not compelled by a desire to be published or exhibited somewhere, but probably purely by the Freudian concept of thanatos - the human primordial death drive that makes us be obsessed with survival and with the fear of inability to hold on to people and things forever. This lack of control over life is what gives us the will to remember, to carve in stone, to immortalise in text or to record in portraits. Of course portraits would never bring the dead to life and transmit the exact human presence, as it is impossible to conduct the precise touch, the smell or the laughter of the specific person. However, by holding physical photographs in my hands, I can at least have a false sensation that the vague representation on a flat piece of paper in front of me is indeed the closest I can get to the desire of eternal life.

Undoubtedly, on the conscious side, the research I conducted, helped me to understand even better the relationship between photography, memory and trauma, gave an insight into the concept of late or aftermath photography and provided an important for my personal research conclusion of the photographic experiences of a pioneer of photo therapy, Jo Spence.

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