

Reimagining Past Histories and Experiences through Performative Photography and Auto-ethnography

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses an autoethnographic exploration within artistic research underpinned by performativity and temporality in photography. Inspired by a childhood photograph depicting the author's Danish grandfather, and a story about his ongoing chess through postal mail upon migrating to Argentina, the study explores the affective and performative power of photography and chess to re-imagine a personal narrative. By decentering the artist researcher's voice, the work reveals the materiality and layers of temporal gap in the act of reimagining the past. This article contributes to artistic research through an autoethnographic inquiry emerging within the transformative space integral to art practice.

Introduction

The project discussed in this article is an auto-ethnographic inquiry based on a framework for the artistic re-imagination and re-enactment of past histories and experiences underpinned by ideas about performativity and temporality in photography. The artistic exploration was inspired by a personal family history strongly connected to a Danish community in Argentina that was the case study of my doctoral research, and my own experience of migration. The work was led by my engagement with a photograph and a story about my grandfather (Figure 1 shows the original photograph), who had been an active member of the researched community. The particular narrative that inspired the work was about my grandfather and his elder brother who for many years, one in Argentina, and the other in Denmark, played games of chess by posting each other their chess notations. I wished to re-imagine my grandfather's experience and the effect of distance in the act of (re)building connections with his family left behind in his home country after moving to Buenos Aires in the mid-twentieth century. This generated a series of conceptually driven responses based on photography, digital technology and chess. These methods allowed me to create an analogy between the idea of being in touch with the touching or affective power of chess and the photographic medium, and the transformative strategies of re-enacting and re-imagining social realities through the analysis of my own experience (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p.66).

Because this project was part of my practice-led doctoral body of work (2022) which fitted within the context of the 'ethnographic turn in the arts' in terms of artists' appropriation of ethnographic themes or approaches (Rutten, 2017), I wished to explore an auto-ethnographic approach as a way of accounting for my situated position within this artistic inquiry (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p.128). A 'halfway' standpoint between the very personal and familiar, and the endless other and mysterious, seemed appropriate from the start as a way of bringing the outside "always already inside" (de Freitas, 2008, p. 471). It was a way of challenging my own 'authority' or authorship position as artist researcher. As it will be explained, the term 'autoethnography' is being used in its broadest sense to refer to the overarching strategy of this research project. However, the term 'visual autoethnography' (Ownby, 2013, p. 3) or 'artful autoethnography' (Bartleet, 2013, p. 443) can also be applied to explain its methodology

more specifically. A visual or artful ethnographic approach served as a means of using images, visual and creative methods, as well as a personal narrative, to explore a family history whilst putting myself as an artist researcher and object of the study and the Other's gaze.

In addition, the strong connection between performance, photography and ethnography (Edwards, 2015) inspired me to apply a performative approach to the photographic medium and the creative practice as a way to re-imagine, rather than to represent, my grandfather's story. Firstly, I sought to investigate what takes place when playing an epistolary game of chess with a beloved person across two different continents. The methods I applied to explore this question were based on testing the experience of playing chess photographically through *WhatsApp* with a close friend in Buenos Aires. Secondly, I aimed to examine my grandfather's childhood image as a material object more closely and engage with the time of the photograph as corporeal, and affective, rather than



Figure 1. Photograph of my grandfather and great uncle in Denmark (n.d). Taken from a family album.

a “traumatophilic”, fixed memory of a past event (Foster, 2020, p.70). This led me to create a series of cyanotypes that juxtaposed two images. I did this by overlapping each of the different photographs of the moves during the chess game with my grandfather’s photo.

To facilitate the understanding of the rationale for this research inquiry, this article will first present the familial and historical background of the project. It will then examine the auto-ethnographic (or visual autoethnographic) methodology for undertaking this artistic research before delving into the analysis of the two interconnected practical explorations of artistic re-imagining and re-enactment in relation to their theoretical underpinnings. The concepts of performativity and temporality are crucial to the artistic re-imagining, or taking another look at my grandfather’s story imaginatively, and re-enacting, in terms of acting out past histories such as the one of his epistolary chess. Broadly, both concepts will be discussed in relation to the creative practice undertaken and its context. Performativity, as a theoretical perspective and approach, triggered thoughts and questions in relation to the idea of

authorship, citationality, difference and repetition integral to the creative explorations. Conversely, ideas around the notion of time and temporality led to reflections on the material and affective agency of photography and the process of artistic practice (as shown in Figure 2).

Family background

As a member of the Danish church community in Buenos Aires, my grandfather was far from being part of one of the largest immigrant groups in Argentina such as the Italians, Spaniards, and French (Baily & Miguez 2003). The Danish community firstly settled during the 1860s in the Argentine Pampas, in the south of the Province of Buenos Aires, a region which was attractive for its crop raising potential in the agricultural industry (Bjerg, 2001, p. 4). The first influx of Dane nationals left their country to live in the rural regions of Tandil, and later in Tres Arroyos, Necochea and Coronel Dorrego (Bjerg, 2001, p.148). Instead, the city of Buenos Aires homed a smaller fraction of the Danish settlers. Because my grandfather died



Figure 2. Images showing the process of playing the game of chess through social media and digital technology.

when I was a young child, my memories about him are from a child's perspective, and many details about his life, such as his personal experience of adaptation to the Argentine society will remain obscure.

Yet, my own memories, and different family narratives suggested that his life was guided by precision and order. For example, I know that he was an accountant but also a talented and avid pianist. Coming from a family of musicians and being the son of an orchestra conductor, he was forced to learn the piano from a very young age. When he moved to Argentina during the mid-twentieth century, he used to play the organ at a Scandinavian church in the evenings after finishing work for the day. He was also passionate about numbers and would sit on his own to do mathematical calculations voiced in his first language. Whilst the story about his game of chess with his brother in Denmark happened years before I was born, it is still possible to imagine the rigor of his actions.

His historical context also contributed to the development of the methodology that I applied in this project. For example, the visual and tactile experience of the photograph that inspired the work was significant. Its features and writings indicated it had been taken in Aarhus, Denmark around the early 20th century. The place and time of its creation was suggestive because of the changes taking place during a period of uncertainty in modern Europe in terms of peoples' connections and links to their historical past (Batchen, 2003, p. 25). Memories were turned into all kinds of commodities, and photography became the opportunity for them to be embodied, commodified, and reproduced (Batchen, 2003, p. 26). In relation to photography's ability to encapsulate different understandings of time, Sutton draws upon Bergson (2015) and Deleuze (2005a; 2005b) to remind us that "the past does not, in fact, exist; it is only an image of memory that coexists with the present as a contraction of the past in general, and regions of the past in particular" (Sutton, 2009, p. 54).

Creating an analogy between the idea of being in touch with the touching, affective and material power of photography and chess triggered a series of questions. For example, how long would my grandfather and his brother need to wait for their letters to arrive and be able to respond with the next move? Did the experience of playing contribute to creating, preserving, or deepening their bond or relationship? Considering that my grandfather

never saw his elder brother again after he left his country, did the memory of the other fade with time? How was the sense of presence about each other perceived? Was this intensified or discolored? In what way was it different to be doing something together instead of just sending information and updates about each other's lives? These thoughts and questions inspired the two aforementioned creative explorations as well as the auto-ethnographic approach to the research inquiry (Figure 3 shows how both creative explorations intersect, overlapping different layers of time).

Auto-ethnography

In broad terms, auto-ethnography can be understood as a "[...] research method, process, and product" (Chang, 2013, p. 120). An autoethnographic inquiry is based on researchers' use of their personal experience to understand, examine, or interpret social experience or phenomena (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, p. 22). Auto-ethnography is therefore concerned with understanding the researcher's positionality within the research process as an implicated and essential participant (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p. 27). It is also method for undertaking artistic research based on the



Figure 3. Examples of the cyanotypes created juxtaposing the two different images (2018).

creation of a self-narrative that explicitly situates the artist researcher’s personal experience within the inquiry whilst performing a self-reflexive critique (Woodward, 2019, p.139). At the same time, exploring the creative process as subject and object of the study exposes the vulnerability, unawareness, and uncertainty of the researcher (Scott-Hoy & Ellis 2008, p.128). It is about being located “through the eyes of the Other” and at the same time observing “myself observing” (2008, p.129). As a methodological framework for this research inquiry auto-ethnography allowed me to make connections between my personal experience, on the one hand, and the social or cultural context of my grandfather’s experience on the other. Basing the creative exploration on a photograph and a story about my grandfather seemed to be a form of connecting both sides: my own situated and subjective perspective together with the more objective and interpretivist as a researcher.

In addition, as previously explained, whilst the methodological framework of this project is based on an auto-ethnographic approach, the role of photography and the creation of visual content were essential to re-imagine the personal family history. Therefore, as an artistic auto-ethnography, the project can be referred to in terms of a ‘visual auto-ethnographic inquiry’ (Mingé, 2013). As Mingé explains, “The intersection of linguistic, artistic,

tactile, and visual texts creates a hybrid arts-based autoethnography, as well as a hybrid epistemological position” (2013, p. 496). This demonstrated the cognitive and affective value of attaching myself to another moment in time through the reenactment of the epistolary games of chess whilst allowing me to explore a strong sense of proximity with the family photograph and the story. At the same time, the use of contemporary as well as analogue photographic technology and digital mediatization, would generate enough distance to explore the transformative spatio-temporal experience of the artistic research inquiry (Bolt, 2009). These thoughts led to a more detailed analysis of both creative explorations in relation to the concepts of performativity and temporality. (Figure 4 shows the continuous engagement in chess playing through photography and social media).

Performativity

As previously explained, the work created in both artistic explorations suggested that both the game of chess and the creation of the series of cyanotypes functioned as performatives at various levels. The notion of the performative draws back on Austin’s *How to do things with words* (Austin, 1962) when he distinguished performative utterances as opposed to descriptive or constative statements

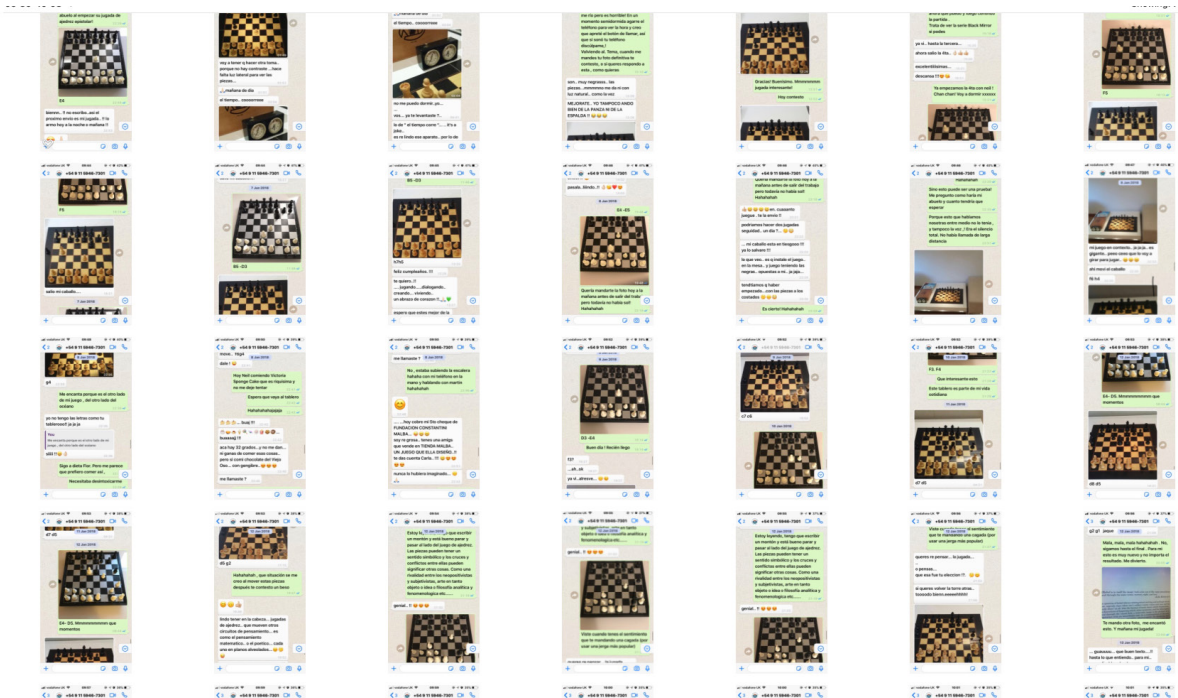


Figure 4. Image showing the series of photographs and messages that constituted the chess games.

(1962, p. 52). The difference between a performative and a constative, according to Austin (1962, p. 56), is that the former is used to *do*, or *does something* in the world, rather than merely describing it. Austin (1962) also differentiates the performative utterance between the illocutionary and perlocutionary. On the one hand, the illocutionary performative has a conventional force and performs an act in saying something (as in a warning or order, for example). According to Austin (1962, p. 109), the perlocutionary on the other hand, brings about, or has an effect or consequence, by saying something (as in words used to convince or persuade). Judith Butler (1997, p. 3) has rephrased Austin by stating that “the illocutionary speech act is itself the deed that it effects”. Therefore, whilst the consequences of the perlocutionary speech act are distinguished from what was said, the illocutionary performative is what it does (Butler, 1997, p. 3).

However, as Dorothea von Hantelmann explains (2010, p. 104), Butler (1997) has expanded the idea of the performative beyond the agency of language to a general notion of agency based on repetition and conventions. However, because conventions exist beyond the intentionality of the subject, Butler has not included the symbolic actions of artistic practice as performatives. Yet, von Hantelmann argues (2010, pp. 104-105) that art also has its own conventions through which it is both valued and recognized as such. Because those art conventions can be both repeated and modified, it is possible to recognize artistic differences (von Hantelmann, 2010, p. 105). This explains why whilst the performance-like or theatrical aspect of the chess game played via mobile phone photography was evident when setting up the chessboard and moving the pieces for each picture (Shusterman, 2012, p. 68), the photographs had a “performative force”. They had a perlocutionary *effect* by making the other player move her pieces. Each image simultaneously performed and constituted a chess move.

In relation to the first creative exploration, the challenge of being able to reinterpret my grandfather’s epistolary game of chase in the mid-twentieth century through my own current perspective required me to adapt the methods I applied. It was necessary to consider the restrictions imposed by the research project as well as the possibilities of contemporary technological advancements. I replaced my grandfather’s system of playing chess over the post with the WhatsApp social media platform. The use of WhatsApp as a strategy to play and record the game of chess was also relevant. This messaging platform

has shaped the way friendships and relationships can be established and continued through multi-modal, or multimedia forms of communication (Adami & Jewitt, 2016, p. 264). Yet, this approach revealed that the process of playing a game together required having the other present in our thoughts at the very moment of moving the chess pieces. This experience also challenged the notion of time as linear. The act of playing the game through social media and mobile phone photography not only made my friend’s presence present when moving my chess piece, but also pulled her back through her distance at the same time.

The chess moves therefore corresponded to two photographs in relation to, and in dialogue with one another. This shared similarities with Manuel Vason’s (2014) work in his book *Double Exposures*, where the photographer presents the diptych structure of the two images of performances for the camera in response to one another. As in Vason’s diptychs, what interested me was what happened between and beyond the two photographs. What meanings (embodied, sensual, and affective) escaped the visible images? What effects and effects did the photographs impress upon each player? What forces kept us playing, moving pieces, exchanging messages and thoughts? What was the relationship between the chess moves, texts, images and the ongoing reflections that unfolded throughout the process of playing? (Figure 4 shows an example of a two-sided concertina book that explores the aforementioned questions).

Through the performative power of citation, each move brought to the present a previous experience we had of playing together, and my grandfather’s story at the same moment. Throughout the process of playing the game, we cited my grandfather’s and our previous games as well as a historicity of actions and meanings around chess, practices, play and family or friends’ relationships. As explained, the citationality, repetition and simultaneous difference established through the WhatsApp exploration connected to understandings of performativity (von Hantelmann, 2010, p. 104) that drew upon Austin (1962), Derrida (1988) and Butler (1997). I was interested in Margaret Iversen’s analysis (2009, pp. 837-838) of the performative practice work of early conceptual artists whose interest in language led them to create score-based pieces that *acted* as performative utterances. In addition to the performative form of the citation, the photographs sent through WhatsApp functioned as performatives because they did not merely describe or represent

the game but actually played it. They made each player physically move the pieces, and simultaneously constituted the chess moves.

Being involved in a similar process of playing a game with a friend was a deeply affecting and a revealing concrete experience. For example, things taken for granted today such as immediate or transparent forms of communication and information were confounded. The assumed literal immediacy of sending the photographs of the chess moves through a social media platform was not the case in reality. The time and seasons differences determined the way the game would be played and perceived. It was a frosty winter in England and warm summer in Argentina. This increased the temporal gap between the moment when the messages were sent, received, and responded to with a new move. I would receive my friend's WhatsApp messages in the morning, and send chess moves at night. What this emphasized was not only the time difference, but mostly the space between both players. The messages that complemented each photograph not

only gave me a stronger sense of the different seasons and spatial context, but also the different time zones that structured each other's lives and required us to wait, sometimes days, for each other's next move. This process created a powerful sense of spatial distance.

From the first moment of preparing the chessboard, moving the pieces, and waiting for someone in another country to reply, there were feelings of excitement and patience. It was about waiting for my friend's response with another chess move in order to continue the game (see Figure 6). The cross-continental bond of friendship felt stronger, in terms of not only being able to establish a more regular communication and dialogue, but by suggesting a stronger sense of encounter between the participants at the moment of going back to the game to think and move the new piece for the other to respond to. These feelings of excitement, frustration, discovery, patience, and happiness triggered by the methods applied revealed an increased



Figure 5. (Hamer) *Concertina* book containing the series of photographs with the chess moves and their time/date annotations.

engagement with my grandfather's story. This was heightened by the ongoing recreation and transformation of the old story into new stories and images.

The chess game foregrounded the intersubjective dimension of the performative self / body that an exploration of photography as both performative and performance enabled. The way the act of playing, moving, or rearranging the pieces, taking the photographs, reflecting, and sending a message to each other, was a simultaneous body and thought, self and other. The photographs allowed me to view my side of the board as my friend's other side. I could see my own movements as the other and object of my friend's moves, thoughts, and words. At the same time, the unfolding process of play contributed to the deepening of a sense of immediacy and feeling part of each other's daily life. This was evidenced by the way the style and content of the text messages changed throughout the time-based process of the game (Figure 7 illustrates the annotated variations and disruptions identified throughout the process). Yet, based on the previous discussion, the affective force of chess playing did not have a self-conscious origin. Rather, it could be said that the game had already been played before

we started. The work had a ritualistic aspect but also, drawing upon Iversen's (2009, p. 839) view on the performative in art, there was an instructional and notational element that photography allowed. As Iversen states, "performative photography begins with an instruction or rule which is followed through with a performance" (Iversen, 2009, p. 839).

Temporality

The second artistic exploration discussed was based on the creation of a series of cyanotypes and concertina books (see Figure 8) in response to the experience and analysis of the photographic performance-based chess project. What interested me about the chess creative process was the power of its continuous division into small steps and their differential iteration. My notation of each move, date, and time had a strong effect as it not only deconstructed the ongoing flow of the project but also had an ethical force in the way I had to respond in each movement, or "temporary stabilisation" (Zylinska, 2016, p.13). Drawing upon Henri Cartier-Bresson's (1952) photobook *The Decisive Moment*,



Figure 6. (Hamer) Photograph showing the chess moves in relation to one another.

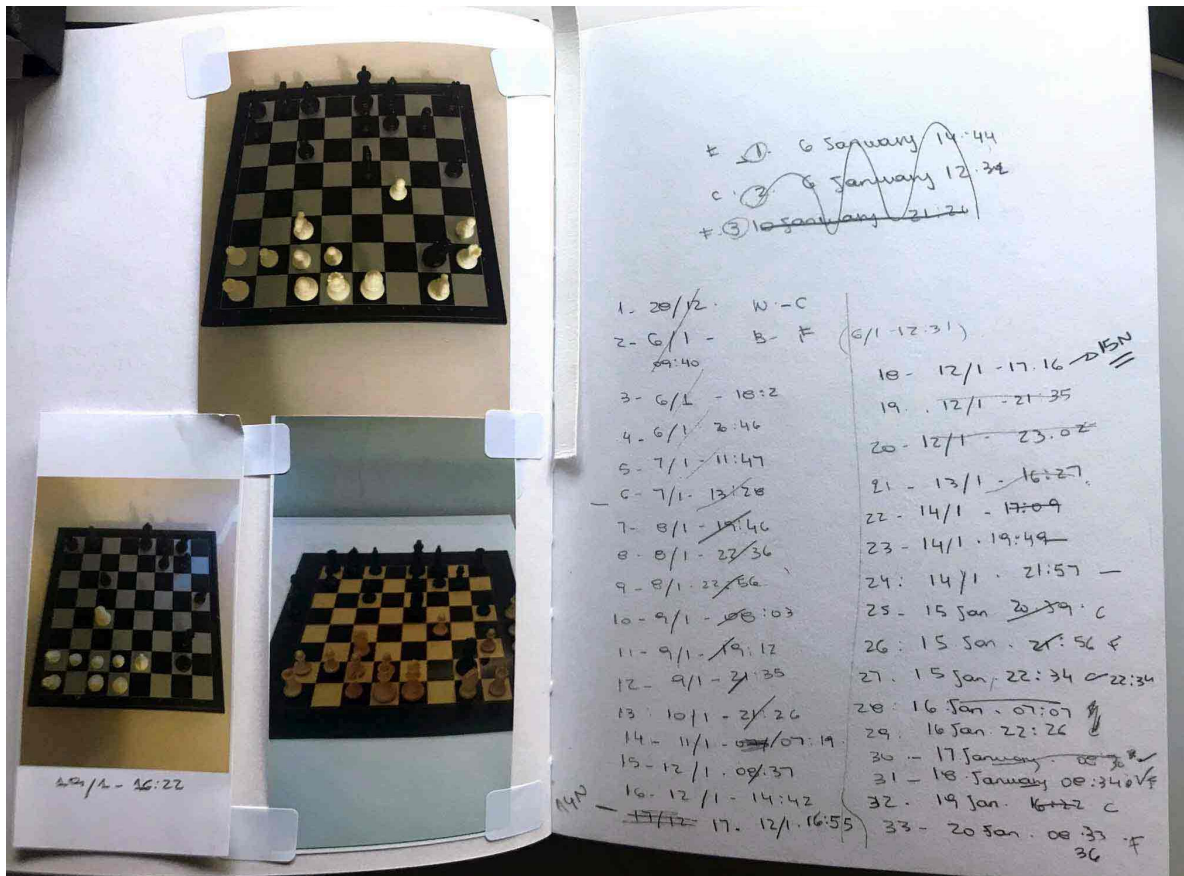


Figure 7. (Hamer) Annotations on each chess game and their variations. Taken from Sketchbook.



Figure 8. (Hamer) Concertina book.

which shows Matisse during the act of cutting pieces of paper to create his famous collages, Zylinska (2017, p. 43) seeks to claim a different way of understanding photography. She argues that by introducing cuts within the flow of life rather than being a passive (constative) form of describing or recording, photography has a “zoetic, life-giving force” (2017, p. 43).

In addition, the act or process of ‘cutting’, as Zylinska (2016) suggests, simultaneously exceeds someone’s control or authority. The acknowledgment of the different human (and non-human) elements becomes an “ethico-political decision” (2016, p. 43). This is because the part played in the cuts of reality into fractions “[...] with our eyes, our bodily and cognitive apparatus, our language [...]” demands accountability (Zylinska, 2016, p. 43). The cyanotype images I created by juxtaposing each of the mobile-phone photographs of the chess games, alongside my grandfather’s photograph, were inspired by my attempt to insert myself (body and mind) to experience the time of the photograph. This was in terms of the connection between the time of my grandfather’s photograph and the images of the game of chess within the ongoing pass of time.

We could suggest that the creation of the series of cyanotypes not only materialized the encounter between the individual photograph that marked the move or turn by one of the players, and the nineteenth century picture of my grandfather and his brother. The series brought forth and connected past and present experiences and transformed them into something new (Figure 9 illustrates the chess game comprising 35 chess moves). As temporary cuts within the durational process of playing the game, the photographs are simultaneously singular, by recording “temporary stabilisations”, and plural (Zylinska, 2017, p. 84). That is, within the larger flow of life.

The exploration of photography and drawing, as traces and differentiations within the continuous course of time (Derrida, 2010) can be observed in the work of American artist William Anastasi (Lomas, 2012). When in the 1970s Anastasi (Foá et al., 2020, p. 25) recorded the movements of his hands during his underground travel to meet John Cage for their regular chess games, his drawings were not merely an exploration of the time, space, and trace relationship as Foá et al (2020, p. 25) have suggested. We could argue that Anastasi’s (1970s) work suggests the incongruity between a stable

and quantifiable measure of time and space and the unpredictability of a lived experience. Whilst there was a constant space and measure of the time during the journey to and from Cage’s studio, Anastasi’s drawings were created by chance and differentiation. This is because the artist kept his eyes closed while holding the pencil on the pad held on his lap, and therefore the movements of the subway train directed his hands and images.

The physical and time-consuming process of working in the darkroom to create each of the 35 cyanotypes gave me a clearer qualitative experience within duration (Sutton, 2009, p. 34). This idea of duration is based on Bergson’s *Time and Free Will* (2015 [1889]) and *Matter and Memory* (1988 [1896]) understood in terms of a qualitative continuity of sensations, rather than the quantitative which is homogenous and measurable (Bergson, 2015, pp. 105-107). In a comparable manner, my experience of the process of creating the photographs was not quantifiable. Being immersed in the process of transformation of the latent image into a visible photograph during the photographic development



Figure 9: (Hamer) Series of 35 chess moves (2018) displayed at The Art Pavilion – Verdant exhibition by Middlesex University (2022).

was experienced differently on each occasion. Because of the multiple influential factors, elements, and difficulties I encountered, it was possible to observe that the same period of time required to develop and print the photographs differed on each occasion.

In addition, the apparent precision of the rules of timing the development or process of creating a photographic image felt far from homogenous, linear, and precise. Sutton (2009, p. 37) explains that “the photograph opens out to an attenuated moment, a suggestion of time passing that has a different experience internal to it”. I believe that the differential, internal experience of each (apparent) cut to the ongoing unfolding of time was what gave my relationship with each cyanotype the sense of responsibility or accountability which was suggested by Zylinska (2014). The process demanded the responsible and patient, physical and emotional close encounter with the images and the materials used. It involved coating or painting paper with chemical solutions, placing the negatives in contact with the treated paper and exposing it to a source of UV light. It required testing different exposure times and waiting to see the results; and washing, drying, cutting, observing, and doing all this again, repeatedly. This experience also created a more intimate re-encounter with my grandfather’s image, and a re-experiencing of the game of chess played with my friend.

As I had not been engaged with analogue photographic techniques for a long time, the creation of the cyanotypes overlapped both the process of re-learning the methods and the creation of the photographs. The perceived experience of creating each cyanotype differed from each other. For example, the beginning of this process was slower and encountered more difficulties. It was problematic to find the ‘right’ paper that would not overly absorb the chemicals and therefore the images would require a longer exposure to the UV light. The creation of the negatives was, for me, not straightforward and required multiple tests as they overlapped two different photographs. The issue was whether my grandfather’s photograph would predominate over the image of the chess movement or, alternatively, it would fade away. Therefore, each of the difficulties encountered revealed thoughts or interpretations and led to more research to support their understanding.

Thus, creating a cyanotype (see Figure 10) where my grandfather’s photograph would appear

visually vague or faded was not merely an aesthetic decision. It would also position his photograph as previous to the other mobile phone picture. It suggested the way the details of someone’s face can be forgotten if we do not see them for some time. Also, drawing upon Derrida’s (1993) *Memoirs of the Blind*, leaving my grandfather’s image undistinguishable by stressing the WhatsApp photograph suggested an element of blindness, which is intrinsic to the act of drawing or tracing someone’s face. Therefore, whilst on the one hand these were decisions that I tried to make conceptually and visually, on the other, the unpredicted actions of the chemicals, light, paper, and my body movements had their own agency over those questions.

It seemed important to apprehend the right movements for each part of the process of creating each of the 35 cyanotypes. For example, the coating of the paper with the mixed sensitizer required control of the special movement of my hands for using the brush neither too lightly nor hard on the paper. Going over the paper from the top to the bottom and then from one side to the other as evenly as possible without putting too much of the fluid became increasingly important. In the same way, each of the procedures involved in the creation of the photographs involved following a rule that would

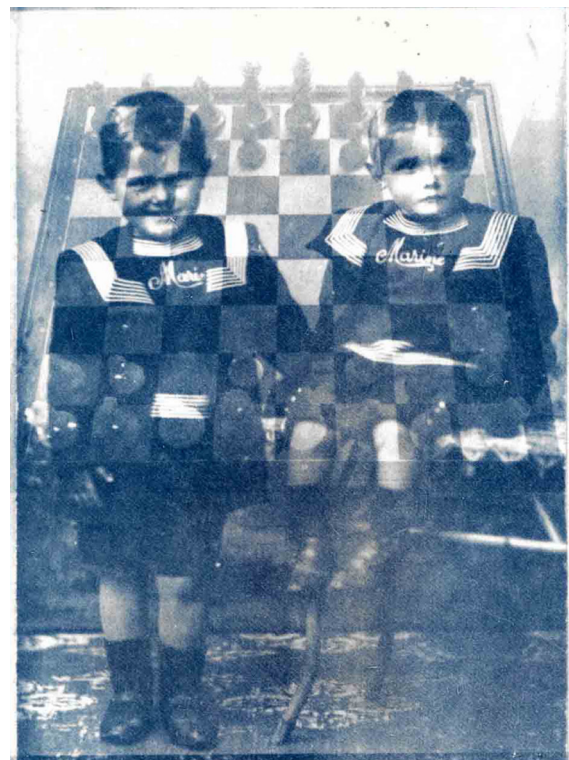


Figure 10: (Hamer) Cyanotype created as part of the series of 35 chess movements (2018).

then be tested, experienced, learned, repeated, and redesigned choreographically. Thus, the qualitative experience of materiality and the body became predominant within an apparent measurable and homogenous series of rules to be repeated.

The creation of the cyanotypes (see Figure 11) was comparable in experience to the chess project. This was produced by the similar feelings of responsibility and patience. Yet, in this case, the responses were not by another human participant but rather by things: chemicals, light, and paper. The process of having to create dozens of tests, change different kinds of papers and exposure times, apply more or less photosensitive solution to create each print, was a constant reminder of the other and unknown agent within - and part of - the project. Engaging with the process of analogue photography also emphasized the embodied or tacit knowledge as its essential and often unassumed element. For example, during the process, there was a moment when I felt that I had internalized or embodied the technique. However, feeling non-professional within the area of darkroom technics had its advantage in making me experience and pay attention to the details,

movements, and changes as unique and for the first time. Similar to the photographs created by German artist Vera Lutter (Crimp et al, 2012) in her exploration of early photographic technologies, examining an old analogue technique such as the cyanotype more clearly emphasised that there was no taking for granted and neither a sense of self confidence about my artistic control or authority. This, I believe, was what made the project even more absorbing. It displaced and questioned my authorial position as the “subject of knowledge and the place of representation” (Mutman, 2006, p. 164).

This auto-ethnographic inquiry for the creative re-imagination and re-enactment of a family history through performative photography, chess, and digital technology inspired alternative ways through which auto-ethnography and artistic research can converge and be mutually beneficial. The creative explorations undertaken with a theoretical underpinning of performativity and temporality in photography can enable further discussions and suggest ways for moving on from accepted forms of art-as-research. The work suggested ways of shifting the focus from artistic methods merely

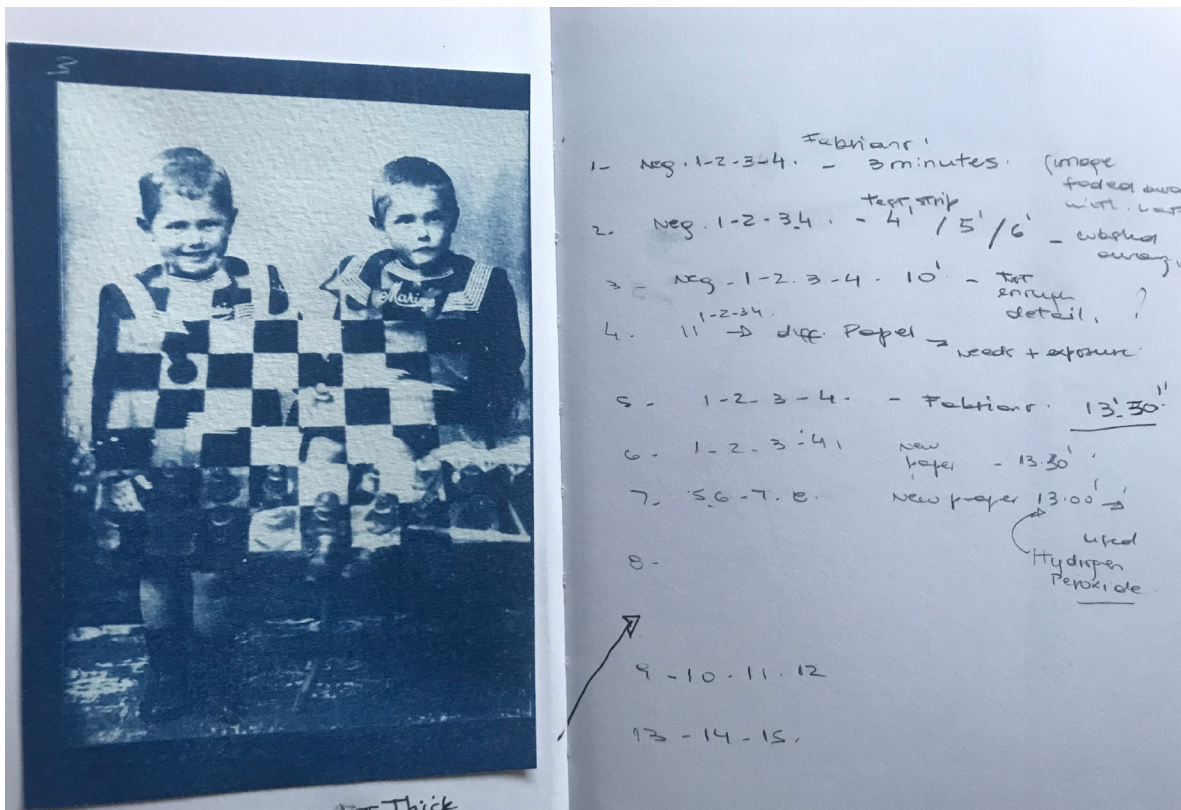


Figure 11. (Hamer) Image showing the ongoing annotations and record of corrections and changes on the cyanotypes created. Taken from Sketchbook (2018).

aimed at describing or representing an auto-ethnographic text to performative strategies where the focus lies in the material, affective or sensual effects and transformations produced within the process of art practice.

rather than merely as a way to fix or represent its object of study.

Conclusion

This article has summarised and discussed an auto-ethnographic inquiry based on the artistic exploration of a family history through performative photographic approaches. The theoretical underpinning of performativity and temporality in photography provided the framework for the creative re-imagination and re-enactment of a personal narrative. The visual auto-ethnographic approach challenged the centrality of my point of view through the self-reflexive process of being subject and object, self and other of a practice-led research enquiry. By attaching myself to a prior moment in time in relation to my grandfather's photograph and re-enacting his experience through the use of photography, chess and digital technology in a performative and collaborative manner, my own authority as an artist researcher was questioned. These methods allowed me to further thoughts about authorship, performativity, and the experience of time in relation to art practice. The act of engaging with these ideas and questions through two interconnected creative explorations highlighted the way unpredictability and the differential force of the performative, as a bringing into being and effect, was foregrounded within both time-based explorations.

The experience of using photography to *do* something, perform, mediate, and create an asynchronous encounter with another person across two continents destabilized the sense of time and place within the moment of playing. It also reinforced the bond or connection between both players. This was perceived as the creation of a separate or distinct dimension of a simultaneous sense of intimate presence and spatiotemporal distance. In an analogous way, being immersed in the process of creating analogue cyanotype prints through a specific method or instruction, highlighted the differential nature of the citation or repetition within the continuous unfolding of time. This was not the expression of a self-intention but a dynamic relationship with objects and materials that constructed their own transformations. Both creative explorations have clearly functioned performatively and proved claims that view artistic research as a material and embodied way of knowing, thinking, and doing

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