Re-imagining the Family Album through Literary Adaptation

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As an artist, I create autobiographical still and moving image works that explore memory, place and familial relationships, drawing upon writers such as Henry James, Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf. In contrast to the conventional forms of film adaptation, I interpret literature emotionally and selectively, in order to produce an ambiguous form of self-portraiture. I therefore allow the text to function as a mediating tool, for the recollection of difficult, yet universal experiences, such as illness, loss and separation. As both artist and subject, my interdisciplinary, self-reflexive practice is concerned with the staging of the self as a subjective performance, operating within a confessional mode.

This alternative method is firmly positioned within a fine art context, and aims to adopt a therapeutic stance, utilizing adaptation as autobiography, realised through a re-scripting process of fragmentary extraction, based upon personal identification. Indeed, I re-invent the source material, seeking associations with certain images, themes, characters or concepts. My doctoral research used T.S Eliot's 1922 poem, *The Waste Land* as a framework to investigate my elusive self-representational strategies, and interpretative methods, which culminated in a collection of photographic and video installations, made between 2005 and 2010. Through the employment of constructed narratives, metaphorical landscapes and performative re-enactments, the *Waste*

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Land project became an attempt to work through the marital breakdown and divorce of my parents, and my subsequent estrangement from my father.[1] *The Waste Land* was published the same year as James Joyce's *Ulysses,* and, was in part, a response to the First World War. It is a pessimistic vision of the beginning of the twentieth century, relayed by a journey through a modern waste land, depicted by five individual sections that draws upon a rich tapestry of both historical, and contemporary references, sourced from literature, mythology and popular culture. The poem deals with universal themes, such as loss of faith, broken relationships and human alienation, and is delivered by a multitude of unidentified voices, and cinematic episodes, that seem to suggest that history inevitably repeats itself, through a continual juxtaposition between past and present.

This chapter will consider how the adaptation of T.S Eliot's poem, allowed me to re-interpret the text as a visual autobiography and reconsider my personal history, informed by the close examination of the family album. This notion will be addressed through three photographic and video works from the *Waste Land* project; *PastPresent* (2005), *Fortune-telling/Re-telling* (2007), and *The Deep Sea Swell* (2009), which all enabled me to re-evaluate my childhood memories and familial relationships through literary adaptation.

PastPresent (2005) was the first resolved work I produced for the *Waste Land* project, and marked the shift towards creating an autobiographical interpretation of the poem. This set of six photographs was initiated by the reference to Marie's sledge ride in part one, of Eliot's poem, *The Burial of the Dead*. The transferral of emotions from, "I was frightened" (l.15) to, "In the mountains, there you feel free" (l.17), activated a compelling childhood memory of learning to ride a bicycle, and prompted a consideration of why the past is either inadvertently romanticised, or perceived with a trusted nostalgia, as a time where fears were overcome.

This compelling emotional connection between the literary text, which is chosen for its empathetic quality, and myself, the reader, is what Susan Suleiman identifies as "*strong* autobiographical reading" (Suleiman 1993: 200). As an artist, this term pertinently describes my method of drawing upon literary texts that have autobiographical resonance. In this sense, I allow myself

1 Works from the 'Waste Land' project can be viewed at: http://www.sallywaterman.com/projects.php

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to 'speak' through the text, in order to unlock and re-imagine past memories, so that some kind of transformation can take place. This form of identification with literature is something that Suleiman explains through her own encounters with Jewish stories about the Second World War, "that could have been my own" (Suleiman 1993: 204). Marianne Hirsch takes on board Suleiman's concept in *Family Frames*: *Photography, Narrative and Postmemory,* to describe her own experience of reading Eva Hoffman's novel, 'Lost in Translation', an autobiographical story of her migration from Poland to Canada at the age of thirteen. Associating herself with the author, due to their shared experience, she reveals how, after reading:

> "I can no longer see the page. Tears are flowing down my face, I realize I am sobbing. These sentences have released a loss, whose depths I had never, until that moment, allowed myself to feel or remember." (Hirsch 1997: 218)

Having elicited this pertinent childhood memory, triggered by the description of Marie's sledge ride, I managed to locate a photograph of myself, aged six or seven years old, and my older brother on Christmas Day, posing on our new bicycles on the driveway of the family home on the Isle of Wight, UK, where my Mother still lives on her own. Whilst my brother is looking towards the camera, smiling and self-assured, I am concentrating, eyes cast downwards, my hands clutching onto the handlebars and my feet firmly resting on the pedals. However, I quickly realise upon closer inspection that the camera provided an inaccurate illusion of the event, as the bicycle's stand was still down, since I was not able to ride at that point in time. Consequently, this particular photograph captures the moment before I achieved this childhood rite of passage. I specifically remember trying out this balancing act and being a little fearful of the tremendous task ahead of me, in learning to ride this shiny new bicycle. Informed by Eliot's poem, this photograph brought back distinctive memories of the glorious sensation of freedom that had I felt when I realised that I was speeding down the road on my own, without my father holding onto the back of the bicycle. I remember my eagerness to replicate the experience and to try again, in the knowledge that, not only I had really achieved something, but also to repeat the same physical sensation I had so readily identified with in Eliot's poem.

From this initial family snapshot, I then rediscovered other photographs from my childhood that were all taken around the exterior of the family

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home. I then edited together six photographs, which documented group portraits shot on special occasions, such as my birthday party tea on the patio, or playing in the paddling pool with friends in the back garden in the long, hot summer holidays. The series also included a posed group family photograph of my mother, father, brother and myself, pictured in the back garden of the new house in 1976, when I was only two years old. It depicts a tightly knit family group, bodies held close to one another, with arms embracing, emulating a sense of togetherness and contentment.

After my parent's divorced, soon after my university graduation, I took some comfort in this image, despite feeling a sense of loss with the dramatic irony of knowing how the future unfolded. Representing the promise of family unity, it provided evidence that my family were indeed 'happy' until their relationship started to unravel by the time I became a teenager. In terms of Eliot's poem, this harmonious family snapshot epitomised the unquestioning nature of Marie's childhood recollections of a carefree past, out sledging with her cousins.

However, Eliot associates the arrival of spring as cruel and painful, rather than restorative, since any subsequent memories had been tarnished by the horrors of the First World War. By contrast, winter becomes comforting, allowing these recent memories to be buried by "forgetful snow". Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley describe how despite the fact that Marie overcame her childhood fears in the past, "remembering the past and intuiting the future, she is left in a vacuum in the present moment, an absence in the middle of her life" (Brooker/Bentley 1992: 62).

A year or so after my parent's divorce, secrets were revealed that undermined this illusion of the happy family depicted in this family snapshot. I discovered then, that even at this early stage of my parent's marriage, just after I was born, my father was involved in extra martial affairs, which my mother, at that time was oblivious too. Therefore, I identified with this desire to escape the natural seasonal cycles of time and remembrance in 'The Waste Land', recounting the way in which I had been caught up within this 'vacuum' of not-knowing, attempting on one hand to remember, whilst of the other, trying fruitlessly to forget the trauma of my discovery. As a result, this particular image, taken before I can remember, is especially poignant since the closeness that is implied here, is tainted by the subsequent knowledge of my father's infidelity.

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In 'Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination' (1995), Annette Kuhn acknowledges the existence of family secrets, whose narratives are commonly forgotten or repressed. Relating what she terms, 'Memory Work', with that of archaeology or detective investigations, she states:

"The past is like the scene of a crime: if the deed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may still remain. From these traces, markers that point toward a past presence, to something that has happened in this place, a (re) construction…of the event can be pieced together." (Kuhn 1995: 4)

Viewing this old group photograph, whilst actually being present at the family home on the Isle of Wight at the time of shooting in 2005, I was acutely aware of the fact that the vegetation and trees in the garden had since become fully established, and that the present scene was vastly different from that represented in the original family snapshot. Having re-evaluated the family albums kept within my mother's wardrobe, in the light of this literary connection, I was immediately drawn towards the potentiality of a comparison between past and present. I felt a need to literally hold up the physical artefact in front of the same scene twenty-five years later, in order to make an instant comparison, and to uncover the hidden 'traces' or meanings behind this archetypal family image.

I had originally envisaged *PastPresent* as a digital video piece, beginning with an extreme close-up of the family snapshot, which would then gradually pan out to reveal the whole photograph within its present day context. However, at the same time, I also took some black and white photographs of my hand holding the snapshots within the same photographic frame, as I was still uncertain of my recent transition to working with digital video. This subjective perspective, with the appearance of my hand holding the snapshot within the photograph, not only highlights the time lapse between the initial childhood event and the photographic re-enactment, but also invites the audience to participate in my self-reflexive exercise. Operating as an effective distancing tool, this re-appropriation of the past through the act of re-photography suggests a tension between a carefree past, with a present day absence.

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Fig.1: PastPresent

Sally Waterman, PastPresent No.6, 2005, Courtesy of the artist

Upon reflection, I found that the duration and continuous movement of the moving image was a barrier to an emotional engagement with the subject. Conversely, the stillness of the photograph allowed time and space for the necessary contemplation of the comparative process to take place. The black and white photographic images themselves were also more symptomatic of memory and appropriate for the subject matter. Gen Doy observes how monochrome images give "an impression of nostalgia, pastness and […] of death" (Doy 2005: 147). This association reminds us of the substantial and familiar scholarship on the relationship between photography and death. Most notably, it was Susan Sontag, who famously claimed, "All photographs are *memento mori.* To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability" (Sontag 1979: 3–24, 15).

The analogue family snapshots that I sourced for both the *PastPresent* (2005) photographs, and for the later video work, *Fortune-telling/Re-telling* (2007), which I will discuss later on, were not only a reminder of my own mortality, but signified a wider, collective human experience. In this respect, the series is also concerned with our ability to re-assess our own perceptions of past events, places, people and emotions, as well as a sense of knowingness that arises from an apparently idyllic family portrait. I sought to question

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the very concept of a photographic truth, in terms of portraying a faithful representation in a pre-digital age, realising that these photographs could only offer a constructed version of the past. Indeed, Sontag reminds us that photography has, "multiple meanings" with "inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation and fantasy" (Sontag 1979: 23).

During the production of this series, I was struck by the similarity of the family grouping in *PastPresent,* No.6, with that of Duane Michels' 1974 photograph, *This Photograph Is My Proof*. This work depicts a couple seated on a bed, looking directly towards camera in the same reassuring fashion. The woman embraces the man, draping herself around his back, her head resting on his shoulder. The accompanying narrative, handwritten underneath his photograph seeks to reaffirm our understanding of the image, stating:

"This photograph is my proof. There was that afternoon, when things were still good between us, and she embraced me, and we were so happy. It did happen, she did love me. Look, see for yourself!" (Livingstone 1997: 201)

The image is offered as a testimony to the state of their relationship at the time. In this sense it draws upon Roland Barthes' assertion that "The photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*" (Barthes 2000: 85). However, whilst Michals photograph certainly documents '*what has been'*, with regard to his subjects positioned in front of the camera, this work also questions the deceptive nature of photography. Issues surrounding posing and performance within family snapshots are relevant to this form of visual representation. As a sitter, I am conscious that I perform for the camera and adopt a particular pose or the same, positive expression that becomes a kind of unrepresentative 'mask', that I see endlessly repeated within the family album over time. This experience correlates with Barthes' assertion that "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object" (Barthes 2000: 13–14).

Consequently, it is important to acknowledge the way in which photographic images are constructed, together with the way in which their meaning can be construed from different contexts or individual perceptions. As a result, this particular image from the *PastPresent* series became an important benchmark, in recognising that my own re-interpretation of the family album,

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translated through the lines of T.S Eliot's poem, was only one of four perspectives on this family history, and that alternative versions or forgotten narratives could have been remembered by other members of my family. The realisation that literature is used as a means of displacement for visualising past traumatic experience in my practice, led to the increasing recognition of the poem as a therapeutic tool, for 'working through' the breakdown of my parents marriage, and my subsequent estrangement from my father. In his 1914 essay, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through', Freud identifies how repressed memory operates:

"The forgetting of impressions, scenes, experiences comes down in most cases to a process of 'shutting out' such things. When a patient speaks of these 'forgotten' things, he rarely fails to add I've known that really, I've just never thought about it." (Freud 2003: 34)

By confronting these 'resistances' (Freud 2003: 33), and recognising the cathartic nature of my autobiographical practice, I was able to identify its meaning in a more open, honest fashion. Ann Kaplan in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005), argues that art can offer a role in dealing with traumatic experience, through an act of transferral:

"I show the increasing importance of 'translating' trauma – that is of finding ways to making meaning out of, and to communicate...Trauma can never be 'healed'…but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being 'translated' via art." (Kaplan 2005: 19)

Kaplan refers to major catastrophes such as the Holocaust, Hiroshima and 9/11, together with what she classifies as, "'family' trauma that is trauma of loss, abandonment, rejection, betrayal". This concept of 'family' trauma is applicable to my own work, which signifies a need to confront these haunting memories and recurring issues by translating them through my interpretive arts practice. Indeed, the *PastPresent* series encourages the recollection of childhood memories, but also represents an exploration into the tension between the remembering of the event and the actual remembering of the emotional response, now that the reality of the situation is known. This realisation is emotionally embodied in the work through what I term, the 'Subjective

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Perspective' strategy of my hand holding the photograph within the frame, in an active reassessment of my personal experience.

The British photographer, Jo Spence described how in phototherapy, "Trying to recall one's own history is a painful process of selective remembering and selective forgetting. Of knowing and not knowing" (Spence 1986: 85). In *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography* (1986), Spence closely re-examined her family album and realised that they provided no record of her troubled schooling, ill health, broken marriage or unfulfilling employment as a secretary due to implicit dominant ideology, which meant that we only consider photographing the "harmony in our lives" at times of leisure, consumption or ownership, particularly in the pre-digital era in which she was writing (Spence 1986: 82).[2] This practice-led research, carried out in the 1980's was developed from Spence's previous politicised documentary photography experience and collaborations, which aimed to subvert existing photographic genres and expose unrepresented subjects (Spence 1986: 48–121).[3] Spence's transformative method later developed into a creative collaboration with the photographer, Rosy Martin from the mid 1980's, whereby they took turns to physically re-stage significant scenarios from their past, becoming other family members, or recollecting their former selves, as well as re-living traumatic experiences, in order to allow acceptance to take place, through re-enactment phototherapy (Spence 1986, Martin/Spence 1986, Spence/Holland 1991, Spence/Salomon 1995, Martin 2001).[4]

2 Spence recounts how the 'Beyond the Family Album' exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1979 was an autobiographical investigation into her family and class background.

3 Such as the 'Women and Work' and 'Who's Holding the Baby' project with the Hackney Flashers Collective in the mid-1970s and her collaboration with Terry Dennett which founded the independent educational photography workshops and led to the 'Remodelling Photo-History' project (1981–1982).

4 Rosy Martin (2001: 20) notes how they devised the term "re-enactment phototherapy" to distinguish themselves from the way in which therapists in the United States and Canada used 'phototherapy', since their work employed "psychodramatic techniques" to produce new photographs, within a "therapeutic relationship".

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My close analysis of the family album and the confrontation of the past through the means of a therapeutic reconstruction process was informed by Spence and Martin's method of "visual reframing" (Spence 1986: 172). However, there is also an established scholarship that utilises the family snapshot as a tool, not only for visual arts practice, but also for autobiographical writing that encourages the remembrance and the recording of undocumented personal histories (Doy 2005, Kuhn 1995, Stanley 1995). Having reinterpreted the family photographs within the *PastPresent* series in the light of parental divorce, I was keen to investigate Marianne Hirsch's observation that, "photographs locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life" (Hirsch 1997: 8). This renewed understanding of vernacular photography, framed by the concept of performed and repeated cultural behaviour prompted me to develop this self-examination of the family album in more depth, and led to the production of two autobiographical video works, *Fortune-telling/Re-telling* (2007) and *The Deep Sea Swell* (2009).

For the *Fortune-Telling/Re-Telling* (2007) video,[5] I sourced fifty-two photographs, (to replicate the number of playing cards in a pack) from my mother's collection of family albums, that featured key moments in my life, from when I was born, until my brother's wedding in October 2006. The work was based on Madame Sosostris's tarot card reading in part one of *The Waste Land,* where she introduces key characters, such as the drowned Phoenician sailor, Phlebas, and attempts to decipher the ambiguous meanings of each card, warning of the potential dangers that lie ahead. Assuming Madame Sosostris's interpretive role, the video documents my solitary performance of looking through this set of physical images, which was shot in one continuous take, against the grey carpet of my childhood bedroom on the Isle of Wight. Each of the photographs are placed on top of one another in an arbitrary fashion, discarded after being held and remembered, as I reflect, trying to understand the story behind each one. Certain photographs that capture my imagination, or 'prick me', to identify with Roland Barthes' definition of the *punctum* (Barthes 2000: 27), such as a Polaroid of my scarred body after my kidney operation, are singled out, and paused upon for a moment longer. It is also important to note that for exhibition, the work was

5 The 'Fortune-telling/Re-telling' video can be viewed at: https://vimeo.com/195088203

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installed at table height, with the screen facing upwards at life size, to simulate my performance to camera, so that the audience shared my own viewing experience.

The process of selecting appropriate photographs for *Fortune-telling/Retelling* was quite traumatic in one way, since having laid out the images in order on the floor, I saw my whole life unfolded in front of me, in this condensed, visual autobiography. The decision to use the grey carpet as a backdrop arose from this activity, since they were initially reviewed and edited on my bedroom floor of my home on the Isle of Wight, and I aimed to replicate the original assessment, with its domestic associations. During the preproduction stage, I considered how representative my selection of photographs actually was, since I could not include everything.[6] The first observation was that of the ageing process, and the fact that despite my changing appearance over time, I still recognised my multiple selves presented in the later images. However, I felt a distinctive sense of detachment and misrecognition from early photographs of myself as a young child. Liz Stanley in *The Auto/Biographical Eye I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (1995) identifies this problem regarding the formation of memory, referring to an early photograph of herself as a two year-old girl:

> "The child is me – or so she is said to be, so I am told. But I do not know her. My memory cannot reach this child: she sits alone looking out and I look back into her eyes and see and feel nothing." (Stanley 1995: 45)[7]

The problem of being unable to connect with this kind of family photograph as a later viewer in the act of looking, raises poststructuralist debates of subjectivity surrounding unknowingness and fluidity, recalling Barthes' difficulty in 'finding' his mother within his family album, in *Camera Lucida* (Barthes 2000: 63–73, 109).

Despite this barrier to memory, the family album provided fruitful material in terms of phototherapy, since it emphasized the fact that despite the traumatic events in my life and my family breakdown, there was 'evidence'

6 Since I was thirty-two at the time of pre-production, this calculated at 1.6 images per year to match the number of cards in a pack.

7 This use of photographs as a prompt is most famously used by Annette Kuhn in 'Family Secrets' (1995).

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of positive memories. The photographic collection, documented family bonds, the people I knew and the relationships I had, as well as charting the given rituals of Christmases, birthdays, weddings and graduations.[8] However, apart from the Polaroid of my scar from my kidney operation, the archive did not portray the troubled experiences of my personal history, although viewers could detect the distinctive absence of my father in the later family group portraits taken on Christmas Day, around the festive dining table. By carefully reviewing these family snapshots, I was able to decipher hidden meanings within particular images, for instance, a photograph of me resisting the arms of my father at a time when I was experiencing the imminent breakup of my parents' marriage as a twenty year old. However, we are reminded by Marianne Hirsch that; "Photographs are fragments of stories, never stories in themselves" (Hirsch 1997: 83).

Therefore, it is significant that *Fortune-telling/Re-telling* employs superimposition in order to replicate not only the fragmentary nature of memory and of photographic representation, but also to partially obscure this unveiling of personal, family history, as a means of self-protection. The piece assembles three video streams together; first, the assessment of family snapshots to signify the past; second, a game of patience to signify the present, and lastly, my own tarot card reading, to signify the future. These different layers are woven together with varying levels of opacity to imitate the unreliable act of remembering, so that sometimes the work is trebled, whilst at other times each layer is fully visible to the viewer. This constantly shifting viewpoint represents my thought processes at the time of re-enactment, as my consciousness wavered between reminiscence, comparison with the present, and anticipating the future.

8 MoMA's 1955 landmark touring exhibition, 'The Family of Man', curated by director, Edward Steichen was the first show to make distinctive connections between family and photography. The show was curated thematically under headings of love, marriage, birth, childhood, courtship, adulthood, leisure, religion, death, war and politics (Hirsch 1997: 50–53).

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Fig.2: Fortune-Telling/Re-telling

Sally Waterman, Fortune-Telling/Re-telling, 2007, Film still, Courtesy of the artist

Consequently, the superimposition of these childhood photographs with the playing cards and tarot reading, makes a distinction between what is known, (the past), and what is unknown, (the future), insinuating a need for a re-evaluation of the past, together with an attempt to acknowledge life's unpredictability and randomness. The pace at which the narrative unfolds, means that the audience who are unfamiliar with these photographs, are only able to quickly grasp its content, before the other two layers of the game of patience, and the tarot reading, intervene and clouds their vision. In this sense, *Fortune-telling/Re-telling* presents a chaotic representation, consisting of competing narratives, whereby the viewer can only apprehend what I term, 'Traces of the Self' within the family snapshots, which, in turn, become generic significations of shared human experience.

The repetition of some of the childhood photographs, that appear in the earlier *PastPresent* series, operate in a similar fashion to the cinematic montage of recurring motifs, multiple voices and filmic episodes that exist within *The Waste Land* poem itself. Indeed, T.S Eliot embraced the experimental form of avant-garde film, art and literature through his imaginative juxtapositions; from the "Shadow under this red rock", to the hyacinth girl who "could not speak"; from the clairvoyant's ominous prediction of "fear death

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by water", to the condemned commuters in the "Unreal City", all within part one of the poem. I was interested in responding to the Modernist context of the work, together with the connection Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley make between Eliot's re-organisation of time in the poem, with the re-organisation of space in cubist painting:

> "Perspective in cubism is not only multiplied, but destabilized as the viewer is put into motion. The relation between the subject and object goes from fixity to fluidity. And in *The Wasteland* there is a continuous instability in which images dissolve, re-form, melt, and overlap." (Brooker/Bentley 1992: 31)

I recognised that this cubist preoccupation with multiplicity, which is manifested in Eliot's poem, could be represented through certain visual techniques, to re-affirm my elusive form of self-portraiture, (whereby I typically appear as an anonymous figure, a disembodied self or as a ghostly trace), as well as acting as a masking strategy for this traumatic experience. During the production of the *Waste Land* project (2005–2010), I established a distinctive relationship between the stylistic methods used within Eliot's modernist poem, and my own employment of re-photography and superimposition, to signify not only the layering of time and space, but also the transient nature of memory itself.

Indeed, this notion of multiplicity and fluidity also characterized the variable and competing nature of the memories that were recalled from my exploratory encounter with the family album. An example of this, is the creation of visual echoes throughout the body of work, first depicted by the initial appearance of this family group snapshot pictured in the back garden, re-photographed in the same scene in *PastPresent, No.6* (2005). It is this image which later re-emerges within the sequence of snapshots in the *Fortune-telling/Re-telling* (2007) video, before resurfacing yet again as a ghostly apparition, rising from beneath the waves in *The Deep Sea Swell* (2009) floor projection.

However, this re-evaluation of my childhood memories and familial relationships through the family album can also be compared with another type of interpretation that took place during the production stage. *The Waste Land* is saturated with cultural allusions that underpin and reinforce the poem's central meaning, providing a deeper level of intellectual engagement that I needed to comprehend to a certain degree. Although my prior knowledge of

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metaphysical poetry and Shakespeare was not imperative for appreciating the work as a whole, I did recognise their thematic contributions, which allowed for a better understanding of the poem. In his accompanying 'Notes', Eliot acknowledges the influence of Jessie L. Weston's book, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) about the Grail legend and James Frazer's study, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (3 Editions: 1890/1900/1906–15), about fertility ceremonies, alongside literary texts by Baudelaire, Dante, Marvell, Shakespeare and references from popular culture, historical events, Christianity, Buddhism and Greek mythology.

In his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), Eliot claimed that appreciation of new work exists in relation to those produced by "dead poets and artists" (Eliot 1975: 38), and that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (ibidem: 39). Therefore, since a comparative exercise is inevitable, Eliot employs these contextual influences to renew our readings of them, creating an interwoven tapestry of allusions that comment upon each other, and assert a sense of circularity through the notion that history repeats itself, through this "mythical method" (Eliot 1975: 178). This concept of circularity can be applied to the family album as a visual document of a passing lifetime, as certain rituals, rites of passage and celebrations are played out and family traits are inherited and re-enacted, all set against the inevitability of the changing seasons.

Maud Ellmann highlights the fact that literary critics who are pre-occupied with tracking Eliot's references; "treat the text as if it were a photographic negative, tracing the shadows of a lost or forbidden body" (Ellmann 1987: 32). This metaphor is quite apt, in that whilst these sources provided the foundation of *The Waste Land*, as readers, it is the final photographic print, or, in this case, the poem, that we interpret. Parallels can be drawn between the deciphering of Eliot's cultural allusions and the close analysis of these vernacular family photographs, and the memories that they evoked, which allowed me to re-interpret the poem as a visual autobiography. Indeed, it is the narratives behind each of the family snapshots, or what Martha Langford identifies as the "oral-photographic framework" (Langford 2006: 225), that give them their sense of worth through performance, storytelling and repetition. Significantly, Langford acknowledges the fact that "The album is a meeting place, not an encyclopedia" (Langford 2006: 226), since some images and their associated narratives are ignored, whilst others are contemplated and openly shared.

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Whilst re-discovering, and consequently remembering the events, or circumstances of each photograph chosen for the *Fortune-telling/Re-telling* video, the variation regarding the clarity of memories that were generated became apparent, together with the differences between my own recollections, and those of my mother. I found it frustrating when I could not remember much more than what the photograph offered to me, or when there were competing memories of a certain event. However, Liz Stanley reminds us that memory is a mixture of fact and fiction. She states that: "we inevitably remember selectively" and, only, "through the limited and partial evidence available to us – half hints of memory, photographs, memorabilia, other people's remembrances" (Stanley 1995: 62).

I was also acutely aware of looking back at these images through the benefit of dramatic irony, and the contextual framework of parental divorce, as well as through the lines of *The Waste Land*, to make sense of my family history. In this regard, Stanley's assertion of the limits of photographic representation, and of the family album's inaccessibility to outsiders became relevant to my understanding of the work. She highlights the fact that:

> "With benefit of hindsight, from a subsequent 'moment' to that of the photograph, I can see this innocent lack of knowledge. What came after was my father's death, that of my lover's father and those of two friends, then my mother's devastating stroke. The photograph holds, but does not reveal to any outsider, pain, death and loss." (Stanley 1995: 52)

This barrier to interpretation corresponds with what is seen as the elitist nature of Eliot's appropriation. James Longenbach warns that, "Teasing out the allusions, we, as readers, become part of that difficult process of transmission. If we do not know the references, we may feel excluded" (Longenbach 1994: 177). I also deliberated the extent of my audience's prior experience of *The Waste Land* and, if their lack of knowledge would prevent them from gaining a full appreciation of my work. However, it was important to realise that the literary texts I chose to interpret served an important function, enabling the recall of autobiographical experience, as well as providing a relevant thematic, psychological and conceptual framework. This chosen interpretive method meant that whilst the works I created are traceable to the source material, they are also able to stand alone, appealing to un-informed

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audiences through their universality. This collective appeal is also true of the family album as a form of visual representation that is instantly recognisable.

It is worth noting that this video was primarily made as a private meditation upon my personal history, and functions as an empowering form of phototherapy, rather than as a purely nostalgic exercise. Through the process of making, I was able to rediscover positive childhood memories by reflecting upon key events and relationships, acknowledge the time spent with my father, and most importantly, confront painful experiences through the actual physical procedure of looking through these carefully chosen photographs in an act of re-assessment. This therapeutic method was further developed for *The Deep Sea Swell* (2009) video,[9] which was the last piece of work from the *Waste Land* project that drew upon the family album, and is preoccupied by my estrangement from my father after my parent's divorce.

Literary critics have interpreted the meaning of Phlebas, the Phoenician's death in part four of Eliot's poem, 'Death by Water', on which this video is based, in two different ways. First, as a signification of death by water without resurrection, and, second, to symbolize the sacrificial death that precedes rebirth (Abrams 1993: 2157, Brooker/Bentley 1992: 159, Gordon 2000: 182). *The Deep Sea Swell* (2009), applies these conflicting interpretations to my own fluctuating emotions regarding the separation from my father, through the creation of a visual metaphor that embodies the struggle between a haunting resurfacing of past memories, and the cathartic process of burial or acceptance. Aligning the character of Phlebas, with that of my father, the ghostly layering of past and present is communicated by the slow emergence of the now recognisable family group photograph, first seen in *PastPresent No.6*, appearing against the surface of a mesmerising seascape. The photograph moves slowly upwards towards the viewer, shifting from side to side by the motion of the sea. We then watch as the image enlarges to fill the whole frame, finally focusing upon the face of my father, before it disappears from sight, overcome by the waves.

9 'The Deep Sea Swell' video can be viewed at: http://vimeo.com/24838945

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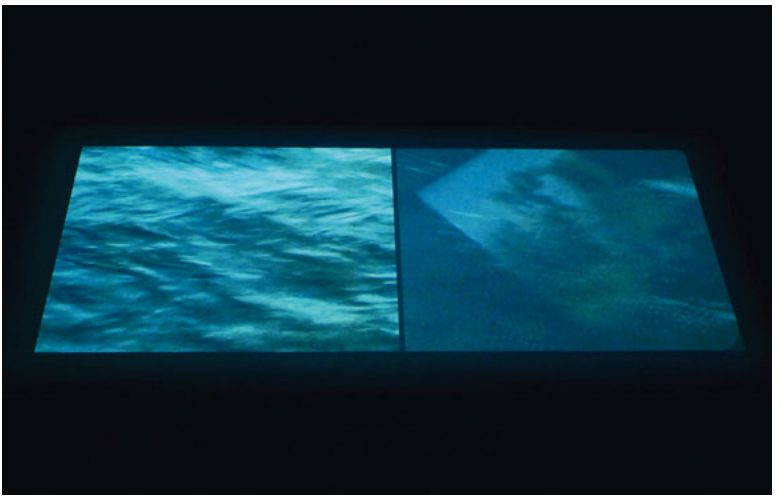
Fig. 3: The Deep Sea Swell



Sally Waterman, The Deep Sea Swell, 2009, Film still, Courtesy of the artist

This split-screen video work, which is suggestive of my divided self, features two, abstract, moving images of the sea, filmed from above to imply a recurring re-visitation of the same, persistent memory. However, each shot presents a slightly different perspective; a wide shot and a closer viewpoint, as well as being slowed down to slightly different speeds, creating a disjuncture or barrier, yet also a point of comparison. The piece begins with the sound of my agitated breath against a black screen, which signifies coming to terms with the trauma from the past, as it slowly calms down to resemble the lulling appearance of the rise and fall of the waves, which fade into view. The background sound of the seascape is accompanied by a whispered voiceover, consisting of an edited script taken from this section of the poem. As we watch the gradual surfacing of the family photograph from the depths of memory, we hear my spoken words, "Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell/And the profit and loss' (l.313–14)", "Entering the whirlpool" (l.318), implying a renewed consideration of the past, having previously suppressed these traumatic memories.

The Deep Sea Swell video also spatialized *The Waste Land* into an emotional, experiential encounter since it was installed as a floor projection in a darkened gallery space. This installation method allowed the audience to immerse themselves more physically into the work, standing on the edge of the

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frame and peering downwards as they witnessed the eerie rising of the family photograph from beneath them. Consequently, this perspective heightened the rhythmic movement of the waves, allowing the spectator to feel as if they were almost falling into the frame, before being plunged into darkness and the deep breathing resumed in this short, looping sequence.

The very procedure of undertaking this phototherapy work, derived from the family album and literary adaptation prompted a series of questions that I had previously evaded. Had I accepted the past revelations and resulting separation from my father, or could it mean that I was still troubled by my family history? Whilst a sense of closure and resolution is evident within the mesmerising quality of *The Deep Sea Swell,* and offers some form of respite, it also summons suppressed emotions from its murky depths, heightened by the unsettling rasping breath at the beginning of the video, which indicates the psychological nature of this seemingly unthreatening work.

In his essay, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), Freud proposes that these two maladies share inherent qualities, such as dejection, and loss of interest in the outside world from the loss of a love object. Nevertheless, he recognises that mourning is more accepted as a painful experience because, "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud 1991: 253). In retrospect, I would suggest that this personal experience occupied both mourning and melancholia at the time, but this work was an endeavour to lay the lost object of the father to rest, in order to become 'free'. In this sense, I was moved by Lyndall Gordon's spiritual view in her biography of Eliot that, "The drowning at the end of 'Death by Water' is not seen to be a disaster, but a stage of purification and metamorphosis" (Gordon 2000: 182).

In conclusion, my empathy with the poem in relation to these three works from the *Waste Land* series, centred upon characterisation, together with appropriating the stylistic techniques, poetic language and symbolic resonance of T.S Eliot's modernist text. The *PastPresent* photographs reclaimed Marie's sledge ride and the sensation of freedom, to represent my memory of learning to ride a bicycle, as well as other key childhood events, whereas I adopted Madame Sosostris' interpretive role for my own assessment of the family album in the *Fortune-telling/Re-telling* video. The ghost of Phlebas came to signify the haunting memory of my father in *The Deep Sea Swell*, along with the thematic associations of sacrifice and burial attributed to that part of the poem.

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The retrieval of childhood memories was also prompted by corresponding the interpretation of Eliot's cultural allusions, with the process of discovering the meaning behind each of the family snapshots. Therefore, the literary text provided a way of accessing these difficult experiences through Suleiman's "*strong* autobiographical reading" (Suleiman 1993: 200), allowing me to view these familiar snapshots in a new light. In this respect, my experience of re-examining the family album through literary adaptation acted as a powerful channelling device for the recollection and re-imagining of repressed family memories.

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