

7IMAG019W.Y The Photo-book

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Contents of My Head

representation of daydreams and thoughts through photomontage

If the photo-book is a medium to transmit, express and demonstrate visual ideas, using various methods, 'Grace *in this place*' is an exploration into the unachievable; the depiction of a daydream or random thought. Yet, although it may be considered unachievable, it is in our nature to seek, to strive to do that, which at first sight appears impossible, made possible by creating or employing methods in the pursuance of our objective.

The visual depiction of a daydream is generally considered inaccessible, for like dreams, daydreams and random thoughts are primarily assigned to the non-conscious meanderings of the mind, and their conveyance would require conscious thought, influencing the non-conscious.

Thus, the photo-book 'Grace *in this place*' – 'Grace' being a reference to her name, also her persona, and the "place" being a reference to the 'physical' whilst also referring to the 'metaphysical' - is a representation of daydreams and thoughts through photomontage.

The **aim** and main purpose in producing this photo-book is to explore an area of interest and experiment with methodologies for achieving the unattainable. Further aims include keeping a promise to Grace; provide a keepsake for her children - who are best placed to understand the images and their references, and provide a historical visual document for her descendants, whom are also the intended audience. To this end, the book is published as a commercially viable publication.

In order to achieve the objective of representing Grace's daydreams and thoughts a number of issues had to be addressed, for example; how can one achieve a visual interpretation of that which cannot be precisely communicated; if Grace is unable to communicate her daydreams during the process, is there an alternative source for her thoughts? Additionally, what visual methodology could be used to create the vernacular?

Sigmund Freud¹, Froth², and James M Honeycutt³, have all published comprehensive studies regarding daydreaming, hence their works were reviewed in forming a theoretical understanding as to why the project, in its true meaning, is unachievable. Yet, having made a commitment to make an attempt, a number of methodologies within numerous publications were explored, including those by David Bate⁴, Ian Walker⁵, Dawn Ades⁶ and the book '*Forbidden Games*' by Tom E Hinson, Ian Walker, and Lisa Kurzer⁷.

¹ *interpretation of dreams*

² *Froth on the Daydream*

³ *Imagined Interactions - daydreaming about communication*

⁴ *Photography and Surrealism - sexuality, colonialism and social dissent*

⁵ *So Exotic, So Homemade - surrealism, Englishness and documentary photography*

⁶ *Photomontage*

⁷ *Forbidden Games - surrealistic and modernistic photography*

This led to the technique of 'Photomontage' being selected. However, much of the ideas within these publications proved unsuitable as the images for 'Grace *in this place*' would have to comply with given levels of decency, morality and realism to be acceptable to Grace - the main collaborator in this exercise - and the intended audience, which will include children as young as 5 years old. If the use of sexually overt surrealist imagery as explored in the book '*Forbidden Games*' were to be used to signify Grace's daydreams, it would be misrepresentation, however interesting it may be for the unattached viewer. However, it so happens she has for some years recorded her random thoughts for her personal reference. Consequently, there proved an opportunity to attain some limited insight into her random thoughts, by means of these jottings as inspiration for her daydreams.

The **rationale** behind selecting to use photomontages was partly inspired by changes in the presentation of imagery in publications post World War II, which saw the photomontage evolved in its use of graphics and text in particular, which became a progression to interpreting thoughts and ideas. Although Theodore Adorno considered the ubiquitous media use of the photomontage rendered it banal in reference to aesthetics, "*The method of montage no longer succeeds in triggering a communitive spark*"⁸, this view is not shared by others who suggest the photomontage has retained its communitive value "*...in dialogue with the viewer's consciousness. In other words, the viewer enters into a conversation with a photomontage*".⁹

⁸ Adorno Theodore, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhart (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.242.

⁹, 2013. *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945 (Modern Asian Art and Visual Culture)*. Edition. Brill Academic Publishers. P. 40

So, it is anticipated the technic of photomontage will serve as an appropriate method for communicating Grace's daydreams and thoughts by capturing photographs of her out-and-about doing her shopping or religious ministry work, (the physical, the here-and-now), and combining them with the daydream image (the ethereal, dream space, or metaphysical image).

Consequently, three main elements are required to produce the imagery for this photo-book. The 'Primary' photograph of Grace (*in this place*), in the state or pose of disconnection to her surroundings signifying her physical presence in one place but her consciousness is in another. A 'Secondary' element based on her jottings, as impetus for the daydream image, which may be archival photographs, graphics, or text. Finally the third element is her jottings themselves, which although used as impetus for the secondary image remain symbiotic to the final image, allowing Grace to directly speak and express herself to the reader.

The **methodologies** used in creating this photo-book were structured with some flexibility and in keeping with normal practice. A works schedule with clear objectives and milestones allowing for an organized production process was produced, taking into account Grace's physical limitations.

In conjunction with Grace's jottings that were examined to determine and identify which pieces of her works were suitable for interpretation, a shoot list of some 38 photographs was created including two image sets from pre-existing work.

Once primary photographs were created and the required images selected - from over 1200 photographs – Grace's jottings were edited to correct obvious spelling mistakes and formatting issues.

Early in the editing process, and after much discussion, it was decided to leave Grace's jottings intact wherever possible. The main changes concerned homophones. For example, she consistently misspells 'there' for 'their'. This was changed throughout but it was felt this trait might offer additional information about her. So it was decided to correct all misspellings except those on pages 9, 38, and 56, as they do not hinder understanding of the passage but may offer the reader an insight to issues commonly encountered by her.

After text was assigned to particular primary photographs and in conjunction, daydream images were selected based on Grace's jottings. These images are mainly taken from the photographer's archive of Grace spanning 42 years. However, some external sources were also selected, as in 'Happy Anniversary' (page 4), and 'Anansi and the Inquisitive Bee' (Page 11).

Where external imagery is used, credit is given.

The next stage entailed creating the photomontages using various layout techniques visually interesting to convey the information.

A number of constraints were placed on the elements used for the photomontages in order to maintain some coherence of vernacular. These include rules such as; in primary photographs 'her gaze should never be directly to the lens/viewer, thus maintaining the perception that her consciousness is absent from her surroundings.

Daydream images should appear slightly out of focus and transparent as our daydreams are ethereal, not fully formed, and placed behind Grace's head to give the sense that the images are from her thoughts. Failing this, the daydream image should in some way be in contact with her body as in the case of 'Mary Bell and Her Sisters - Part 2' (page 13).

A few notable departures from these rules, shown in images on pages 35, 36, and 39, incorporated at the center of the book, expand the vernacular. In particular, page 39 a polyptych in which Grace's gaze is towards the camera. This is because the accompanying text on page 38 is written in the manner of a monologue where she engages the unseen viewer, as we sometimes do when re-enacting an occurrence out-of-view, replaying a situation where we wish we had said something other than we had. "*I should have said...*" Yet, whilst all these rules were set and altered, the images also include subplots and meanings conveyed at times through minor elements. Such as in the case of 'Greed' (page 31) there is a £50 note at Grace's feet, which she walks past and ignores, or the text on the pamphlet being held by the young woman in the image 'Field Report' (page 22). Many of these idiosyncrasies will only become visually notable when the images are enlarged, as is the intended case upon the official publication of the book.

The **outcome** of this production has afforded a number of beneficial experiences and was well received and prized by the intended audience.

The initial idea has metamorphosed through several stages owing to complexity in using a layering technique of various substrates to create a single photomontage. Alterations were also made to the production process in order to meet time

constraints and ensure understanding by the intended audience, the commercial and financial viability of the project, and its future reproduction.

The original intention for this enquiry was to determine where Grace's mind continues to return and what were the precursors or triggers that made her thoughts return to that point/place. Nonetheless, the time required to engage in such an undertaking was excessive, so the initial idea was modified to exploring her daydreams and random thoughts.

It is recognized and accepted that third-party interpretations of her jottings will be influenced by their own life's experiences and one cannot expect to adequately express her daydreams based upon their experiences. However, it should be noted, Grace is my mother, we have a very good working and oral relationship and have spent much time together, so she has been privy to the interpretations and was free to edit or expand them. In other words, she has taken a full and active participation in the creation of this book.

Finally, although the decision to have the book commercially produced is still considered the right choice for the intended purpose, the printers failed to meet expectations, even though it was reprinted. Therefore, in future more time should be allotted to this process with allowances for ill health or other external factors.

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Ben Edwards

- 'Grace in this place' is a magnificent body of work. Extremely well researched and beautifully produced. The binding, design and complimentary text can only add to the aesthetics
- LO2 LO3 LO4.LO5 The approach to 'Grace in this place' is extremely sensitive, as you allude to in the critical review. The challenges of individually interperating your practice while retaining the integrity of your subject. You have achieved this delicate balance with elegance. The documentary strategies you have deployed in the sequencing, design and text and image have created the pathos and understanding that are commiserate with your intentions. Your invention of 'Grace in this place' is sophisticated and professional, the images have been well edited and conform with your intentions. The text and image fully realize your vision.
- Extremely thoughtful and analytical critical review. Excellent references and observations. See Frank Hurley, he was manipulating images pre WW1 as in the Shackelton expedition.

You have learnt so much in this module which shows in the work . You have revisited your subject again and again striving to communicate the life and memory of Grace and with such affection and gratitude that you clearly have for your Mother.

A beautiful document.

Your progress has been measured and your departure into collage will be an invaluable addition to your practice, which you can carry forwards onto the next work.

A solid and cohesive body of work...

Tutors Signature

Ben Edwards

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