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A portrait of dementia: the symptoms of demetia as a model for exploring complex and fluid subjectivity in portrait-painting

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**A portrait of dementia: The symptoms of dementia as a model for
exploring complex and fluid subjectivity in portrait-painting**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Creative Arts

from

University of Wollongong

by

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School of The Arts, English and Media

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Abstract

This practice-based doctorate in painting explores the perplexing subjectivities in portraits of people with dementia and my response as an artist in relation to changes in his own identity. The research discusses the intersubjectivity of portraiture through portraying institutionalised residents with dementia in the UnitingCare Ageing Boronia Hostel at Gerringong, New South Wales, and also the artist himself during a three year project from 2011 to 2014. As well as small scale oil paintings from life, the artist documents the physical and psychological alteration in his subjects through photography to reflect the changing relationship between his subjects and himself in their portraits. Through several strategies, including large scale self-portraits, this research provides a decentered perspective of the artist to contextualise theories of subjectivity in contemporary portraiture.

The exegesis that accompanies the exhibition asks two questions: what is the perspective of an artist in relation to people with dementia during the process of portraying from life? And how is a reflexive sense of subjectivity represented in their portraits? Inspired by nineteenth century French artist Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) who portrayed hospital inmates with mental illnesses from life (*Portraits of the Insane*,

1822) the artist embarked on a journey of portraying people with dementia. During the project years, as he depicted the residents in Boronia his own identity was constantly forgotten by them.

A companion to the visual effects in the artist's self-portraits is the work of British artist William Utermohlen (born U.S.A, 1933-2007). Utermohlen was diagnosed with dementia in his late life, but continued to paint for six years. By employing his case study, this thesis also examines the role played by family, friends and the medical establishment as interpreters of the works of an artist with dementia. Unlike the common analysis of Utermohlen's late self-portraits through the pictorial narrative in these works, this thesis examines his selfhood through a procedural memory that was developed in his professional career. Rather than addressing the truth of his psyche and emotional states, this thesis argues that Utermohlen's selfhood is embodied in his act of painting.

This artist's work with dementia patients initiated a sense of the precariousness in his own idea of himself. In responding to the crisis of losing his identity in the Boronia Hostel, the artist takes painting as an analytical vehicle to explore this loss of identity in the social dimension. By installing four series of works in his exhibition *"Searching for*

the Vanishing Subject in Portrait of Dementia” in the Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery, including *Absence* (2011-2014), *Presence* (2012-2014), *In Proximity (self-portrait)* (2011-2014) and *Anonymous Portrait* (2010-2014), the exhibition reveals the consequent psychological impact on the artist though he lives **without** dementia. In order to recreate a similar effect on the viewers, the artist employed over-painting and the tactile texture of paint as the strategy to destabilise the viewer’s subjectivity through her/his process of viewing his paintings. Projected onto the broader relationship between the artist’s marginalised identity and the community, the metaphorical position of the viewer is constructed in the exhibition to convey a need for personal engagement in recognising the identity of people with dementia through the artist’s self-expression under the threat of his own losing identity in Boronia Hostel.

Certification

I, Xi Hsu, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and The Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Xi Hsu

20 August 2014

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Looking for a “dementia subject” in a portrait

1.1 The research journey

As far back as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the human face and representing it through painting and photography. A concern with the face was never absent in my life: I learned anatomy and expression through the face when I was an art student at the Chinese Culture University, Taipei, Taiwan from 2002 to 2006. I painted portraits when I began my career, and I often expressed my love and attachment through painting portraits of friends and family. The face has continued to be my vehicle to investigate the wonders of the human subject: the relationship between body and soul, sitter and artist, and presence and absence. To me, the act of portrayal became a method to understand my subjects: I observed, studied, described, compared, then represented her/him with meaning within a frame.

Not surprisingly, I became interested in interrogating subjectivity during the process of portrayal. At the same time, I was concerned with the relationship between artist and sitter, and its influence on the final representation. I noticed that portraying someone I

loved was more complicated than portraying unknown clients and that different relationships between my sitters and myself always changed the result on canvas. In my experience, the exchange of emotion through the gaze and good conversation during the process of portrayal seemed to be the key to creating a good portrait. I realised that my existential state during the process of portraying the sitter must influence the painting outcome. For example, when I felt optimistic, my sitter would notice my emotion and simultaneously correspond to it through changing her/his pose. I became aware, that based on a mutual understanding, a dynamic transaction was often created in the relationship between myself and my sitters. The calibre of such a relationship gave a more sophisticated quality to the portrait works.

In 2009, as a backpacker visiting Australia from Taiwan, I worked as a casual caregiver at the Baptistcare David Buttfield Centre in Gwelup, Western Australia. It was a residential care facility for elderly people including some with dementia. Twenty-four residents lived in the dementia unit. For reasons of security, the door was locked and not many visitors appeared during the day-time. During six months of working in the David Buttfield Centre, I found that residents in the dementia unit presented themselves unusually in social encounters. Because of their loss of short-term memory, they did not remember the names of their caregivers, families and friends. Their temperaments were

also intriguing. For example, within ten minutes, one resident who had initially treated me like a dear friend could become extremely aggressive for no apparent reason. To me, the loss of communication was perplexing and curious, but I noticed that the symptoms of their dementia and their living condition also affected my own self-identity to a certain degree. For instance, they could not remember me in a face-to-face relationship which in a sense, questioned the significant meaning of my feature in a social encounter. In order to explore these feelings, I decided to portray the residents with dementia in David Buttfield Centre from life. After gaining the trust and consent of their families, I chose five residents as my subjects. After the portraits were made, some of them were given to their families, and I kept others with their families' agreement. During the process of portrayal, I discovered that the traditional rules of portraiture could not be applied to my new subjects. They were never as stable as my usual sitters, sometimes wandering off from one place to another, and eventually their behaviours influenced the quality of their portraits. As a result, though it was not my intention, their portraits looked incomplete and incoherent¹.

At that time, after reviewing the unusual quality of their portraits, I realised that the immediate concern of my works was not the quality of the representation but the

¹ Due to privacy concerns, the portraits that I made for residents in the David Buttfield Centre will not be shown here.

identity of the artist and the sitter shown in the analytic layers of my works. On the one hand, I attempted to create authentic portraits through portraying from life; on the other hand, the subjects' essence that I felt on site was not represented by the finished fragmented images. In a sense, these portraits not only represented the questionable subjectivity of the portrayed image, but also that of the artist whose identity could not be fully represented through the controlled brush works.

Reflecting now on my itinerant identity at that time, I was escaping from my old job as an art teacher and artist in Taiwan. When I came to know the residents with dementia in the David Buttfield Centre, something triggered my emotion and that substantial impression wanted to be narrated. In a sense, their portraits became the tool for me to document my own experience, and convey the idea of interpersonal relationships in difficult conditions. Although remaining unclear about my artistic goal at that time, I created many portraits of the residents over two continuous months.

During the process of portrayal, the reaction of the sitters with dementia to my identity was intriguing to the sitters with dementia. I noticed that I was lost in their memory; I became somewhat invisible for them. Metaphorically, I sometimes *disappeared* in their disinterested gaze as if I became just another object around them. At other times, they

returned from their trance and looked at me happily as if I was a close friend just arrived, or contrarily, they turned dramatically defensive as if I was invading their space. In addition, verbal communication was also blocked due to the malfunction of their cognition. Because of all these factors, I was often in a passive position during the process of portrayal and interaction with them.

My experience at the David Buttfield Centre became a precursor to this doctoral project at the University of Wollongong. Unfortunately, without sufficient supportive documentation to analyse some details of these earlier portraits, I could not further study how the portraits influenced my identity at that time or what happened during the process of portraying people with dementia in their living environment. Therefore, I planned to start a similar but more complex project at the UnitingCare Ageing Boronia Hostel in Gerringong, New South Wales from 2011 to 2014 as a research project for the Doctor of Creative Arts degree. As a core component of my doctoral degree in visual arts, this project undertook to assess the meaning of portraying people with dementia and the represent-ability of its symptoms through visual arts.

In her book *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997), sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot advocates that portrayal should be regarded as a methodology in

human science research. As a portrait is made through observation, description and representation of the details of the subject, it inevitably represents the perspective of the artist (p.9). In comparison to the traditional methodology of human science research that asks for an objective perspective in research, Lawrence-Lightfoot suggests that the act of portrayal is to proactively embrace the complexity of human subjects and their paradox (p.12). To Lawrence-Lightfoot, a portraitist's focus is not to depict the idiosyncrasies of the sitter such as imperfections or ideal features, but to inscribe the artist's self into the process of portrayal, which ultimately represents the artist's values and viewpoints in the social context. This reflexive sense of selfhood of the artist in the portrait of her/his sitter was summarised in Lawrence-Lightfoot's definition of the portraitist:

...the portraitist is interested not only in producing complex, subtle description in context but also in searching for the central story, developing a convincing and authentic narrative...In creating the text, the portraitist is alert to the aesthetic principles of composition and form, rhythm, sequence, and metaphor. The portraitist's standard, then, is one of the authentic, capturing the essence and resonance of the actor's experience and perspective through the details of action and thought revealed in context (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p.12).

Pragmatically, the perspective of the artist is representable because one criterion is unquestionably endorsed in the relationship between the artist and the sitter: the

consciousness of both parties. In order to complete the process of portrayal, the artist and the sitter must have a kind of consensus of participation. Rather than a simple linear process of production, the act of portrayal includes several social practices between the artist and the sitter: talking, listening, and sometimes intensive looking at each other. They all create a short-term memory for both parties to continue playing the roles in the temporary relationship of portrayal. One can argue that without these essential characters, a traditional process of portrayal cannot be made.

1.2 Research question and aim

In this practice-based thesis, I aim to answer two questions: Firstly, what is the perspective of an artist in relation to people with dementia during the process of portraying from life? And secondly, how is a reflexive sense of subjectivity represented in their portraits? In order to answer these questions, I firstly examine the perspective of several artists in western art history who have portrayed sufferers of mental illness and dementia. Secondly, in order to analyse the process of portraying people with dementia in a residential care facility, I describe my project of portraying residents in Boronia Hostel. Thirdly, I examine the radical relationship between artist and dementia through the case study of British artist William Utermohlen (1933-2007) who had portrayed himself since he was diagnosed with dementia in 1995. Finally, I suggest that the

position of the viewer in my exhibitions is the essential element in actualising the experience of both the identity of people with dementia and the artist. In particular, the viewer's subjectivity is a necessary component in the totality of my exhibition *Searching for the vanishing subject in portraits of dementia* (2014) that included expressive paintings and self-portraits; the portraits of residents of Boronia Hostel and the documentary instant photographs. Altogether the works reflect an unstable subjectivity under the impact of the symptoms of dementia.

The order of chapters in this thesis embodies the process of taking a mobile perspective towards the symptoms of dementia. In Chapter Two, the third person perspective of artists in the history of portraying people with mental illness and in particular dementia is represented through their art works. In Chapter Three, I document the influence of the symptoms of dementia on myself as an artist through the live portrayal of people with dementia that suggests the importance of employing the first person perspective in my research. In Chapter Four, through examining the details of the process of painting, an analysis of British artist William Utermohlen as an artist whose subjectivity is shaped by his symptoms of dementia and his interpreters of his late self-portraits signifies the instability of the subjectivity in portraits of people with dementia. In Chapter Five, an exhibition documents the intriguing qualities of the subjectivity that is discussed in

Chapters Two to Five, and it invites the viewer to experience the impact of the loss of subjectivity of people with dementia, the artist and her/himself. Throughout the five chapters, these fluctuating perspectives eventually signify the complexity of the symptoms of dementia and their relationship with to artist and the viewer.

Chapter 2

The subject matter of portraiture: the relationship between the artist and a sitter with mental illness

In this chapter, I explore the almost untouched territory of painting portraits of people with dementia. Employing the history of portraits of people with mental illness as my vehicle, I focus on the study of the relationship between the artist and mentally ill subjects during the process of portrayal. In order to examine the sense of reflexive subjectivity in portraits of subjects with mental illness, I employ a case study of the French artist Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) who portrayed sufferers of mental illness in the series *The Portrait of The Insane* (1822-1823). In comparing him with the perspective of contemporary artists in portraying people with dementia, I suggest that Géricault's process of portrayal pose an important question regarding the subjectivity of sitters with dementia in relation to the position of artist in the inter-subjective relationship. In addition, as a powerful strategy that is employed by many artists such as French artist Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), I suggest that portrayal from life can be used in investigating the subjectivity of people with dementia in my art project.

2.1 The image of people with mental illness: historical overview

Portraiture is a genre of western arts that deals intensively with human subjectivity. In her book *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Woodall, 1997), art historian Joanna Woodall suggests that Renaissance Italian architect and artist Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) believed that the power of portrait “makes the dead seem almost alive” after the subject's ultimately physical absence (Woodall, 1997, p.11). This sense of a preservation of identity through portraiture often reflected power and social class. Therefore, the subject in the portrait varied through different periods in art history: aristocracy in the sixteenth century, the non-noble elite in the seventeenth, and the bourgeois in the eighteenth (Crozier and Greenhalgh, 1988). As many portraits were commissioned by patrons who preferred an ideal or classical image, the represented figure tended to be standardised, with an up-right body and flowing garments, the gaze towards the viewer was often calm and reserved. Demonstrating the symbolic function of objects in portraiture, Woodall suggested that typical portraits signified personal achievements rather than individuality (Woodall, 1997, p.15). At the same time, while traditional portraitists from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century created the ideal look of their subjects, few artists before the sixteenth century investigated the daily life of their subjects (West, 2004).

The representation of humble individuals and realistic daily life can be traced back to the Hellenistic Age. *Drunken Old Woman* (200–180 BC) is the representation of a realistic image of an old woman holding a jug of wine (indicated by the grape vine around the neck of the jug), whose facial expression suggests that she is drunk and semi-unconscious. There are several details that imply the artist's intention to recreate this dramatic scene for viewers: she looks up with an ambiguous expression that is blissful and haggard at the same time. In addition, her lack of self-consciousness is intensified by the robe slipping from her upper arm to reveal her breast, indicating her unawareness of her inebriated appearance.

According to art historian Shearer West (2004), expressive emotion in portraiture was uncommon before the twentieth century. However, she also discusses the series of “character heads” (1770-1783) created by eighteenth century sculptor Franz Xavier Messerschmidt (1736-1783). His work demonstrates that an interest in investigating the relationship between facial expression and human subjectivity is not only found in modern and contemporary artists. Art historian Michael Krapf (Krapf *et al.*, 2003) argued that Messerschmidt's series of “character heads” was largely drawn from his personal feeling of solitude as a man living with schizophrenia. In his work *Arch-Rascal*, the distorted face represents the unspoken ambiguous feeling of his suffering: the head

is withdrawn while the neck is contracted in the trunk, and the eyes are tightly squeezed together as if in pain, or suppressed laughter (Baum, 1980).

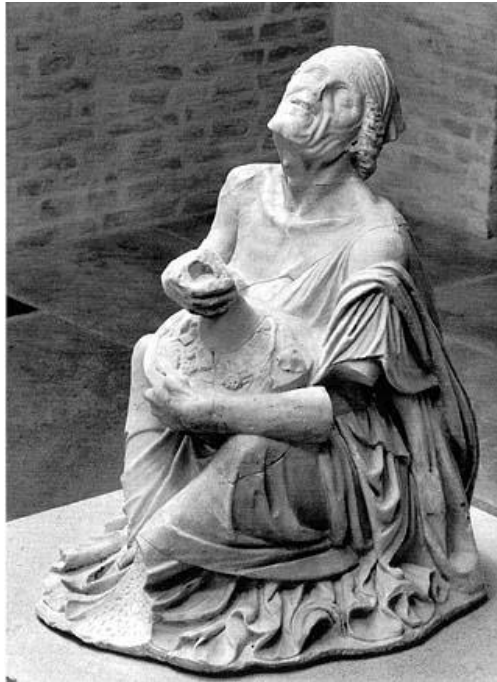


Figure 1: Anonymous, *Drunken Old Woman*, Marble, Height 92 cm, Staatliche Antikensammlung, Munich. Existing documents all indicate that this statue should be attributed to an artist called Myron, who made the copy after a Greek original in the 2nd century BC (200–180 BC).



Figure 2: Franz Xavier Messerschmidt, *An Arch-Rascal* (No.33 in the series of “character heads”), after 1770, tin-lead alloy, Height 38.5 cm, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.

However, Messerschmidt was not the only one who investigated the inner world of human subjects with mental illness in the eighteenth century. The English artist Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) had also noticed the importance of emotion in portraying features. In a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth in 1771, he had complained of his contemporary portraitists' avoidance of representing realistic human features and preferring to create certain typical middle class personae through clothes and symbols:

Had a picture voice, action, etc. to make itself known as Actors have upon the Stage, no disguise would be sufficient to conceal a person: but only a face confined to one view and not a muscle to move to say, 'Here I am' falls very hard upon the poor Painter who perhaps is not within a mile of the truth in painting the Face only (Dartmouth, 1887, p.194).

British art historian John Gage suggests that Gainsborough's concern about facial expression in portraiture posed questions about the fundamental relationship between the face, portraiture and the psyche of the sitter: a portrait with likeness did not always represent an accessible identity (Woodall, 1997). Far from creating intimacy with its viewers, a portrait can present a blockage to the viewer envisaging the inner world of the portrayed subject. To Gainsborough, the expression of emotion was as important as the likeness in representing an authentic subject because it embodied the vivid quality of

the portrayed subject that a static face was not able to represent.

To see the uniqueness of this aspect, one can compare the works of Messerschmidt with other artists in eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries such as the Neoclassical French artist Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) (Figure 3) and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) (Figure 4). The figures in the *Oath of the Horatii* by David were like mannequins on the stage, and the features in Ingres works were often idealised and lacking strong emotion. In a sense, facial expression became another way of accessing the human psyche though the artist's interest in constructing pictorial narrative through human subjects was still common in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.



Figure 3: Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1784, Oil on canvas, 329.8 cm × 424.8 cm, Louvre, Paris. David created a pictorial narrative in his work (1784) in which the faces and figures were static elements in a theatrical scene.



Figure 4: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Portrait of Princesse Albert de Broglie*, 1853, Oil on canvas, 121.3 cm × 90.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Almost synchronously with Neoclassical artists and Gainsborough in the late eighteenth century, European physicians and psychiatrists started to collaborate with visual artists in the burgeoning research of medicine and arts (Rhodes, 2000). One of their aims was to understand the relationship between face and character. Physiognomy at that time was believed to reveal the inner truth of human subjects through investigation of the subject's countenance (Sobieszek, 1999). In his book *Ghost in the Shell: Photography and the Human Soul, 1850-2000: Essays on Camera Portraiture* (1999), curator and writer Robert A. Sobieszek investigates the relationship between the human face, its subjectivity and photography. According to Sobieszek, physiognomist Johann Kaspar

Lavater (1741-1801) who published the treatise *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (*Essays on physiognomy for the promotion of the knowledge and love of mankind*) in 1789, was at the frontier of probing the subjectivity of people with mental illness in the eighteenth century (1999, p. 92-93).

Lavater (1840) was keen to classify the relationship between certain human traits and inner truth. He employed geometric rules intensively in measuring the distance between facial features and their link to temperament. Artists who were commissioned by physicians and psychiatrists needed to create realistic images for their medical treatises, and also to intensify the symptoms of the depicted subjects in order to suit the texts of authors (Sobieszek, 1999). Therefore, the function of these artistic collaborators was not simply to document objectively what was in their vision, but to create a convincing visual narrative for the reader. Generally, the images of people with mental illness were depicted as rather desperate or empty without a reciprocal gaze towards the viewers. Rather than unveiling the subjectivity of people with mental illness, the artists of these images threw into question the authenticity of representation in portraiture. For example, as Figure 5 indicates, Lavater described one subject's appearance as "the strong grimace of an impotent madman, who distorts himself without meaning. In the eye is neither

attention, fury, littleness, nor greatness” (1840, p.447). This subjective description highlighted Lavater’s observation of people with mental illness and showed that he did not simply follow the rules of the ratio and composition of facial features that he employed in most sections of his book.

Later in the nineteenth century, two physiognomic treatises focused on the facial expression of people with mental illness: Scottish anatomist Sir Charles Bell’s (1774-1842) “*Essays on The Anatomy of Expression in Painting*” (1807) and French psychiatrist Jean-Etienne-Dominique Esquirol’s (1772-1840) *Des Maladies Mentales* (1838). Both of them studied the transience of facial expression and its relation to mental illness (Sobieszek, 1999).

In opposition to the traditional physiognomic studies that suggested connections between the look of animals and humans,² Bell believed that facial emotion was a privilege of human beings and that it was controlled not by consciousness but the soul (Sobieszek, 1999, p. 45). He pointed out that several types of strong expression could be

² Both Lavater and seventeenth century French artist Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), who published a physiognomic study called *Les expressions des passions de l'âme , représentées en plusieurs testes gravées d'après les dessins de feu Mr. Le Brun* (Expression of the passions of the soul, represented in a number of heads engraved after the drawing of the late Mr. Le Brun) in 1727 classified several temperaments and characteristics by examining the shape of the head and the ratio of facial features. They believed that the stronger similarity between several types of animal heads and human facial traits, the more alike the temperament of both (Sobieszek, 1999).

seen as evidence of the human soul:

To learn the character of the human countenance when devoid of expression, and reduced to the state of brutality, we must have recourse to the lower animals; and as I have already hinted, study their expression, their timidity, their watchfulness, their state of excitement, and their ferociousness. (Bell, 1807, p.63)

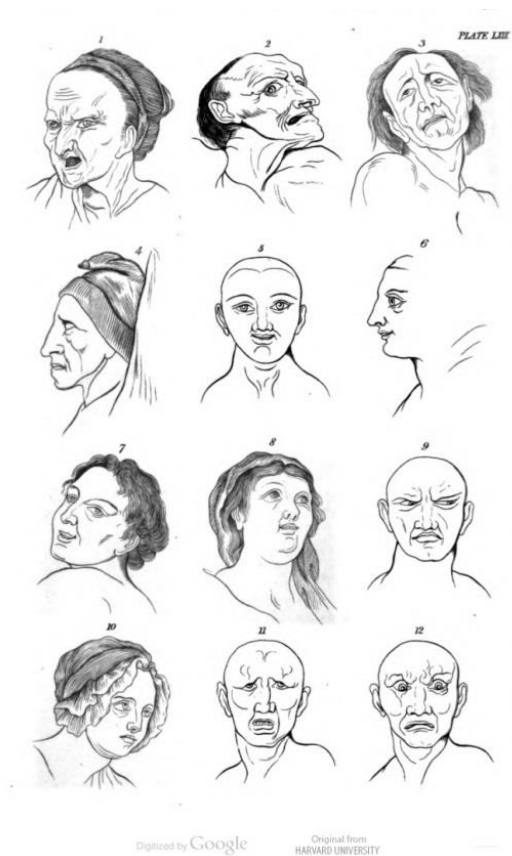


Figure 5: This illustration selected in Johann Kaspar Lavater's work *Essays on physiognomy* distinguished different kinds of mental illness through features. This English version was published in 1840. They are titled *idiot*, *impotent madman* and *imbecility*, p.446-447, Plate LXIX, n.d..

Bell also employed strong facial expressions to represent people with mental illness.

Figure 6 is one of the drawings that Bell created for his book, of the seemingly naked madman who was chained and perhaps imprisoned. Sitting on the floor, his gaze is

furious and aggressive, however his folded arms suggest that he was also defensive and withdrawn. Unshaven and ungroomed, his appearance is indicative of the way people with mental illness were treated in asylums. At the same time though, a humane perspective towards people with mental illness emerged from medical practitioners. In 1803, one of the leading German physicians Johann Christian Reil (1759-1813) had observed and commented on the living conditions of mentally ill inmates,

we incarcerate these miserable creatures like criminals in cages in abandoned jails, near to the hovels of owls in desolate caverns beyond the city gates, or in damp dungeons of prisons, where never a pitying look of a philanthropist penetrates; and we let them rot there in their own excrement, in chains. (Reil qtd. in Klein, 1998, p.205)

In this regard, Bell's illustration represents the paradox of the emerging humane perspective towards people with mental illness that appeared in the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, his depiction represents Reil's sympathetic description of mentally ill patients; on the other hand, the picture shows that people with madness were isolated and alienated from society. For Bell's readers, even though the subject expressed strong emotion through his face, the image of the chain implied that the subject was not perceived as a sane individual. In other words, the physical restraint on the subject was not caused by his lack of a soul, but the immediate danger that he might

present to the public or himself.

Interestingly, images of people with mental illness seemed to embody the standard perspective towards mental illness by the end of the eighteenth century. The traditional viewpoint of a polarised relationship between body and soul was still popular at this time according to French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) who published his work *Folie et Dérison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (History of Madness) in 1961. Bell's illustration, as well as the description of people with mental illness in asylums, implied that the bodies of people with mental illness were often considered to have an "animal status" that imprisoned the soul (Foucault, 2006, p.423) .



Figure 6: Sir Charles Bell, *the Madman*, from Bell's *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting* (1807), p.153, Engraving, n.d., Courtesy of the Wellcome Trustees.

Sobieszek (1999) suggested that in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, this aspect was still seen in other collaborations between medical experts and artists. For example, psychiatrist Jean-Etienne-Dominique Esquirol had commissioned Ambroise Tardieu (born France, 1788-1841), among many artists to illustrate his case studies of mentally ill patients in the Salpêtrière hospital. Twenty-seven engravings were then selected for his *Des maladies mentales* (1838). Esquirol expressed the importance of studying and documenting the faces of people with mental illness:

The study of the physiognomy of the insane is not a matter of idle curiosity. It helps to define the character of the ideas and emotions that fuel the lunacy of the mentally ill. I have had drawings made of more than two hundred insane patients for this purpose, and shall perhaps publish my observations on this interesting subject some day (Eitner, 1983, p.243).

Figure 7 shows a raging inmate who was restrained by a straitjacket. His facial expression implies his tendency to commit violent acts. As in Figure 6, the sense of alienation was constructed through representing both the symptoms and expressive appearance. However, this perspective was transformed in early nineteenth century Europe. Writer John M. MacGregor (1989) who specialised in the study of the art-works created by and representing people with insanity, argues that Tardieu evolved his perspective on his subjects in asylums throughout many years of working for Esquirol.

Compared with Figure 7, the picture created by Tardieu (Figure 8) shows more sympathy towards his subjects. MacGregor argues that the “mania sufferer” in the earlier work (Figure 7) of Tardieu is “completely lacking in both objectivity and individuality” (MacGregor, 1989, p.40). In the later works, the figure appears in a more portrait-like format: the size of the face is enlarged, with the details of personal traits depicted, and the gaze toward the viewer seems reciprocal, looking for recognition (Figure 8). In Figure 8, although her facial expression suggests a trace of anxiety, she seems well-cared for: her hair is groomed and her clothes in order.

According to MacGregor, this transformation in representation resulted from the increasing experience Tardieu gained from engaging with people with mental illness in asylums (MacGregor, 1989, p. 40). Although MacGregor’s assumption might seem convincing, without actual evidence from Tardieu’s biography, it is difficult to justify this point of view; Tardieu’s sense of reflection in portraying people with mental illness still requires further examination. In particular, if the experience of portraying people with mental illness did resonate with his life as an artist, one must examine in what context the artist encountered mental illness.



Figure 7: Ambroise Tardieu, *Figure in Restraining Garment*, from J.-E.-D Esquirol's Essay *Des maladies mentales* (1838), III, Plate 7, Engraving, 14.5cm × 9.2cm, The National Library of Medicine, Bethesda.



Figure 8: Ambroise Tardieu, *A Demonomaniac*, from J.-E.-D Esquirol's Essay *Des maladies mentales* (1838), III, Plate 6, Engraving, n.d..

2.2 Théodore Géricault's *The Portrait of The Insane*

Prior to the publication of Esquirol's work *Des maladies mentales*, representing the third generation of modern psychiatry in France, Esquirol's student, French physician Étienne-Jean Georget (1795 – 1828) commissioned artist Jean-Louis André Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) to create a series of paintings entitled "*The Portrait of The Insane*" (Figure 9) around 1822 to 1823. This was Géricault's last series of portraits before his early death. All the existing five portraits were finished in a traditional format: the upright bust and the face was the focal point. Like the later work of Tardieu (Figure 8), the emotion shown on the features of the face was not expressive. All subjects were anonymous, without biographical information, excepting the symptoms of their mental illness. The subjects did not confront viewers with their gaze, some of them even looked slightly timid and withdrawn. Compared with other series of portraits that were made by Géricault, this series of works were presented in an unadorned way: the subjects' humble clothes almost merged into the dark background where no decorative symbols were attached to imply the social identity of the sitter. Without exaggeration of facial emotion, these portraits were often considered as the representation of the psychological states of both the artist and the sitters (Eitner, 1983, p. 246).

Géricault's concept in making this series of works still remains intriguing (MacGregor,

1989). Although it was part of a series of commissioned works, many studies believed that the plain format and honest depiction were the representation of Géricault's scientific curiosity (Rosenthal, 2012). For Georget, this series of portraits suggested Géricault's intention to rectify the stigmatised image of sufferers of mental illness (Miller, 1941). Other studies considered that these works were a reflection of the mental distress of Géricault himself (Eitner, 1983). As a contrast, these works could also be seen as the exploitation of the image of mentally ill subjects in the psychiatric system (Boime, 1991, p. 89-90) or as image templates for students of Georget during lectures (Berger, 1952, p. 158).

Lorenz E. A. Eitner (born Czech Republic, 1919-2009), as one of the leading Géricault scholars, suggests this series of portraits was made through an encounter between Georget and Géricault. As both of them died tragically at age thirty-three, their collaboration was romanticised as the series represented two very talented professionals who reflected their short but fulfilled lives in these portraits.³

Although having a close relationship with his teacher Esquirol, Georget had different

³ It is worth noting, Géricault's strong interest in investigating the inner state of his models was shown in many of his late works. For example, the figures in his work *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819) seemed to represent the despair of the soldiers and sailors who were cast adrift on the raft. Eitner also implied that the portraits of the insane influenced Géricault's mental distress evident in *The Raft of the Medusa* (Eitner, 1983, p.202).

views regarding physiognomy. Unlike Esquirol, Georget was not very interested in documenting the facial expression of people with mental illness in his early career in Salpêtrière hospital. There were no illustrations in any of his publications or original texts describing this series of portraits (Eitner, 1983, p. 242). To emphasise his opinion of the appearance of people with mental illness, he wrote:

in conclusion, those who have had considerable experience in observing the insane will not contradict me when I put forward the opinion that in the large majority of cases, these patients look no different from individuals who are in perfect health (Georget qtd. in MacGregor, 1989, p.39).

Then surprisingly, his perspective dramatically changed after 1821. Eitner pointed out that Georget had initially embarked on his investigation of mental illness by developing his own expertise named *monomania*, but in later years, he became interested in the moral and social aspects of his subject (1983, p. 244). The subjects in the existing five portraits in the series *The Portrait of the Insane* were kleptomania, kidnapping, delusion of military authority, gambling and envy; all of the subjects were considered to have criminal tendencies. Eitner (1983) suggested that Georget might empathise with subjects with mental illness through his personal experience—his own self-destructive habits of work. Drawing from his own experience, Georget even stated that certain

types of people may also suffer from mental disorder, “poets, men of letters, scholars, philosophers, and artists” (Georget, 1821, p.345). In a sense, this bald statement could be seen as favourable to the decriminalisation of people with mental illness, as Georget might have noticed himself as one of many sufferers.

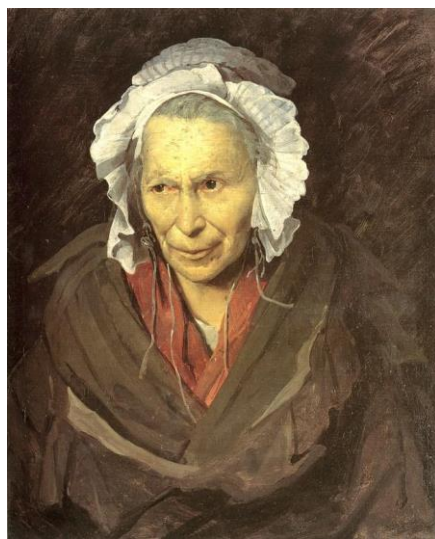


Figure 9: Théodore Géricault, *Portrait of A Woman Suffering from Obsessive Envy (Insane Woman)*, 1822, Oil on canvas, 72 cm × 58cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, Lyon. This is one of the portrait in the series of *The Portrait of The Insane*.

By comparison with a medical expert like Georget, the reason Géricault took up Georget’s commissioned project of depicting people with mental illness can be related to the difficult last years of his life: Géricault had suffered from physical and mental disturbance for years including injuries from a horse-riding accident (Eitner, 1983), and depression accompanied by paranoid delusions which may have been associated with

his close relatives' mental illness.⁴

Eitner suggested that Géricault was aware of his own mental distress and intended to ease his anxiety and depression by travelling to England after painting *The Raft of The Medusa* (1818-1819). But when Géricault's friend French painter François Gérard (1770-1837) questioned his motivation to travel, Géricault replied: "What I lack is the trial of misfortune" (Eitner, 1983, p.209). During the stay in England, he created several realistic drawings of unusual subjects including one disturbing image of a public execution by hanging. In this picture (Figure 10), three criminals are waiting for the execution of their death penalty. The face of the criminal in the middle is covered by a bag or mask; the face of the criminal at right is about to be covered by the executioner. Compared with the depiction of the other two criminals and the crowd, Géricault gives much more detail to the criminal's face on the left. This criminal looks directly at the viewers as if they will witness the execution. His expression is ambiguous, it appears despairing but also somewhat determined (Figure 11). The figure who stands next to him is perhaps a clergyman who was listening to the last words of the man about to be hanged. The criminal seems to fall into his own thoughts without showing his regret, while his closing hands contrarily suggests that he is nonetheless pious as if he

⁴ Eitner (1983) suggests that two of Géricault's close relatives had died insane including his maternal grandfather and an uncle of his mother's side.

understood his fate. A sense of dignity in his features replaces passion and rage. The viewers are witnessing a person who is going to be hanged, not a criminal.

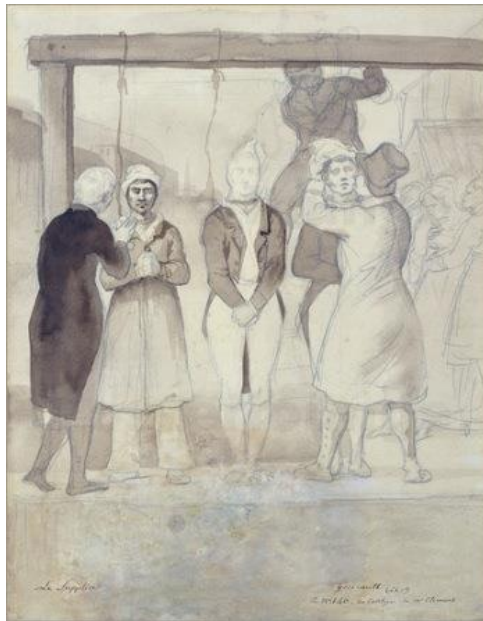


Figure 10: Théodore Géricault, *Public Hanging in London*, Pencil and Wash, c. 1820, n.d., Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen.



Figure 11: The detail of *Public Hanging in London*.

In a similar way, there is a sense of humanity in the perplexing expressions of the figures in *The Portrait of The Insane*, and they do not directly show the influence Géricault had learned from physiognomy. Although Eitner believes that Géricault's physical and psychological distress caused him to have a more empathetic understanding of people with misfortune, Eitner also assumed that *The Portrait of The Insane* might be a natural development of the artist's style since he often focused on marginalised groups in his works. Although there is a similarity between the features presented in Géricault's work and that of Georges-François-Marie Gabriel (1775-ca. 1836) (Figure 12),⁵ who had collaborated with Georget's teacher Esquirol and also reproduced the work of Tardieu (Figure 8), the expression of the subjects in *Portrait of A Woman Suffering from Obsessive Envy* by Géricault was very different from the woman in Tardieu's work. Compared with Tardieu, the woman in Géricault's work (Figure 9) had asymmetrical eyes and a longer upper lip, which made her gaze appearing more impenetrable. It seems likely that Géricault had referenced the documentary works of Tardieu and Gabriel, but intended to paint a different expression according to both his observation and creativity.

Because of Géricault's talent and skill in painting, it is commonly accepted that the

⁵ Boime (1991) argued that Géricault may have seen Gabriel's works while Géricault visited Esquirol.

series of *The Portrait of The Insane* was made from life (MacGregor, 1989; Eitner, 1983). However, none of the existing studies presented any documentation of the making of the series or the relationship that Géricault had with his sitters. Compared with another unusual subject matter of Géricault's, the cadaver (Figure 13), one can tell the quality of emotion and dignity that Géricault brought into his portrait works. For example, in order to convincingly represent the scene of the tragic event in his work *The Raft of The Medusa* (1819), Géricault used some unorthodox methods of study, including painting cadavers and keeping body parts in his studio (MacGregor, 1989). In many ways, painting the cadaver is unlike painting a person from life because it lacks any possibility of the live interchange that is created by the interaction between the artist and the sitter. Seen in Figure 13, the amputated heads strangely carry a sense of humanity. Focusing on the facial expression, one can see that the left one looks like a person in sleep and the right one seems to lose consciousness in a kind of ecstasy. In a sense, whether or not the subjects in the series of *The Portrait of The Insane* were aware of the existence of Géricault on site, Géricault's empathetic vision of human subject is represented in both his anatomical studies and his portrait works.



Figure 12: Georges-François-Marie Gabriel, *A Demonomaniac*, from J.-E.-D Esquirol's Essay *Des maladies mentales* (1838), VIII, Plate 4, .Lithograph, n.d..



Figure 13: Théodore Géricault, *Study of Two Severed Heads*, Oil on Canvas, c. 1819, n.d., National Museum, Stockholm.

2.3 The portrayal of people with mental illness after the invention of photography: the study of Robert A. Sobieszek's *Ghost in the Shell*

Inter-personal relationships between an artist and sitters with mental illness not only disappeared in the analytical studies of *The Portrait of The Insane*, but are also absent from portraits of people with mental illness after the invention of photography in 1839.

Photography replaced painting in documenting the appearance of the people with mental illness for physicians and physiognomists because of its precision in representation. According to art curator Robert A. Sobieszek (1999), the neurologist Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne (born France, 1806-1875) employed photography to capture the expression of his patients while their facial muscles were contorted under electroshock (Figure 14). Duchenne collected numerous photographs from his experiments in his *Mecanisme de la Physionomie Humaine* (The Mechanism of Human Physiognomy) (1862) to map out human emotions and their corresponding features.

Although Duchenne did not focus on the study of the features of people with mental illness, his method challenged the fundamental relationship between the inner state of the subject and its representation in portraiture. Duchenne's collection of pictures may not be called portraits as his intention was not to represent the essence of his patients, but rather his work suggested that human expression could be created by an external

stimulus without inner emotion to show features in motion. After Duchenne, one of his most famous students, neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (born France, 1825-1893) also adopted photography to document his mentally ill patients reacting to stimulation such as very loud sounds in Salpêtrière hospital (Figure 15). During his years of practice, Charcot created an event every Tuesday called the “theatre of the passions” (Figure 16) for audiences who were keen to understand the “uncontrollable fits and rages of hysterical bodies” (Sobieszek, 1999, p.76). This controversial method embodied an unbalanced power in social relations and in 1996, sociologist John O’Neill criticised Charcot’s display as representing the patriarchal medical system’s control over the female body. In a sense, photography satisfied the need of the public for grotesque images. In addition, the reality of the sufferings of people with mental illness became theatrical, so that the audience’s perspective became voyeuristic. Photography captured the theatre of the mentally ill with great realism and replaced painting as the main medium to represent people with mental illness.



Figure 14: Photographer Adrian Tournachon (1825-1903) had worked for G.-B. Duchenne de Boulogne in documenting this experiment. This picture represents *The Muscle of Fright, of Terror*, fig. 64 from *Mecanisme de la physionomie Humaine*, albumen print, Horblit Collection, The Houghton Library, Harvard University.



Figure 15: Paul Regnard, *Beginning of an Attack (Cry)*, from *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878), collotype print, photograph courtesy Yale University. Harvey Cushing/ John Hay Whitney Medical Library.



Figure 16: Pierre Aristide André Brouillet (born France, 1857-1914), *A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière*, Oil, 1887, 290 cm × 430 cm, Paris Descartes University, Paris.

At the same time, photography rendered the relationship between artists, mentally ill patients and medical experts more intricate. Unlike artists who needed a longer time span to create what they perceived, the camera was able to capture the fleeting moment and transform the extraordinary scene into a document of people with mental illness. As the subjectivity of people with mental illness was represented by camera rather than a living human hand, the documentation of people with mental illness became mechanical and showed lack of empathy. Writer Susan Sontag (born U.S.A., 1933-2004) points out this characteristic of photography in her book *On Photography* (1979). She argues that photography often creates a distance between the viewer and the represented subject rather than closing the separation. She stated that:

to suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more—and more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize. An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs... (Sontag, 1979, p.20).

Although the invention of photography allowed pictures of people with mental illness to become accessible to the public, photography also took away the essence of emotion expressed even in portraits painted for medical purposes such as those by Géricault. In a sense, what had been replaced was not only the tradition of portraying people with mental illness, but also the experience of artists in relation to subjects with mental illness who were observed, described and refined by the artist's living mind.

The link between mental illness and art did not entirely disappear. Breaking from academic art, twentieth century artists including Surrealists, Expressionists and Outsider Artists took mental illness as their vehicle to challenge the vision of traditional art (MacGregor, 1989). For example, French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) was inspired by the art works of people with mental illness selected by German psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933). These appeared in his 1922 book *Bildnerei der*

Geisteskranken (Artistry of the Mentally Ill) (Rhodes, 2000). Art Brut,⁶ a term meaning “raw art” (Rexer, 2005, p.20) was, created by Dubuffet in the mid 1940s to illustrate the particular characteristic of works created by people with mental illness, children, or self-taught artists (MacGregor, 1989). According to English art historian Colin Rhodes (2000), Dubuffet employed several significant patterns and compositional techniques used in the works of mentally ill patients such as *Untitled* (1917-1922) by Swiss psychiatric patient Heinrich Anton Müller (1865–1930) (Figure 17). Titled *Man with a Rose*, Dubuffet’s painting seems primitive and unadorned because the physiognomic rules of portraiture were not applied in his depiction of the unknown subject (Figure 18). Influenced by Müller’s paintings, Dubuffet viewed mental illness as a type of knowledge rather than as a stigma. Through his work, the genre of portraits of people with mental illness changed entirely while the meaning of the “portrait” itself was also transformed.⁷

⁶ This term was translated to *Outsider Art* by the British writer Roger Cardinal.

⁷ According to art historian Ernst van Alphen (2005), an incoherent human subjectivity was achieved by contemporary artists through portraiture. For instance, American artists Cindy Sherman (1954-) created a series of portraits named *Untitled Film Still* (1977-1980) to challenge the relationship between authentic subject and representation. Employing her own face in this series of works, she blurred the boundary between self-portraiture and the reenactment of role play in modern cinematographic images.



Figure 17: Heinrich Anton Müller, *Untitled*, black pencil and chalk on toned paper, c. 1917-1922, 78 cm × 82 cm, de l'Art Brut, Lausanne.

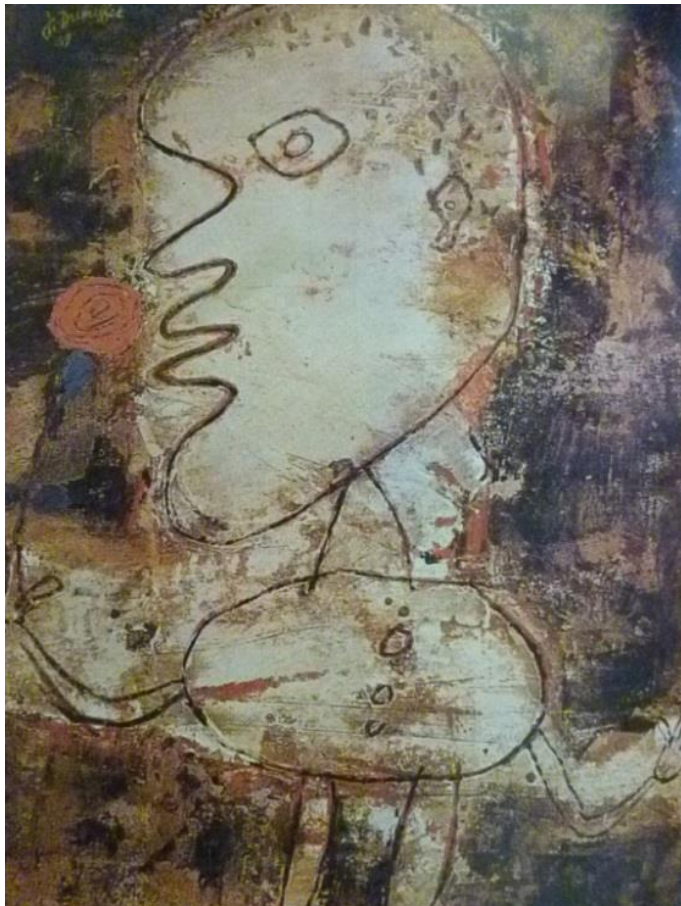


Figure 18: Jean Dubuffet, *Man with a Rose*, Mixed medium, 1949, 116 cm × 89 cm.

2.4 Representation of people with dementia in contemporary portraiture: the absence of intersubjectivity in the relationship between the artist and the sitter

Among the types of mental illness that are currently discussed by experts from different disciplines, dementia is one of the most common topics. Neuro-physical deterioration such as loss of memory, decreases in cognition, and changes in perception affect the daily life of people with dementia. The risks claimed to be the triggers of dementia are age, intoxication, or even head injuries; and many types of dementia correspond to those risks: Alzheimer's Disease (AD), Vascular Dementia, Frontal Temporal Dementia (FTD) and Lewy Body Dementia (LBD) (Boltz *et al.*, 2011, p. 163-165). Dementia is considered a type of mental illness because the deterioration of the brain afflicts people psychologically. Delusions or hallucinations usually accompany dementia in relationship to the specific sections of the brain that are damaged (Holroyd, 2000). Additionally, developing difficulties in participating in social life may result in depression and anxiety. For example, a person with dementia may suffer from low confidence in performing tasks requiring memory and so withdraws from social life (Bandura, 1989). Thus dementia not only influences sufferers physically, but also socially.

Although dementia is one of the most pervasive mental illnesses, artists do not

commonly adopt it as their subject matter. The broad category of mental illness encompasses several types of psychological disease including hallucination and hysteria, as well as ambiguous terms like insanity or madness (Critchley, 1987, MacGregor, 1989). In companion with other severe diseases that have been addressed by contemporary artists, such as cancer and AIDS, dementia has not been sufficiently represented in contemporary art. As one of the biggest challenges for medical scientists and practitioners in this century, dementia is called the “plague of the twenty-first century” (St. George's University of London, 2013) with a bad reputation for damaging personal health, identity and social relationships⁸. The number of people with dementia has increased substantially. Several astonishing figures show that one in four Australian over eighty five years old have dementia, and that there will be around 115 million people with dementia in the world by 2050 (Alzheimer's Australia Association, 2014).

The history of dementia can be traced back to 2000 B.C. when ancient Egyptians discovered that memory malfunction accompanied the process of aging (Boller and Forbes, 1998). Much later, Hippocrates (ca. 500-400 B.C.E) was the first scholar to locate the brain as the corresponding seat of mentality (Loeb, 1995). In medieval times,

⁸ In her book “Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors,” American writer Susan Sontag (2001) argues that the representation of diseases in culture and art reflects our deep misunderstanding of some diseases, and how we lay moral judgments on their sufferers. She pointed out that the origin of the word “plague” in Latin *Plaga* “has long been used metaphorically as the highest standard of collective calamity, evil, scourge...as well as being a general name for many frightening diseases.” (Sontag, 1988, p.132).

the image of dementia was linked with superstition and mysticism as the sufferers' mind was understood to be afflicted by devils (Loeb. 1995). For instance, the philosopher Roger Bacon (1214-1294) commented that senility was a consequence of the original sin (Albert *et al.*, 1991). Since the fourteenth century, dementia has had many negative stereotypes, though it has been gradually demystified. Even though some scientific methods have been introduced into the study of mental illness since the seventeenth century, dementia is still a stigmatised illness. For example, the French philosopher Michel Foucault (2006) suggested that the characteristics of dementia were close to the *stupiditas, sive morosis* (stupidity, or morosis, or foolishness) (2006, p.253) in the work of English physician Thomas Willis, *De Anima Brutorum* (On the Soul of Brutes) (1672). With no hope of cure/reconciliation with reason, the image of dementia often related to pure madness. In later centuries, although dementia was recognised as mental illness rather than mystical punishment, significant improvements in dementia research were not made until the last quarter of the twentieth century (Boller and Forbes, 1998).

Photography has been commonly adopted by twentieth century artists to represent people with dementia because the camera could capture transient moments and changes in the sufferers' features. For example, American photographer Nicholas Nixon (1947-) created a series of images of sufferers of Alzheimer's disease (1983-1985). In Figure 19,

Nixon captures the emptiness of an elder's face. The photograph gave little information to give viewers the means to identify with this person. Her gaze penetrates the surface of the picture, however it does not carry any intention of communication. In a sense, this representation recalls what Foucault (2006) described of dementia: unreason. Nixon left viewers to confront a face that they could not fully comprehend, and their imagination was also cancelled by the context of a dark background, like that used by Géricault in *The Portrait of The Insane*. The gesture of holding her hands to her mouth is elusive and ambiguous; it conveys an unusual character in the photographed subject. Although her mouth is open it seems to have no words to say. Gesture and gaze do not construct a coherent meaning to this face.

At the same time, there exist very few painted portraits of people with dementia by established contemporary painters. Most contemporary artists who have attempted to represent people with dementia through portraiture have adopted photographs as their image reference. For example, the little known English artist Jeff Bowering painted a series of portraits of people with dementia (Figure 20). Bowering employed photographs that he took in his mother's nursing home as his image reference. To a degree, what has been represented in Bowering's works is poignancy rather than intimacy. The colors he uses are rather stylised as can be seen in his other series of

works. Rather than responding to the actual presence of the sitter, Bowering focuses on representing the details of his photographs such as glasses and wrinkles. At the same time, the tonal work and facial expression suggest his intention to evoke an emotional response. Like Nixon's photograph, there is no strong indication of the subjects' continuity of personality in Bowering's portraits of people with dementia. The background, gaze and the feature of Bowering's subject were also similar to that of Nixon's photograph: she was in a state of loss, and her identity was anonymous. In a sense, what contemporary artists represent is the *representation of representation* of people with dementia—a creation made through the perspective of the camera. In fact, whether the subject matter of a portrait is people with dementia or not, contemporary painters often adopt photography as their image reference for reasons of finance and economy. In the case of Bowering, his representation of people with dementia was largely drawn from the perspective of the camera including its detached position in relation to the photographed subject. Dutch writer J. Bernlef (1937-2012) analogises the feeling of people with dementia with a camera in his novel *Out of Mind*:

a camera makes no distinction between important and unimportant, foreground or background. And at this moment I myself seem like a camera. I register, but nothing or nobody comes closer, jumps forward: no one touches me from the past...You can't read that photo album on the table for the most part because you lack the necessary background information. You weren't there. In other words, you cannot form any further pictures about what is in

them because you cannot remember what could once be actually seen. It isn't your past (1989, p.57).

Lacking the artist's engagement during the process of portrayal, a portrait made from a photograph signifies a common perspective in the context of the representation of people with dementia: it relies heavily on the theatrical appearance of the sufferers to evoke the empathy of the viewer. Moreover, as Sontag previously suggested, the viewer is paralysed by the impact of dramatic photographs and thus loses the ability to care in real life (1979). This is not to suggest that Bowering did not have a deep understanding of and love of his subject but paradoxically, his process of portrayal covers the attachment that he had to people with dementia.



Figure 19: Nicholas Nixon, *M.A.E., Boston*, 1985, Gelatin silver print, 19.5 cm × 24.5 cm, Museum of Modern Arts.



Figure 20: Jeff Bowering, one of the portrait from the series of *Portraits of Dementia Sufferers*, acrylic, 30cm × 30cm.

In his book *Dementia Reconsidered: the Person Comes First*, one of the pioneering works addressing dementia care in the framework of “person-centred care” (Brooker, 2003),⁹ English psycho-gerontologist Tom Kitwood (1997) argues that the identity of people with dementia can only be found in the equal relationship between them and their caregivers. He observed that the deeper personal emotion that appears during interpersonal engagement is key to recognising the subjectivity of people with dementia. This observation is crucial to the argument presented in this thesis, which considers the unique relationship based on reciprocal projections of subjectivity during the process of

⁹ According to English Professor Dawn Brooker (2003), the term “person-centred care” was first created by American psychologist Carl Rogers (1902-1987) in his work *On Becoming a Person* (1961). The gist of “person-centred care” was to highlight the uniqueness of every person with dementia in terms of her/his different mental and social need in redefining her/himself while the symptoms of dementia affected her/his cognitive ability to communicate with caregivers.

portrayal. Positive feelings such as fulfillment, and negative feelings such as anxiety, influence both the engager/caregivers and subjects with dementia during the engagement (Kitwood, 1997).

This thesis examines closely the inter-personal elements of the dynamic relationship between artist and sitter in the history of portraiture. To emphasise this interaction and its influence on portraiture, Woodall points out that the dynamic relationship between artist and sitter in different eras should be considered as an important element in defining the transitional meaning of portrayal as well as its represented subjectivity (Woodall, 1997). For example, James Lord (1922-2009), the biographer and subject of French artist Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), documented the conversation between himself and his portraitist in his book *A Giacometti Portrait* (Lord, 1980) (Figure 21). Lord sat eighteen times for Giacometti between the twelfth of September and the first of October 1964. In his book, Lord lists their various emotions including happiness, frustration and confusion. One of the magical moments Lord experienced during the process of portrayal represents the depth of the engagement between the artist and the sitter,

...I tried to relieve the itch by twitching my cheek and nose instead of raising a hand to scratch.

“What’s the matter with you?” he asked.

“My face itches,” I explained.

“Why?”

“Because of all the little strokes of your brush on my cheek.”

He laughed. “Very pretty,” he said.

...But what I said was absolutely spontaneous and unpremeditated, not at all an effort to make a pretty phase. I told him this and he said that he understood perfectly the sense of transmutation my remark implied (Lord, 1980, p.38).

In this description, the relationship between sitter and artist is so close that it conflates the illusion of representation with reality in the perception of the sitter. While Lord was unconsciously unsettled by the sitting experience, Giacometti revealed the intimacy in their relationship through different expressions such as jokes in their conversation,¹⁰ and his repetitive effort in capturing Lord’s appearance, as if he was trying to recreate another *real* sitter. Apparently, it was impossible to create the *real* sitter in Lord’s portrait, but it did not mean that it was not worth trying. What Giacometti endeavoured to represent in a portrait was not a likeness of the sitter but the sense of *being* of both artist and sitter. Lord believed that their conscious and unconscious minds intersected in their conversation and the process of painting; more importantly, the interaction deepened the bond between artist and sitter and generated a “supernatural atmosphere” (Lord, 1980, p.37). Through the repetitive gesture of the creation and modification of

¹⁰ Giacometti had mocked Lord for his looks several times, and those teasing jokes were the proof of their close relationship. In the first day of the process of portraying Lord, Giacometti exclaimed “You look like a real thug. If I could paint you as I see you and a policeman saw the picture he’d arrest you immediately!” (Lord, 1980, p.6-7)

the lines and shades, the act of painting became the act of summoning the “real” sitter into the work. For Giacometti, though he could tell the representation from the reality, the reality changed constantly in his perception of the sitter and the representation. In his dream of bringing these two elements as close as possible, his sitter experienced a degree of irrationality¹¹.

This type of interactive relationship between artist and sitter is often associated with the notion of *intersubjectivity* in contemporary art. Demonstrated by the case study of Giacometti and Lord, the exchange of emotion and unconscious recognition of identity (though mistakenly) in the relationship between artist and sitter parallels with the definition of *intersubjectivity* that is widely used in artistic and philosophical disciplines.

(Intersubjectivity is) a term used primarily in phenomenological sociology to refer to the mutual constitution of social relationships. It suggests that people can reach consensus about knowledge or about what they have experienced in their life-world—at least as a working agreement if not a claim to objectivity. (A Dictionary of Sociology, Oxford University Press, 2009)

¹¹ In his book *Camera Lucida* (1981), French philosopher Roland Barthes (1915-1980) had addressed a similar effect of disintegration of the self-representation in photographs. Contemplating the unstable position of subject and object, Barthes said: “(I)n terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis).” (p.13-14)

According to English philosopher and sociologist Nick Crossley (1996), taking two subjects (or more) in a human interaction, an inter-subjective relationship can be regarded as a collaborative process in which both subjects project themselves onto each other's position in a social encounter. This inter-relationship in the perception of two (or more) subjects actualises the experience of having agreement with one another while their opinions are nevertheless subjective. Using such a sociological definition, Giacometti and Lord can be seen not only to recognise each other as the participants in the process of portrayal,¹² but also to modify their individual identities in a radical inter-subjective relationship.

¹² Employing the theory of philosopher and sociologist George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), Crossley (1996) suggests that identity in social relationship is often made through taking role of the other in perception. For a subject, the process of understanding the other takes a few steps. Firstly, the other is a target to be objectified in the mind of a perceiving subject. The objectification, Crossley suggests is a common way for most of us in interacting with other people socially in the modern world. To encapsulate, the other is to be considered as an object (*It*) rather than an integral subject like the perceiver, the other becomes an experienced object to the perceiver in a *I-It* relationship (p.11).

Then, during the process of perceiving the other, the perceiver undergoes the same process conducted by the other. As we learned above, the *me* in Mead's account is perceived by the subject her/himself in an introspective perspective. However for the other, the *me* is seen as an exterior image of the perceiver. Philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) analogises that this sense of identity is perceived like a mirrored image which the perceiver experiences by seeing the reflective image as an alienated *me* in the mirror (1968). When other people also have access to the exterior image of the 'me', the subject becomes alienable; in other words, the identity of the subject is shattered by the *me* in the perspective of other people.

Finally, the identity of the subject is enriched by this experience of taking a perspective from an imaginary position outside to perceive her/himself in the same way that the other would perceive her/him. In particular, Crossley (1996) suggests that the self-consciousness of the subject is intensified during the process of being objectified by other people (p.61). Therefore, the subject becomes more aware of the difference between the *me* in the eyes of other people and the *me* that the *I* defines through self-recognition.



Figure 21: Alberto Giacometti, *Portraits of James Lord*, 1964, Oil on Canvas, n.d..

2.5 Conclusion

Considering portrayal as an inter-subjective relationship, it is clear that the relationship between artist and sitter, in particular subjects with dementia, has seldom been represented in contemporary art works. The nature of the relationship discussed in this chapter, shows two important aspects: firstly, the use of photographs of people as a reference point in painting means portraits are quickly accomplished, and so the influence of the process of portrayal on both artist and sitter is less noticeable than the time-consuming process of painting from life. Secondly, the *consensus* was reached that the healthy artist and sitter (such as Giacometti and Lord) develop a different relationship than that between the artist and the sitter with dementia, due to the loss of

memory and consciousness of the latter.

As Kitwood(1997) suggests the subjectivity of people with dementia might be better understood through personal engagement. Portraiture from life, as Géricault demonstrated in the series *The Portrait of The Insane*, plays an important role in investigating the subjectivity of people with dementia. Building on the historical discussion of artists and dementia in Chapter Two, in the next chapter I present the practice of making portraits from life in a dementia hostel for three years. I focus on answering these questions: what is the perspective of an artist in relation to people with dementia during the process of portraying from life? And how is a reflexive sense of subjectivity represented in their portraits?

Chapter 3

The relationship between people with dementia and an artist during the process of making portraits

In this chapter, I present my project of painting, drawing and photographing residents in the UnitingCare Ageing Boronia Hostel in Gerringong, New South Wales from 2011 to 2014. Inspired by Géricault's *The Portrait of The Insane*, I adopted portrayal from life as my vehicle to investigate intersubjectivity in the portraits of people with dementia. Developing a very close relationship with them, I not only represented the reality of portraying people with dementia, but also explored my reflected identity in their portraits. To do this, I used the journal that was made during the years of the project in which I examined my changing perspective towards my subjects and myself as a volunteer artist. This personal narrative of the process of portraying people with dementia and the art works themselves present two different facets of the intriguing inter-subjective relationship between my subjects and myself; a relationship that aimed to enrich the context of the portraiture of people with dementia.

3.1 The reason for portrayal from life, method and the timeframe of my project

As I discussed in Chapter Two, a portrait made from life carries an essence of the engagement between the artist and the sitter that is hardly found in photographic portraits. Moreover, portrayal from life allows more unconscious interaction between the artist and the sitter, and this eventually emerges in the portrait works. Apart from these unconscious interactions, a portrait is also an end product of certain procedures and techniques, so that one can study a portrait through the sequences of processes in its making that define the final result. From this perspective, I focus on documenting the process of making the portraits of my subjects with dementia rather than discussing the quality of representation.

Inspired by artists like Géricault and Giacometti, I am fascinated by the efforts that they made to represent not only the reality of the process of portrayal, but also to investigate the human condition and inner psyche through their act of portrayal. Interestingly, recalling their passion in depicting their subjects, my art practice also largely centres on humble or marginalised groups, including friends that I have repeatedly portrayed for years and people affected by the 2011 tsunami in the Japanese town of Ishinomaki.¹³ I have always taken portrayal from life as a central approach to understanding the

¹³ One year after the tsunami that damaged Japan on 2011, I went to Ishinomaki for nine days in February 2012 to portray a family who had survived the tsunami. As one of the most affected towns on Japan's East Coast, people in Ishinomaki were still struggling with their pain and the process of reconstruction.

psychology of both artist and sitter. In addition, having similar experiences of mental disorder with Géricault and Giacometti, I conceived that my anxiety and depressive tendencies could be a powerful tool to investigate the psychological sufferings of others. In a sense, portrayal is a reflective act that also embodies the existence of artists in the context of the portraiture.

In my project, I employ both photography and traditional drawing and painting as my strategy to investigate the subjectivity of people with dementia and its relation to the artist during the process of portrayal. Materials such as the instant camera, drawing book, pencil, oil paint and canvas have been part of my practice for over ten years. In particular, the camera I used was a Fujifilm Instax 210, which is similar to a Polaroid camera in terms of the quality of the picture and weight. Except for the different strength in quality (the colour of the Instax's picture tends to be more naturalistic than that of the Polaroid's picture, while the latter creates a nostalgic look through its dull colour), the major difference between Instax and Polaroid is the shape of the photograph: the Instax produces a rectangular picture while the Polaroid's picture is square. I used the Instax camera to attract residents in the Boronia Hostel to engage with me and also took many pictures of residents with their families and gave them as small gifts.

During the three years project, I visited my family in Taiwan between October 2012 and June 2013. While I was away, Kylie Young, a caregiver at the Boronia Hostel continued to document residents' lives through photography on my behalf. After returning from Taiwan, I found that some of my collaborating residents showed significant deterioration including the loss of speech and signing, and the ability to comprehend hand gestures. None of the residents of Boronia Hostel remembered me after nine months' absence. However, several residents who showed only mild deterioration were able to show some sense of familiarity through their smile. Having the consent of residents' families, I have interacted with and portrayed more than twenty-five residents. Interestingly, in the targeted group of four residents, three of them remained relatively well, retaining a memory of our physical contact such as hand-shaking and hugging each other.

	Aim	Supplement/Materials
2011 April-2012 April	Identifying and getting to know residents at Boronia Hostel, gaining consent from the families of residents and introducing drawing into the facility.	Fujifilm Instax 210 camera, Journal and notebook
2012 April-2012 October	Working in collaboration with residents (taking pictures of each other), portraying residents at Boronia Hostel and documenting the process of engagement.	Fujifilm Instax 210 camera, Drawing book, Pencil, Oil paint, Canvas
2013 June-2014 April	Working in collaboration with residents (taking pictures of each other), portraying residents at Boronia Hostel and documenting the process of engagement.	Fujifilm Instax 210 camera, Oil paint, Canvas

Chart 1: Timeframe of the Boronia Hostel project. This project involved visited to Boronia Hostel on a weekly basis, and I stayed in the facility for four hours each week. Four selected residents participated in this project from 2011 to 2014.

3.2 The background of the portrayal of residents in Boronia

During 2011 to 2014, I collaborated with UnitingCare Ageing Boronia Hostel, based in Gerringong, NSW where all residents suffered from different levels of dementia. The environment of Boronia was designed to prevent them from going astray and to avoid potential risks, so the doors needed to be always locked. As well, two fenced gardens outside of the facility provided leisure space for the residents. The facility had been designed with two wings including a total of 25 single bedrooms. In each wing, as well as twelve to thirteen bedrooms, there was a large bathroom for showering and toileting, a dining area with four tables and sixteen chairs, a lounge room with television, sofa and cushions, and a kitchen. The two kitchens were in the middle of the facility and joined together by a small stair in the central area. Residents were not often allowed to go into the kitchen area. Normally, there were four professional caregivers and a registered nurse to provide care in the morning until one pm, and two caregivers worked in the afternoon until three pm. The registered nurse finished work at five pm. Then the caregivers handed over duty to the next shift and another two caregivers worked from three pm to eleven pm.

Most of the residents had previously lived in New South Wales, particularly in the nearby Illawarra region. All aged over eighty, most of them were physically healthy.

However, having had limited interaction with people in the community, residents spent much of their time napping, watching DVDs or wandering off into the lounge area. Occasionally, occupational therapists created projects for them, such as decorative painting, reading magazines and simple physical exercises. Most of the residents appeared confused, however they were mostly calm. Several of them were anxious and unsettled, and their emotions were quite unpredictable. During the process of interacting with caregivers, they were sometimes cooperative, and at other times resistant. Most of them could not remember their own family, and they confused reality and memory. For example, one resident often misrecognised me as someone she knew from her past who might once have had a very close relationship with her.

Before ethics approval for the project was issued, I had already applied to be a volunteer at the Boronia Hostel in 2011. In order to explain what I hoped to achieve in the facility and gain the trust of those who would be involved, I had discussed my project with the families of residents, the manager, registered nurses and several caregivers. After my project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong in April 2012 and with the consent of the families of the residents with whom I wished to collaborate, I started to engage more than twenty-five residents through different methods including conversation, portrait-painting and drawing, and

instant photography. On a weekly basis, I made more than fifty portraits of residents from life (some residents came and left during the project). Out of all the residents that I interacted with in Boronia Hostel, the four residents Doris B, Doris Y, Alan and Connie are the ones that I particularly focus on in my doctoral work. They sat for their portraits and were collaborators in a series of photographs. I took their pictures and they took mine in turn. As soon as the instant photographs were developed, they signed at the bottom border of the photographs. Eventually, there were more than 750 instant photographs that were taken by these four residents and by me. During this three-year project from April 2011 to April 2014, these four residents and I developed a good relationship, although none of them could remember my name or recognise me after short periods of time.

Each of the four residents had a different history and specific symptoms of dementia. Alan was a mechanic who used to work at the air base, and he never changed his welcoming attitude towards me. Doris B was a British immigrant who had won a tap dancing championship as a young woman in her hometown. She often misrecognised me as her partner. The symptoms of Doris Y's dementia were quite unpredictable: she was very kind to me most of the time but sometimes became aggressive. Connie had been an amateur artist and her works were hung on the walls of Boronia Hostel. Her

dementia was relatively stable in terms of her cognitive ability and consciousness. Like all other participants, she did not remember me personally but she could quickly recall a fuzzy memory of our activities such as photo-taking, when I gave her some hints.

Although they could not remember my name, our friendly relationship was represented in a physical way: the three ladies often kissed me on the cheek and hugged me, Alan and I always shook hands firmly with direct eye contact. I usually engaged with them in the lounge, but occasionally I joined in their “bus trip” to the park or beach. They were not particularly outgoing but enjoyed the trip with other residents and caregivers. Except for short trips, their time was basically spent indoors: waking up in the morning, staying in the lounge watching television, having breakfast, morning tea, lunch, then afternoon tea and supper.

3.3 Ambiguity in relationships to Alan, Doris B, Doris Y and Connie

At the beginning of this project in 2011 (when I was a volunteer at Boronia Hostel), the stages of dementia of the four residents were quite different. For example, they each had a different ability to articulate verbally and this declined at different rates throughout the three years. Without knowing their actual medical history, I perceived their deterioration directly from what I observed in our engagement through photography. Taking my

collaboration with Alan as an example, one hundred and sixty-five instant photographs document the trajectory of the transformation in our relationship between 2011 and 2014. Literally documenting the power of time in the life of individuals, the series of instant photographs became the backdrop to my project, our relationship and most importantly, their mental deterioration. Canadian visual culture theorist Peter Buse (2010) argues that taking Polaroid pictures is a social practice that creates a situation where the photographer and her/his human subjects interact with each other more intensively than in regular photography. Compared with other photographic media, the Polaroid picture is more of an object due to its unique characteristics such as quick development, unreproducible nature and inseparability of the white frame. From Buse's viewpoint, an instant photograph is an object to ensure the authenticity of the engagement between photographer and the photographed subject—it frames an unchangeable *present*, and exists as a representation of that particular second in a space.

3.3.1 Disappearing Alan and my absent image

In a sense, the Instax camera was ideal for this project: it developed images quickly; residents could easily operate it, and it was an attraction that encouraged my subjects to interact with me. During our engagement, Alan and I took pictures for each other then he was asked to sign his own name and write down my name at the bottom of our

photographs. The images in Figure 22 and 23 were created by Alan and me. They were created on 09/06/2011, 15/02/2012, 29/02/2012, 03/04/2012 (Figure 22),¹⁴ 06/06/2012, 17/07/2012, 18/10/2012 and 03/07/2013 (Figure 23). Most of the photographs were taken in pairs except for the first and the last one. There were singular differences in the images for different reasons: the first one on 09/06/2011 was an experiment that I tried in order to attract residents to interact with me. Knowing Alan was a mechanic in his past, I often showed him something that jogged his professional memory such as Lego bricks, or small industrial objects like various marker pens and my camera. Interestingly, during the process of our interaction, he was more involved in the act of taking the picture rather than observing the resulting image.

At the beginning of this project, I did not intend to develop an inter-subjective relationship with Boronia residents and to collect their pictures. Initially, although my image was taken by Alan, I had no intention of positioning myself within this project but wanted simply to document the reality of residents' lives. From early 2013, Alan became unable to activate the camera, and his frequency of communicating with me

¹⁴ Before the official ethics clearance was approved, Alan's family and I had an agreement whereby I could interact with Alan through picture-taking. These pictures were not shown to any third party, and the family reserved the right to withdraw participation and all pictures that were taken before the ethics clearance was approved. As a volunteer at Boronia Hostel, my process of interacting with Alan was supervised by the registered nurses and manager. No complaint or report was made in relation to my approach in caring for the residents.

decreased dramatically. As a result, my image disappeared from 03/07/2013. The changing degree of clarity of his signature in this series of portraits implies Alan's decreasing level of consciousness during the project.

However, even these transient moments that were captured did not fully represent the inter-subjectivity between us. The reality of the process of portrayal, including our different consciousness levels, memory and physical health all challenged the authenticity of our portraits. To be more specific, since Alan could not remember me, the photographs that he had taken, or even identify himself in the pictures, the referential function of these photographic portraits seemed to be unsettled. On the one hand, the existence of both of us in the pictures represented a mutual relationship; on the other hand, our relationship was quickly cancelled by Alan's symptoms of dementia. Failing to recognise both me and himself, Alan was unable to continue underpinning our relationship on a reciprocal basis in the photographic representation.

In a sense, the instant photographs in the *Absence* series signified the transformation in the relationship between Alan and myself. Resonating with Bernlef's analogy of people with dementia and the function of a camera as discussed in the previous chapter, Alan

was unable to differentiate between me and other people. At the beginning of my project (when he was still able to talk and understand the meanings of several words), he sometimes asked me to reconfirm some details of photographs as if I was a mechanic who shared some experience with him in the past. From Alan's perspective, I could be someone he knew and trusted. Eventually, my identity was fluid: sometimes I was his colleague, sometimes a friend or at other times, a normal visitor.



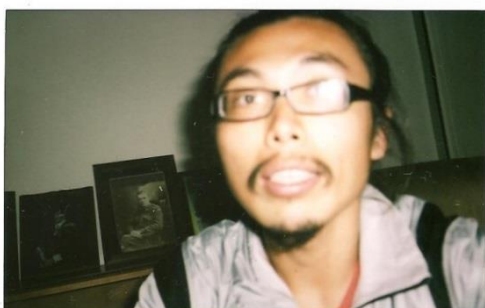
OLIVER ALAN SMITH



OLIVER ALAN



ALAN



Oliver - Alan



Alan Smith



ALDO SMITH



ALLSMITH

Figure 22: Xi Hsu and Alan Smith, Pictures from series of *Absence*, 2011-2012, Fujifilm Instax films, 8.2 cm × 10.5 cm.



Figure 23: Xi Hsu and Alan Smith, Pictures from series of *Absence*, 2012-2013, Fujifilm Instax films, 8.2 cm × 10.5 cm.

3.3.2 The unconscious interaction with Doris B: Martin Buber's *I-Thou* relationship

Other residents that I worked with also misrecognised me from time to time. As an example, Doris B failed to perceive me in the present despite her expressing affection for me at the same time:

Doris pointed at the corner of the lounge and said to me, "There, there...is a man...taking pictures..." then she turned around and looked at me as if I was her guard.

"Sorry. Am I annoying you?" I quickly replied.

Suddenly, I realised that she was mentioning me in the past—we always took pictures of each other in that particular corner. But for a few seconds, I felt that I was that imaginary person even though I was actually standing next to her.

"Was that me?" then I asked her to confirm my assumption.

She looked at me and answered resolutely, "No! Of course not. You are here...love you, I do love you." She then gave me a kiss on the cheek.

Maybe you are right, Doris. That invisible man wasn't me, and neither is this one who is writing this text. I was there watching the empty corner with you, at that moment of now-ness. (notes on 15/October, 2013)

Although misrecognising me as someone she knew and loved, she also remembered an image of me in Boronia, in her recent past. But when she looked at me again, I became the one she loved, not the imaginary man with camera at the corner. In a sense, my identity shifted between her past and present. Whether or not my appearance (tall, long

hair, with a camera all the time) reminded her, with the sense of familiarity, of someone she knew, my existence was the trigger to recall her memory and sense of comfort.

Although it seemed unreasonable in a way, our relationship did not only build on a reciprocal basis, but also with a unified consensus. It is important to note that I did not reach this level of unification of subjectivity during my talks with other residents with whom I collaborated. Recalling the experience of James Lord discussed in Chapter Two, I temporarily experienced a confusion of identity in an inter-subjective relationship with my subject. However, unlike Lord and Giacometti, my subject and I had very different level of consciousness in relation to our intersubjectivity. In his argument (discussed in Chapter Two) that the identity of people with dementia was socially-defined, psycho-gerontologist Tom Kitwood (1997) employed the *I-Thou* (1966) theory of German philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965) to examine the relationship between people with dementia and their caregivers. According to Buber's *I-Thou* theory (1966), human beings are naturally associated with their environment and located in relationship with other people.¹⁵ In addition, Buber emphasises that a sense of self is initiated through this relationship rather than the consciousness of the subject of

¹⁵ According to Buber, the *I-Thou* relationship could exist in the relationship between human and non-human too. For example, when one is so focused on viewing an extraordinary landscape, the overwhelming feeling may cause the temporary loss of identity of the seer. S/he may even temporarily lose the ability to tell the difference between her/himself and her/his environment.

her/himself. He states that “there is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word I-Thou and I of the primary word I-It” (Buber, 1966, p.4).

It is also important to note that the *I-Thou* relationship entails neither sympathy nor care. Nick Crossley (1996) suggests that a subject in Buber’s radical inter-subjective relationship has no position of her/himself, and s/he needs no consciousness or imagination to distinguish the difference between her/himself and *other* because s/he *is* others. Crossley (1996) summarises the closeness between the other and the subject in an *I-Thou* relationship, through detailing the position of the other:

The other is not experienced in this case. We may not even be aware of them, as such, because we are too closely involved and harmonised with them... (others) are a subject who is in communication with us (Crossley, 1996, p.11).

Taking the relationship between Doris B and I during the conversation as an example, her afflicted consciousness and self-awareness became the beginning of an unconscious engagement. Escaping from the surveillance of my consciousness, the process of co-constructing her narrative of an invisible man destabilised my identity position as the sole speaker in the present. In other words, the language between us did not create the separation of two identities but revealed another layer of human connection that was

made through an unconscious power like love and emotion expressed in the conversation. During the conversation between Doris B and myself, neither of us required full consciousness to experience the encounter, and there was no sharp distinction between her identity and mine. Besides, I did not follow her narrative because I asked for her compliance to administer my duty of care. At the moment of confusion, I did not see Doris B as a dementia sufferer but a close friend. As a result, the feeling of the assimilation of the identities of Doris B and me did not affect me in a negative way. In contrast, the last section of my notes indicates my feeling of fulfilment and reward.

3.3.3 Portrayal as an act of differentiation of the identity of Doris Y and I: consciousness in *I-Thou* relationship

Interestingly, Kitwood (1997) suggests that the definition of the old word *Thou* implies “strong recognition: command, accusation, insult and threat” (Kitwood, 1997, p.10). In the *I-Thou* relationship, a subject risks losing control of her/himself, and s/he could be afflicted by emotional turbulence such as anxiety during the engagement with others. Compared with the *I-Thou* relationship, a subject has no such apprehension, and maintains emotional safety in engaging with others in the *I-It* relationship. Kitwood suggested that the subject in the *I-It* relationship frees her/himself from the ethical responsibility of others through objectifying others as forms of knowledge. In other

words, the subject in the *I-It* relationship *observes* rather than *engages*. As a contrast, the subject in the *I-Thou* relationship risks the loss of her/his own identity during engagement with others.

The downside of *Thou* could be found in the relationship between Doris Y and myself.

When I volunteered at Boronia Hostel in 2011, Doris Y and I had good relationship, and we often chatted about household matters, such as knitting and cooking. From 2012 at the start of my project, she became defensive when she noticed people's gaze on her, due to her loss of short term memory. For this reason, it was not easy to draw her whenever she was aware of my gaze on her during the process of drawing: she often became slightly aggressive, and would stand up or walk towards me to interfere with the process. In responding to her defensive attitude, I became cautious in the act of creating her portraits. For example, in order to avoid distraction, I attempted to keep a low profile: I avoided becoming the centre of her focus and chose spots near the corners of the lounge to set up my painting tools. Facing the unpredictable characteristic of Doris Y and her symptoms, I often felt insecure and frustrated. The notes that I took in Boronia Hostel expressed my mixed feelings involved in my attempt to portray her,

I did not have enough time for a proper engagement with Doris today. However, several drawings of her were made during lunch-time. Unlike the

good mood that she had when we met in the morning, she looked at me very detachedly and almost fixed me with an unfriendly gaze when she was eating. Maybe my gaze disturbed her as it is quite impolite to stare at people when they are doing something personal like eating. I did not want to annoy her, so I turned my head away quickly.

The last drawing of her was made in two minutes. With over ten drawings that I had made in this morning, did I really capture her essence? Maybe in one or two, but how could I tell? I did not even know which one was Doris— what if “the Doris who was having lunch” was the authentic one and not the persona she was in the morning? Which one was her natural response to my visit? In what way, was I remembered and forgotten? (notes on 19/May, 2011)

Turning my thoughts from observation to introspection, my notes showed that I was unable to understand the way my subject perceived me while I was trying to portray her. I understood that I should not be simply defining Doris Y as an object of my perception (as in the *I-It* relationship), but at the same time, I had to create her image quickly before she was aware of my act and stopped me from drawing. At the beginning of this project, I often portrayed her in the most time-efficient way possible such as in the drawing (Figure 24). Sometimes, I adopted a more voyeuristic perspective to avoid a direct gaze and the consequent tension between us (Figure 25). Another portrait of Doris Y signified the process of portraying her and many other residents: it was made in fifteen or twenty minutes, the quick brushworks and the lack of detail in the eyes reflecting the short time span available for direct portrayal and my avoidance of confronting Doris Y with eye contact (Figure 26). Compared with another resident’s

portrait (Figure 27), fewer details of the eyes and face were depicted in Doris Y's portrait. The different levels of completeness in the eye area showed that I was still striving for a stable representation while I was troubled by my sitter's fidgety motion. It became obvious that different qualities of the portraits indicated the relationship between various residents and me during the process of portrayal. Taking Doris Y's portraits as an example, uncertainty and the qualities of uncertainty and withdrawal became the main representation of our relationship. In this regard, two crucial points shaped the result of portraying residents with dementia and exemplified the interaction between them and me: firstly, the gaze between artist and sitter during the process of observation and painting; secondly, the nature of interacting through photography. Both engagements can be considered as the key to defining intersubjectivity in representation.



Figure 24: Xi Hsu, *Untitled*, 2011, pencil drawing on paper, 15 cm × 21 cm. This drawing was made in two minutes to avoid Doris's defensiveness.



Figure 25: Xi Hsu, *Doris Y*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 20 cm × 25 cm. This image of Doris was a part of the group portrait of people in Boronia. The lack of direct gaze implied my slightly voyeuristic perspective.

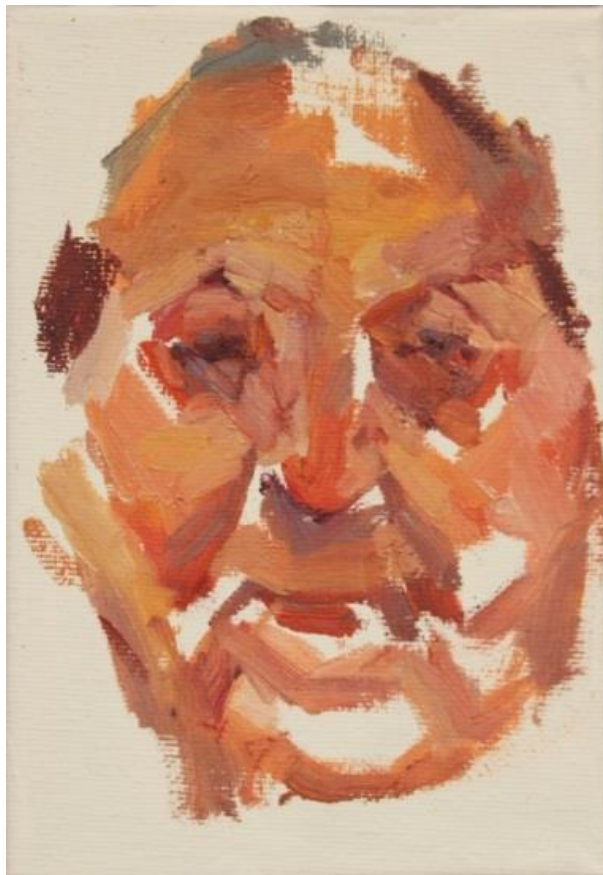


Figure 26: Xi Hsu, *Doris Y*, 2014, Oil on Canvas, 18 cm × 13 cm.

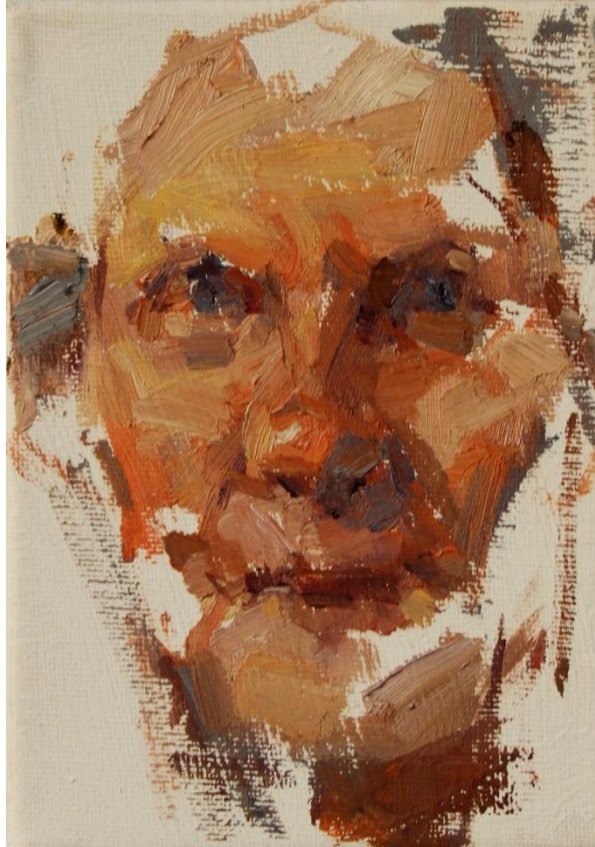


Figure 27: Xi Hsu, *Pam*, 2014, Oil on Canvas, 18 cm × 13 cm.

3.3.3.1 *Glance* in the face-to-face relationship: Edward S. Casey's study of Emmanuel Levinas's face-to-face relationship

Like many artists, I faced my sitters during the process of portrayal. According to the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), face-to-face relationships embody the intersubjectivity between two people. A person cannot simply be the observer of another face and its owner without having certain kinds of engagement, and s/he is compelled to read the face and its represented identity; however the process of engagement is not transacted by imagination or thought (Crossley, 1996, p.24-29). For instance, when I look at a face expressing pain, I do not need to imagine how much pain the carrier of the face has; as a contrast, I directly perceive and understand the pain even

without *that* actual experience of her/his pain. Levinas describes this special encounter of two subjects in a face-to-face relationship as an *epiphany* that amazed the seer and also acknowledged the absolute difference of other people (Appignanesi and Baum, 2006). Unlike the projective perspective that a subject holds during a social encounter (Mead's theory, as discussed in the previous chapter), Levinas believes that the face-to-face encounter is not perceived in the social or cultural dimension that asks a subject to "put her/his feet in other people's shoes" but instead is rooted in a deeper level of human ethics connects with God (Schroeder, 2006).

Leaving out of Levinas's religious purpose in articulating face-to-face relationships, the American philosopher Edward S. Casey (2006) contextualised the phenomenon of face-to-face contact through analysing different kinds of gaze between two subjects.

Casey differentiated *glance* and *look* by the level of intensity:

The glance is something else again from the look. Unlike the look, which freezes intimacy or overlooks it altogether, the glance is well suited to the close quarters of the face to face circumstance. It gains impressions and picks up nuances in an especially skillful way. It can increase intimacy itself, as when welcoming and seductive glances are exchanged directly between two parties; but even short of this, and apart from alienating glances, the glance can discern signs of distress of the very sort that are ethically relevant on the Levinasian paradigm (Casey, 2006, p.89-90).

To Casey, the *glance* was a surprising revelation (p.90) of another subject, as it was able to quickly respond to the other's gaze and actively seek out conversation (p.91). However, the spontaneous glance returned from the other subject may not necessarily have the same intention as the face-to-face encounter. For example, the interpretation of a face could be affected by the presentation of a blank face on the part of the responder that leaves no access for the other to decode any of its intrinsic qualities (Casey, 2006, Broekman, 2009). Allied with Levinas's and Casey's theory, American philosopher Brian Schroeder (1996) argues that *glancing* not only creates intimacy, but also becomes an aggressive act because of its "overarching self-imposed sovereignty" (p.122) over others.

There seems to be a paradoxical perspective to the glance: on the one hand, it signifies the difference of others that cannot be reduced by the perceiver her/himself; on the other hand, it initiates the discovery of the privacy of others through its own presence in the eyes of others. This ambivalent perspective is embodied in the relationship between Doris Y and I through my act of observation and portrayal. Faced with Doris Y's unpredictability, my gaze could never be fully "aggressive" because of my concern for her feeling. According to the notes that I took and listed above, I felt guilty by interrupting her through my *glance* while she was eating. As a result, avoiding eye

contact minimised the mutual and dynamic inter-personal engagement that I had with Doris Y while we were simply chatting or enjoying morning tea together. In a sense, the alienating perspective was created when my identity was as an artist who would *glance* over her disinterestedly, but not when I was her friend with no confronting and inspecting gaze (even though she could not recall my name).

Comparing the case studies of Doris B and Doris Y, both of their reactions to my company showed particular types of awareness of other people in relation to them. To Doris B, I was her partner who gave her comfort; to Doris Y, I was an intruder who annoyed her sometimes. Even though their loss of cognitive ability prevented them from knowing my identity through my glance, my purpose was quickly detected. Spontaneously, I became the particular person they perceived. In the case study of Doris B, I temporarily experienced the eerie feeling of being myself in the past; whereas Doris Y's returned *glance* fixed me as a rude guest whenever I attempted to portray her, or in other words, to rule her over through my own *glance*. To a degree, my glance not only revealed the "truth" of me to her but also influenced how I experienced myself. Doris Y, in particular, questioned my identity because of *my own* interrogating *glance* on her.

Therefore, *glance* breaks the radical *I-Thou* relationship in which two people experience

not themselves but rather their unitification into one subject. During the process of engaging with people with dementia, the *glance* of the artist may sometimes create a deep understanding and intimacy (Doris B and I), or it may disturb the sitter when it is purposeful such as in the act of portrayal (Doris Y and I). Portrayal becomes a conscious act that departs from an unconscious face-to-face relationship when the *glance* of the sitter with dementia threatens my own identity. In order to understand my sitter with dementia through portrayal, I was trapped in a dilemma: on the one hand, the deeper understanding in the face-to-face relationship was hindered by my purposeful *glance* and the act of portrayal, and it sometimes threatened the existence of my sitter and my own existence (when I was considered by Doris Y as the intruder); on the other hand, the depth in the face-to-face relationship was always called for in description and portrayal, as the representation of other face was my responsibility. In the case of portraying Doris Y, her *glance* destabilised my identity but my *glance* ironically aimed to construct coherence in my representation of her facial features: a face that could be understood. On the other hand, my consciousness and ethical responsibility became problematic in understanding my sitters' unconscious landscape, but they secured my position as a prolific artist who was able to portray from life.

3.3.3.2 Embodiment of subjectivities of artist and sitter with dementia during the process of portrayal: Pia C. Kontos's analysis of the social selfhood of people with dementia

If the identity of my portrayed subjects and my own identity was unsettled by the transaction of glances on an uncomplementary basis, our social identity was incarnated in the encounter of portraying and sitting. According to Canadian dementia scholar Pia C. Kontos (2004, 2005, 2012), people with dementia retain their sense of self through their bodies instead of their conscious thought. In this regard, Kontos employs the studies of French phenomenologist/philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and French sociologist/philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1990). Kontos (2005) suggests that a sense of self can be found in some physical behaviours of people with dementia, that those behaviours reflect their history and culturally shaped identity. In particular, Kontos refers to the theory of Pierre Bourdieu to suggest that the information of history and social class is embedded in *habitus*. Beyond the simple habits that represent very limited information about their presenter, *habitus* is defined as a combination of habits and the indexical meanings such as educational background that position the subject in the context of an extensive social climate (Kontos, 2005). In other words, the history, dispositions, and biographical information of the subject are all imprinted in the physical behaviours that originate through learning and communicating with her/his community in her/his past. For example, the way Doris B danced and sang signified her

past including her upbringing, education and even the economic background of her family.

This could be seen in the instant photographs of all the subjects that I worked with including Alan, Doris B, Doris Y and Connie. At the beginning of the project, they all showed their familiarity with a camera, including the way to press the shutter and hold the camera. To resonate with Kontos's definition of embodied selfhood, for their capability to function, the camera represented their memory and habit of using it in their past. Besides, the subjects also possessed a sense of selfhood when they were the ones pictured in the photographs. For example, in the pictures of Doris B (Figure 28), she almost always presents her delightful face to the camera. Her hand gestures and pose for photo-shooting suggest her awareness of being a performer in the past. Her stylish signature was another sign of her unique social persona. In fact, she sometimes remembered the process of our photo-shooting and signing so that she asked for a pen to sign on the photograph immediately after it was taken. Her identity was embodied in her pose and her eagerness to sign her name after her picture was taken and developed.

At the same time, this embodied sense of selfhood was also found in my process of portraying residents of Boronia Hostel from life. Doris Y was an example. Although the

experience of using a camera might be the shared memory of all my subjects including Doris Y, being a sitter was more unfamiliar to her. Her defensive reaction towards portrayal was evident in her continuing habit of protecting her privacy, a habit that was part of her character before dementia. At the same time, my embodied sense of self was also represented during the process of portrayal. Several acts of portrayal including observing and memorising the details of the face of the sitter, then reconstructing/improving a combination of paint and brush work on the canvas or paper all embodied the history of my identity. Other sitters that I had worked with were able to act naturally in sitting, or even to dignify their appearance through performing an ideal image of themselves. By contrast, residents of Boronia Hostel did not suppress their sudden inner impulse to walk away from sitting or suddenly napping. In addition, their loss of short-term memory prevented me from reasoning with them about their actions. Therefore, I only had a very short time, normally less than fifteen minutes to finish a portrait before the sitter's pose changed or they fell into sleep.



Doris Boothroyd



Doris Boothroyd



D, Doris Boothroyd



Doris Boothroyd



Doreen Boothroyd
PADING TONKE



Doris Boothroyd



Doris Boothroyd



Doris Boothroyd

Figure 28: I have taken over 100 pictures of Doris B and these eight pictures indicate her remained persona in front of the camera, 2012-2013, Fujifilm Instax films, 8.2 cm × 10.5 cm.

To cope with the problem of portrait-painting, I needed to rely on the abstract concept of painting. For example, I created a structure of the face often starting from an oval shape whether my sitter was showing her/his full front face or not. Then I *built the features onto* this shape in order to create a realistic face quickly. Once the face area was roughly mapped on the canvas, the following steps of painting became strongly associated with this constructed shape rather than the realistic image of my sitter on site. Finally, my perception gradually focused on details such as the proportion, size and shape of different features. More often than not, my sitters disappeared during the process of portrayal leaving me with no chance to reconfirm the integrity of the portrait through looking at their faces again. In a sense, my method of portraying was not a process of *making the portrait look like the person*, but *finding the person in the combination of paint and brush work*. Consequently, my perception was limited accordingly to the shape/structure I made on canvas. For example, I could focus on the face area but not the clothes of the sitter since the size of the canvas was too small to encompass other details below the neck area. In order to create a realistic image of the sitter, I tended to create a single point perspective in her/his portrait without distorting the sitter's face and other parts of her/his body to squeeze them into the limited space of the canvas.

As the process of painting gradually dominated the quality of works, I was gradually

stepping away from the radical *I-Thou* relationship that was discussed earlier. I became more aware of what strategy I should adopt to make a “good portrait”. In other words, I employed some skills and concepts that I had learnt in art schools to create a portrait that was close to my aesthetic taste. Accompanying the interrogating glance, the act of portrayal embodied the history of my selfhood, and agitated the inter-subjectivity in *I-Thou* relationship at the same time. To the same degree, my process of portraying residents in Boronia Hostel also questioned the representability of our inter-subjectivity: the more I was active in observation and painting, the more withdrawn they became. Although the process of portrayal of residents of Boronia embodied our history and the attached identity, it neither fully represented an exchange of our emotion in the *I-Thou* relationship, nor a reciprocal basis that promised an agreement or the participation of both parties to partake in the act of portrayal/sitting.

3.4 The intersection of embodied selfhoods of Connie and I

Interestingly, these two embodied selfhoods did intersect on the portrayed surface. According to the analysis above, portraits of residents of Boronia Hostel intensified the paradoxical meaning of traditional portraiture: on the one hand, the realistic form of the representation aimed to guarantee the authentic subjectivity (as the content) behind the face; on the other hand, the essence of the face’s bearer was not authenticated by the

artist since many factors influencing the quality of the representations such as the idealisation of filling in from memory of the sitter's appearance was unsettled by their unstable relationship. On examination of the portraits of residents of Boronia Hostel, one can see that their evasive subjectivity created an interesting relationship between the portraits' form and content, representative of the challenges to the inter-subjective relationships between us.

Connie was an amateur realistic artist in her late or early sixties. Her landscape and still life paintings were meticulously made, and hung on several walls in Boronia Hostel. Being my first subject in Boronia, Connie had the longest relationship with me of all the residents I collaborated with. In contrast to the other residents who were only the sitters during the process of portrayal, Connie not only sat for portrayal (Figure 29) but also created portraits of me (Figure 30). Each time after the drawing was made she signed her name under my portrayed face. She always showed me the works with embarrassment because she could unquestionably sense the quality of her works: the portrayed faces were somewhat distorted and dehumanised though Connie did not create the frightening effect on purpose. They were mask-like, unrecognisable and strange. I once asked her if the drawing was my portrait, and she replied: "No! Sorry, you don't look like this" (notes on 12/May, 2011). Besides, she was often confused by

the fact that she was unable to create a realistic portrait that was once an easy task for her.

Although she attempted to depict me realistically during the process of portrayal, she eventually noticed that there was a significant difference between the represented face and the one she perceived. In a sense, her apology indicated her awareness of me, as another subject whose feeling and integrity might be offended by a distorted portrait of himself. However, I was not offended because I understood that the result was influenced by Connie's dementia. In other words, neither Connie nor I *believed* that was my portrait, and the created identity lacked some kind of *essence* that we both perceived from our own perspectives. Whether the result was made by her decreasing cognition or physical coordination, the painted face was somewhat independent from both Connie's and my perception of me.

The art historian Ernst Gombrich (born Austria, 1909- 2001), in the first chapter of his book *The Story of Art* (1989) argued that the inviolability of the face was of primal importance to a human's perception:

suppose we take a picture of our favorite champion from today's paper - would we enjoy taking a needle and poking out the eyes? Would we feel as

indifferent about it as if we poked a hole anywhere else in the paper? I do not think so. However well I know with my waking thoughts that what I do to his picture makes no difference to my friend or hero, I still feel a vague reluctance to harm it. Somewhere there remains the absurd feeling that what one does to the picture is done to the person it represents. (Gombrich, 1989, p.41)

Resonating with Levinas's theory of the face-to-face encounter, Gombrich's concept of not disrespecting a face was seemingly actualised by the portrayed face in Connie's works. In other word, it was a *life* that I did not want to harm before I realised it was a representation of life of a human being. In a sense, my portrayed identity in Connie's drawings was therefore anonymous, and it was a representation of *a face with life* that deserved to be recognised as a subject but strangely lacked a human essence, which both Connie and I could perceive.

Comparing the portraits Connie and I made for each other, the disintegration of subjectivity was represented in both our works whether it was the consequence of the lack of engagement of my sitters that activated my embodied selfhood imposing my own identity onto the portrayed face, or the inability of Connie to portray the un-representable quality that she perceived from me. According to Levinas, our collaboration would represent the perception of the inevitable wholeness of human subjectivity in the dimension of the social relationship, in which the subjectivity of

other people is an integral pre-conditioned, and different from that of the perceiver. But the sense of subjectivity was reduced by the process of representation that required consciousness to create and define the similarity between the perceived and portrayed subject. As a result, *a subject* was created in my portraits of Connie and hers of me, which was identified through conscious thought during the process of viewing but the process of perceiving the real subject on site had not been possible for Connie.

The area without marks on the portrait of Connie became evidence of our engagement that resonated with the unrecognisable and anonymous identity of Connie's work. To portray someone in such a compromising condition, or to involuntarily care about the feeling of my sitter revealed to me another unfamiliar aspect of myself. The white space did not represent our lack of interaction but on the contrary, expressed my unconscious comprehension of the disintegration of the artist's subjectivity that is often veiled in traditional portraiture. In a sense, this white space embodies the unknown and undefined area of the intersubjectivity between residents of Boronia Hostel and me in our unconscious relationship.



Figure 29: Xi Hsu, *Connie*, 2014, Oil on Canvas, 18 cm × 13 cm.



Figure 30: Connie McCowage, *Untitled*, 2011, Drawing on Paper, 21 cm × 15 cm.

3.5 Conclusion

Because these portraits of people with dementia were created through several unseen dynamic relationships between artist and sitter, these invisible relationships often

registered their history in the actual physicality of the painted image. My experiences in Boronia Hostel showed that the role-play, emotion and embodied memory that were represented during the process of portrayal should all be studied in a broader social context. In a sense, the identity of the artist should also be examined through her/his relation to people with dementia and the nature of the portrayal. To me, a portrait of a person with dementia is the evidence of my struggle to hold a sitter's image together in a corresponding feeling of disintegration. At the climax of inter-subjectivity, my sitters were influenced by my act of portrayal and vice versa. The project at Boronia Hostel demonstrated that a portrait of a person with dementia was not only the representation of the unstable relationship between artist and sitter, but also the self-portrait of an artist who closely experienced an imitation of the symptoms of dementia, a loss of self, in the dimension of the social encounter. During the process of portrayal however the artist was able to highlight the transaction of two embodied selfhoods.

Although the symptoms of dementia were unpredictable, they nevertheless reflected the essential position of the artist as the partaker and creator of represented subjectivity. The act of portrayal always registers in the consciousness of the artist; at the same time, the act of portrayal in this case failed to represent the unconscious interaction (the *I-Thou* relationship) that was created in the face-to-face relationship with people with dementia.

As a result, the unpainted area on the canvas became my natural response to the symptoms of dementia.

In the next chapter, I continue to challenge the ontology of the relationship between artist and sitter with dementia through the case study of British artist William Utermohlen (1933-2007), who created a series of self-portraits after he was diagnosed with dementia. By employing Utermohlen's late body of works, I will give a rare example of the paintings of an artist with a perplexing identity who still persisted in representing himself through his afflicted body and unstable conscious state of mind.

Chapter 4

“Self in portraits” of William Utermohlen

In Chapter Two, I showed that although contemporary artists have started to portray people with dementia, the relationship between the artist and the portrayed sitter with dementia is hidden through the intensive use of photographs as a reference. In particular, the works referring to people with dementia were often represented in a stereotype: lost, soulless and poignant. In Chapter Three, I demonstrated that portraying people with dementia from life was an unpredictable process because of cognitive deterioration and failed memory in the participants. I found their failure to recognise me through their dementia affected my social identity, and eventually, I felt that I was affected myself by the characteristics of dementia. To summarise, the symptoms of dementia re-shaped the relationship between artist and sitter so that the essence of painting a portrait of a person with dementia affected the artist to the point of assimilating the symptoms into his own self-portraits.

In this fourth chapter, I examine the relationship between the representability of

portraits of people with dementia and their socially-constructed identity. By analysing the case study of British artist William Utermohlen (1933-2007) who created a series of self-portraits after he was diagnosed with dementia at the age of sixty-two, I suggest that the selfhood of people with dementia is not represented in their actual completed self-portraits, but within the process of portrayal. In addition, this chapter includes first-hand information that I collected from interviewing Utermohlen's wife in 2013. I provide some unpublished details about Utermohlen's process of portrayal in this chapter to point out the contradiction in current perspectives towards his late self-portraits. This analysis of Utermohlen's late self-portraits focuses on his painting process which gives a profound insight into both his deterioration and the nature of painting itself.

4.1 An artist in the text

William Utermohlen (1933-2007) was born in south Philadelphia. He enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts where he learned traditional painting and draughtsmanship. Throughout his career, he was mainly a realistic artist whose paintings were figurative though he was influenced by the bright colours and patterns of pop art painting. At the age of sixty-two in 1995, Utermohlen was diagnosed with dementia but he continued to create several self-portraits between about 1995 and

2001.¹⁶ This series of self-portraits documented the deterioration of his painting ability.

Because these self-portraits reflect the progression of dementia and its influence on an artist, they gained the attention of neuro-psychological and psychoanalytic researchers whose focus was on revealing the resilience of human creativity and recording the impairment of brain function caused by dementia. Through analysing these self-portraits and other test drawings, the researchers not only examined Utermohlen's spatial perception and cognitive ability throughout his period of painting self-portraits, but also searched for the early symptoms of dementia that were revealed in other works that were created before the diagnosis was made (Crutch *et al.*, 2001; Utermohlen, 2012). Ironically, these late self-portraits are often considered as the highlight of his career. According to his dealer Christophe Boïcos (2013, pers. comm., 8 January), this extraordinary project has amazed viewers in many exhibitions across the U.S.A., England and France since 2001. The viewers found the expression of emotions in these self-portraits not only to be authentic and sincere but felt that they demonstrated the inner feelings of the affected artist, such as loss and frustration.

According to British neuropsychologist Sebastian J. Crutch and his co-researchers

¹⁶ Evidence indicates that he was encouraged by his caregiver and the research team to keep creating. In a 2001 interview by David Derbyshire (Utermohlen, 2012), Utermohlen had signalled this series of self-portraits as having a more community-oriented direction, saying "I think is perfect. It is there to help people" (2001).

(2001), Utermohlen's dementia showed several unusual characteristics during his late years, because the illness strangely spared his ability to paint. The research team documented changes in Utermohlen's perceptual and cognitive ability since the onset and diagnosis of dementia until 2000 through tests of memory and facial recognition. At the same time, Utermohlen created at least one self-portrait every year from 1995 to 2000 which coincided with their study.

After examining data, drawing tests and his late self-portraits, Crutch and his colleagues suggested that the presented data was inconsistent with Utermohlen's ability to paint continuously throughout his late years. In particular, they concluded that there were several main points that illustrated this inconsistency. Firstly, loss of spatial perception and cognition were represented in a test sketch (Figure 31) showing disassembled human figures. Secondly, the distortion of the face in self-portraits was mainly attributed to the loss of executive ability in painting (which related to physical coordination) rather than the loss of perception and cognition. Thirdly, his motivation and desire to create self-portraits were both spared from dementia but his traditional skills were affected. Surprisingly, Utermohlen seemed to adapt to those changes by expressing himself through different approaches such as abstract painting. Finally, the researchers suggest that Utermohlen's creativity was surprisingly resilient and coped

with the difficulties he had over the period (Crutch *et al.*, 2001).



Figure 31: William Utermohlen, *A welcoming man*, 1995, Pencil on Paper, n.d..

It is important to know that the way viewers perceived the late self-portraits of Utermohlen was largely shaped by the available narratives about his life and art. The existing biographical resources and main publications regarding Utermohlen were mostly generated by his wife Patricia Utermohlen, his student and art dealer Christophe Boïcos (2001) and psychoanalyst Patrice Polini (2007), who was also a close friend of Boïcos. In a sense, their interpretations of Utermohlen's late works created a link with his early works that signified the continuity of Utermohlen's selfhood across his repertoire. In their description of Utermohlen's works, these close associates found that symbolic meaning was one of the most important characteristics throughout his career. For example, Mrs. Utermohlen suggested that the *Mummers* series (1958-1970) (Figure 32) was a reflection of Utermohlen's unhappy childhood in America where the artist's

father forbade him to participate in the parade (Utermohlen, 2006). Instead of representing the authentic parade, Mrs. Utermohlen believes that the young Utermohlen inserted himself as a passive and lonely witness into the frenetic scene of *Mummers* (P. Utermohlen, 2013, pers. comm., 1 January). In addition, Mrs. Utermohlen (2013) points out that the symbols in the later *Vietnam War* series (1972-1973) (Figure 33) including the isolated and dignified young soldiers were the representation of his feeling of being an “outsider” in the contemporary art world. Comparing the two series *Mummers* and *Vietnam War*, Mrs. Utermohlen (2013) believed that Utermohlen presented not only an empathetic vision of people of the lower classes, but also his own projected self-image.



Figure 32: William Utermohlen, *Golden Slippers*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 107 cm × 137 cm.



Figure 33: William Utermohlen, *Bird of Paradise*, 1972, Oil on canvas, 96 cm × 121 cm.



Figure 34: William Utermohlen, *The show*, 1994, Lithographie, 54.5 cm × 39.3 cm.

Another example of Utermohlen's strategy of transforming the symbolic meaning of images into autobiographical narrative was seen at the dawn of his dementia. During 1993 and 1994, Utermohlen was commissioned to create a series of illustrations for the work of British poet Wilfred Owen (Figure 34). Unlike his early works, the lines and patterns of these pictures seemed to engulf the individuality of the faces in the work. The faces in the *Wilfred Owen* series were less recognisable, mask-like, and lacking in facial expression. Although the individuality of the figures in the *Wilfred Owen* series seems uncertain, the artist's subjectivity was still intact in the interpretation of his friends. For example, addressing the consistency of lines and shapes, Utermohlen's student and art dealer Christophe Boïcos (2001) suggested that his ability to draw was unquestionably refined when he was creating the *Wilfred Owen* series. Boïcos also argued that Utermohlen's choice of subject matter was made intentionally: the forthcoming dementia was analogised as a cruel battle field by Utermohlen after he became aware of the latent danger of losing his identity.

The psychoanalyst Polini (2007) focused on analysing Utermohlen's works from around the time the diagnosis of dementia was made. In Polini's analysis, several of Utermohlen's works represented a state of reality at that period in 1995, and this persistence of his personality continued to be reflected throughout his late years. For

example, *The Conversation Pieces* (1990-1993) were considered as a precursor that represented several symptoms of his dementia (Utermohlen, 2012). W.9. (1990) (Figure 35), the earliest painting in *The Conversation Pieces*, represents a scene of the artist's wife having a chat with a close friend in the artist's house. The artist's jacket hanging over a chair functions as the symbol of his transition from presence to absence (Utermohlen, 2012). To imagine Utermohlen's feelings during the process of creation, Polini described *The Conversation Pieces* series through a poetic interpretation: "Like a snapshot, every painting tries to freeze the instant and suspend time so that its flow can be reserved. To seize things is to re-create what was. It is to resist the inexorable degradation, the return to nothingness" (Utermohlen, 2012).

As in the interpretation of Mrs. Utermohlen and Boïcos, the sense of self was highlighted in Polini's interpretation of the late self-portraits. Though the symptoms of dementia clearly appeared in these works: the form became incoherent, the colour turned unsophisticated and the texture of paint appeared coarse (Figure 36). Interestingly, in Polini's analysis of Utermohlen's late works both before and after the diagnosis of dementia, he observed consistent emotions and feelings as if Utermohlen consciously created symbolic narratives while the severe symptoms were approaching. For example, in *Self-portrait with Saw* (1997) (Figure 36), Polini offered another

description of an artist facing his illness:

The scan imagery has cut up his head into slices. From what the doctors tell him he has retained that only an autopsy will allow a true diagnosis of his condition. The truth will be known post mortem. This notion haunts him, he speaks of it constantly to those close to him. The vertical saw like a guillotine blade symbolizes once more the approach of the prefigured death. It also points to that other death, that of his psyche. The split between what he feels, what he would like to do or say and that which he is actually reduced to doing is each day greater. Not able to find himself within himself, he senses a stranger lurking at the heart of his being. It is an encounter with the unknown within. His possibilities of expression are no longer adequate to the extreme nature of his experience (Utermohlen, 2012)¹⁷.

In a sense, by employing the narrative of figurative images in relation to the artist's life, Mrs. Utermohlen, Boĩcos and Polini created a poignant image of Utermohlen who had undergone an unprecedented project of experiencing and portraying dementia. They described his capacity to employ the symbolic meaning of objects as a persistent characteristic of Utermohlen's art throughout his career regardless the influence of dementia.

¹⁷ Polini's journal was originally published on Utermohlen's official website. However, due to the reconstruction of the website, the article has been temporarily inaccessible since February 2014.



Figure 35: William Utermohlen, W.9., 1990, Oil on canvas, 120 cm × 120 cm.

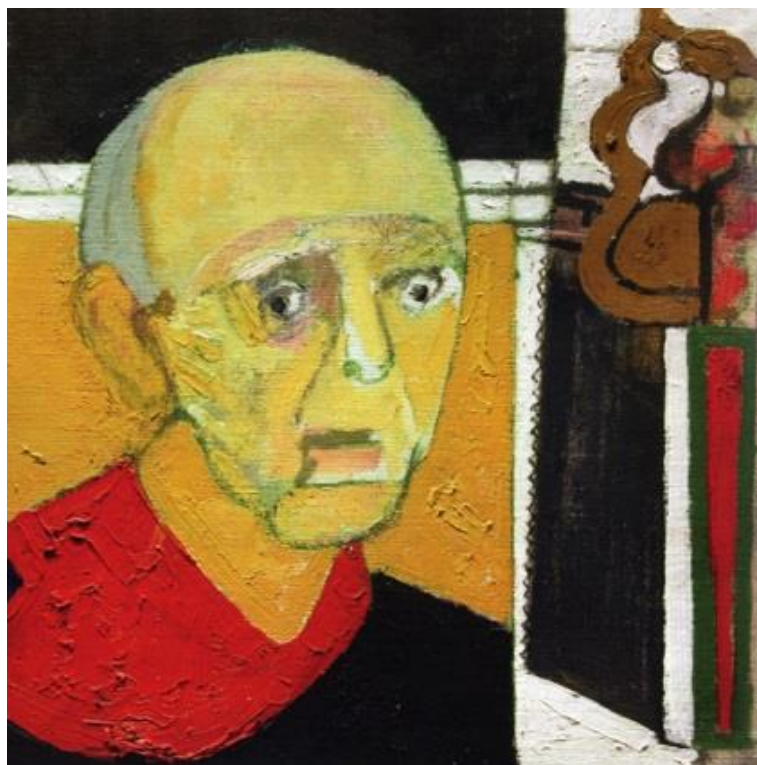


Figure 36: William Utermohlen, *Self-portrait with Saw*, 1997, Oil on canvas, 35.5 cm × 35.5 cm.

4.2 Self-in-progress: Nigel Wentworth's concept of *Rubric*

Due to his inability to articulate his thought and speak about his motivation to create the late self-portraits, this sense of a continuity of Utermohlen's selfhood was mainly observed by his family and friends. Surprisingly, none of them described Utermohlen's process of self-portrayal during his late years and his ambiguous facial expression in his late self-portraits. As a traditional painter with rigorous training, Utermohlen had demonstrated his skilful and comprehensive painting style in many of his early works, including both traditional draughtsmanship and the vibrant colours of Pop Art. In particular, these two characteristics somehow remained in his late portraits as if they were spared the effects of dementia. Although another contemporary neuro-psychological study suggested that artists who suffer from dementia might change the pictorial patterns in their paintings (Maurer and Prvulovic, 2004), Utermohlen's style did not vary and consistently appeared in most of his late self-portraits.¹⁸ Comparing two self-portraits created in 1967 and 1997 (Figure 37), it is clear that the later self-portrait manifested some evident symptoms of dementia, including the difficulty of constructing the image through lines and shadows. Yet one

¹⁸ Maurer and Prvulovic (2004) employed the case study of German artist Carolus Horn (1921-1992) to suggest that some dramatic transformations of artistic style can be related to dementia, such as alteration of the size of figures, loss of ability to differentiate facial expressions, and distorted representation of space and lines. Although Utermohlen and Horn suffered from different kinds of dementia, some similar symptoms were seen in both of their late works. However, unlike Horn's choice of various subject matters, Utermohlen only focused on portraiture.

can see the similarity between the early and later self-portrait in terms of composition, perspective and expression. Regardless of the difference in colours and media, these two self-portraits were like mirrored images. In fact, a composition of “three-quarter face with upper bust” was the basic structure of all Utermohlen’s late self-portraits.

Intriguing information about the making of Utermohlen’s late self-portraits was revealed in an interview with Mrs. Utermohlen in 2013. She claimed that she covered all the mirrors in the house because Utermohlen was “frightened by what he saw in the mirror”. As a result, Utermohlen created these self-portraits without looking at the reflective image in the mirror (P. Utermohlen, 2013, pers. comm., 2 January). However, the absence of an image reference did not simply liberate him to jump from the traditional style to freer, abstract painting as was suggested by Crutch and his research team (2001). His struggle to capture a facial likeness still appeared in the self-portrait in 1997. Comparing the quality of these two works, one can see that the early self-portrait was created meticulously and determinedly with clear strokes, but the latter was made more indecisively with several modifying marks. As Utermohlen’s process of portrayal indicated, his focus was not the naturalistic likeness of the represented image but the actual act of portrayal as if he could understand his world through painting. In this regard, self-portraiture is often seen as the interrogation of the identity of the artist

her/himself.



Figure 37: These two self-portraits of William Utermohlen shared the similarity of composition, perspective and expression. Left: *Self-portrait*, 1967, Pencil on Paper, n.d.. Right: *Self-portrait*, 1997, Oil on canvas, 35.5 cm × 35.5 cm.

In the report that was made by Crutch and his co-researchers in that same year (1997), Utermohlen showed his well-preserved capacity to distinguish different faces, and he fully realised the flaws in his self-portrait though he did not know how to correct them. In other words, Utermohlen was capable of recognising but incapable of representing faces through painting in his drastic condition. He also became aware of the inconsistency between his early and later works, clearly expressing his disappointment in his late self-portraits in a 2001 interviews: “The whole thing [painting] is what I want to do. What I have always done and I feel sometimes like a baby saying, ‘Why can’t I have it? I have had it before’ (2001)”. Even though he knew there was no cure for his

dementia, Utermohlen surprisingly addressed his dementia as a new subject matter to work with in another interview in 2001:

It (dementia) makes me anxious because I like to produce good work and I know good work, but it's just so sad when you feel you cannot do it...It was in a sense an opportunity to have something so interesting happening to you...You have to approach something like this positively and throw yourself into it...It's not fighting back, you can't fight it. But I wanted to try to understand what was happening to me in the only way I can (2001).¹⁹

Expressing his frustration, Utermohlen's words represented his loss of identity as an artist who used to accomplish high quality of work but was now unable to do so. Since the repetitive act of self-portrait-painting over five years was hardly to be classed as a random hobby, one can assume the reason Utermohlen created his self-portraits was related to his sense of loss of his identity. Rather than being represented in the depiction of the symbolic objects, it seems likely that Utermohlen's selfhood was actually embodied in his attempt to recreate a past identity when he was capable of representing what he perceived in painting.

In his book *The Phenomenology of Painting* (2004), British artist and philosopher Nigel

¹⁹ Originally posted on Utermohlen's official website, this 2001 interview by journalist Margaret Driscoll on 2001 has been inaccessible since the reconstruction of the website in February 2014.

Wentworth suggested that *motif* and *rubric* were two crucial terms to define the relationship between the art work and the artist during the process of painting. To define the meaning of *motif*, Wentworth suggested:

the motif, then, calls to the painter in a particular way, and he responds by trying to give form to the way that it calls to him. As a result, there is a purposive search for the visual elements whose configuration together would give form to that which called and the way that it did so. As a purposive looking, this looking is a kind of staring in response to a question. The painter is drawn to the motif in a certain way and seeks the means of translating what attracts him on to the canvas. He searches the motif for these means (Wentworth, 2004, p.99).

To summarise, one can suggest that the motif appears in the encounter between the perception of the artist and her/his subject matter. As an act of selecting and representing visual elements, Wentworth argues that the inspiration of the motif is not always stable during the process of representation, and it differs from artist to artist. For example, during the process of portrayal, one artist may concentrate on depicting more details of wrinkles, and another may focus on the structure of the face (Wentworth, 2004, p.102).

By contrast, *rubric* was defined as the supplement to enhance the artist who does not “paint from life, because he does not have the subject before him, and must rely upon

“inner resources” for the figurative material, out of which the figurative subject will be constructed” (Wentworth, 2004, p.103). In particular, Wentworth suggested that the *rubric* is encapsulated then transformed into the inner resource by “external tradition” such as the habits that one has developed in art school (2004). Taking my process of portraying residents in Boronia Hostel as an example, the rigorous training at art school did provide me with an inner resource to keep painting while my subjects were absent. Therefore, without having the time to perceive the *motif* of my subjects, I could still work with my *rubric*.

Likewise, Utermohlen’s *rubric* was created by the constant practice of portrait-painting and training that he had in art school, and the experience that he gained throughout his career. Because Utermohlen did not look at his reflected image while he was creating his late self-portraits, he must have employed his inner *rubric* during the process of portrayal. More importantly, as Crutch and his co-researchers (2001) discovered, what Utermohlen created on the canvas was very different from what he was able to perceive from life. As a result, the represented subjectivity in Utermohlen’s late self-portraits splits into two different directions: on the one hand, he was able to examine the quality of the created image though he failed to fix it by his will in the present; on the other hand, a lifetime habit of creating a painting indicated that residue of his past remained.

In recalling the concept of *embodied selfhood* suggested by dementia scholar Kontos (2004, 2005, 2012) listed in Chapter Three, I argue that Utermohlen's habit (of painting) did not unify his identity in the present but polarised it. *Rubric* became the evidence of his struggle to identify himself, and his act of painting was increasingly widening the gap between his present and past. Therefore the evidence presented here suggests that what the late self-portraits of Utermohlen challenged was not only the representability of self-portraiture while experiencing dementia, but also the feasibility of representing a subject through the concept of *embodied selfhood*.

4.3 A portrait by Utermohlen

Soon after the diagnosis was made, Utermohlen and his wife made a trip to Europe to visit galleries. Then after returning from Europe, Utermohlen created a self-portrait called *In the Studio* (1996) (Figure 40). According to Mrs. Utermohlen (2006), Utermohlen (at the age of sixty-three) had spent hours looking at the Spanish artist Diego Velázquez's (1599-1660) work *The Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1650) (Figure 38). In this regard, Mrs. Utermohlen (2013) pointed out the striking similarity between Utermohlen's *In the Studio* and Francis Bacon's *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) (Figure 39), which was also inspired by the work of Velázquez. During the interview with me in 2013, Mrs. Utermohlen suggested that she believed

Utermohlen might discover the essence of madness in Velázquez's work just as Bacon did.

The traditional approach to painting held that copying masters' works was an efficient method for the artist who intended to learn the *rubric* of these works, a rubric that condensed their technique, understanding of materials, and ways of expressing emotion (Wentworth, 2004, p.159-161). According to his wife, Utermohlen also admired Bacon's works in terms of how the latter created strong emotion through gestural brush marks and symbols (Utermohlen, 2013). Comparing *In the Studio* and *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, the most significant likeness was the open mouth that seemingly screamed out silently. In a sense, the emotion that was created in Bacon's work was transcribed into Utermohlen's work through simulating the visual symbol: the shattered body with the open mouth and ambiguous gaze. To recall my argument above, Utermohlen's employment of Bacon's pictorial symbol was evidence of his still remaining ability to assimilate his style to that of another artist.

It is important to note that Utermohlen's procedural memory did not reduce his effort over many years into the random practice of art. As a contrast to his earlier work, one

can see a certain inner quality in the method of creating in his late self-portraits. Many neuro-scientific researchers have suggested that the ability of people with dementia to experience and perceive emotion from the face varies from case to case. For example, many studies argue that dementia sufferers lose most of their ability to recognise subtle facial emotion (Spoletini *et al.*, 2008) and to understand emotion that is perceived from eyes (Bediou *et al.*, 2009). As a contrast, others suggested that dementia sufferers can recognise that emotion is happening but not what emotion it is (Albert *et al.*, 1991, Burnham and Hogervorst, 2004).

Although the panorama of Utermohlen's dementia is still bewildering, it is clear that his ability to distinguish the difference between faces remained intact (Crutch, Isaacs and Rossor, 2001). According to Crutch and his co-researchers, whether he was able to perceive emotion from the face or not, the major challenge for Utermohlen was his inability to represent a particular emotion that corresponded to his inner reality. The English philosopher Nick Crossley (1996) suggested that emotion is not a private property as it often appears in dialogue with other people. For example, if someone was angry, he could create fear in other people, then possibly feel guilty afterward (Crossley, 1996, p.46). In other words, to express emotion is to ask for mutual recognition in the inter-subjective relationship.

As the only self-portrait that showed strong emotion and different composition (full figure) among all Utermohlen's late self-portraits, *In the Studio* presents an analogous image of an artist who searches for response through the emotion that he constructs on the canvas rather than his expression of fear and terror. By borrowing the powerful symbol that was created by Bacon, which might have been learned and remembered by Utermohlen in his early life, he was able to re-create an access to his world for his viewer. Specifically, by colouring the face area and table scene, Utermohlen seems to convey the narrative of his identity in the past: an artist works in his studio and he was waiting for recognition from other people. In other words, what Utermohlen intended to express in this self-portrait was his desire to be known by his viewers as an artist rather than because of his sufferings with the symptoms of dementia.



Figure 38: Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1650, Oil on canvas, 114 cm × 119 cm.



Figure 39: Francis Bacon, *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, Oil on canvas, 153 cm × 118 cm.

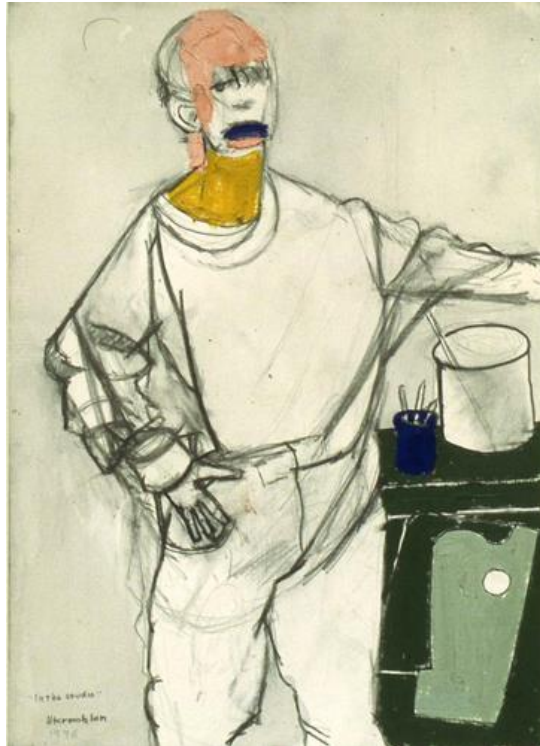


Figure 40: William Utermohlen, *(Self-portrait) In the Studio*, 1996, Oil on canvas, 45.5 cm × 32.5 cm.

Comparing Utermohlen's social identity that was mainly constructed by family and friends with the selfhood that was created through his procedural memory and working habits, one can see that a different reading of his late works emerges from a different belief in the self-referential power of self-portraiture. Employing the self-portraits of Dutch artist Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669), American philosopher and playwright Douglas P. Lackey (2006) suggested that self-portraiture had no self-referential power that was embodied in language. In this regard, Lackey proposed a succinct formation of two imaginary self-portraits of Rembrandt, one was made when he thought "I am depressed" and the other was made when he pictured himself in the third person portraying "Rembrandt is depressed". Lackey argued that there was no

difference between these two imaginary works because the position of *I* was not visible in the pictorial representation (p.454-455). Therefore Lackey suggested that “we know a great deal about Rembrandt, not because he painted himself, but because Rembrandt painted him” (p.455). In other words, a self-portrait of an artist can be regarded as the representation of the knowledge and technique of the artist which registered her/his unique history.

In a sense, Utermohlen’s late self-portraits not only highlighted the dilemma of artist with dementia, but also the ability of self-portraiture to represent the artist. The analysis of his family and friends supplanted the subjectivity of Utermohlen “himself.” Nowadays, one cannot analyse Utermohlen’s later self-portraits without considering the fact of his dementia and cognitive deterioration; as if dementia ironically authenticated the inner quality in his self-portraits, but at the same time, the process of painting was often ignored in the analysis of representation. To be framed in a face-to-face relationship, Utermohlen’s portrayed face was directly perceived by many viewers as giving access to his mind. However, by learning of his struggles with depiction and the strategy he employed to construct the self-image, one should bear in mind that “Utermohlen” was never fully represented in his late self-portraits, and his identity should be analysed through his process of painting. His late self-portraits dramatically

signified the unstable position of the *I* in self-portraiture, as it did in that of dementia.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discovered the intriguing subjectivity of British artist William Utermohlen who created a series of self-portraits after he was diagnosed with dementia. Without minimising his efforts in representing the reality of the symptoms of dementia, I argue that his identity was intensively defined by his family and friends. Employing the concept of the *rubric* (Wentworth, 2004) to examine Utermohlen's late works, I discovered that his identity was embodied by his act of painting rather than the symbolic objects that were painted on the canvas. In comparison, the research outcomes of neuro-scientists like Crutch and his co-researchers (1997) indicated that the incoherent visual effect in Utermohlen's late self-portraits was the result of his decreasing ability in execution rather than an increasing difficulty in perceiving and recognising faces. Utermohlen's expression of dissatisfaction with his late works in several interviews made a few years before his death was evidence of his struggles with representing himself through painting; but at the same time, his well-trained painter's hand ironically presented itself in a way that conveyed the symbolic meaning of his late self-portraits as perceived by critics.

Therefore, I suggest that Utermohlen's late self-portraits should not be analysed solely as representations of his selfhood since the physical act of painting was significantly troubled by his dementia. In addition, I argue that the emotional expression in one of his late self-portraits (Figure 40) could also be created through his working habits such as copying the work of a master. Finally, by examining the notion of Utermohlen's selfhood through the ontology of the identity of self-portraiture, I point out that his authentic selfhood did not fully appear in his late works; as a contrast, Utermohlen's "subjectivity" in his late self-portraits was mainly created by the narrative of his family and friends. While Utermohlen's history was represented through the gestural act of painting involuntarily, his symptoms of dementia were strangely assimilated into his identity in the eyes of his community. In the next chapter, rather than representing a coherent identity of subjects with dementia, I create for the viewer the dilemma of recognising an entity with dementia through the works in my own exhibition.

Chapter 5

Absence and Presence of identity in relation to dementia: Faculty of
Creative Arts Gallery exhibition *Searching for the Vanishing Subject in
Portraits of Dementia* (1 May-13 June, 2014)

Influenced by artist William Utermohlen (Chapter Four), I began to represent the symptoms of dementia through painting a series of self-portraits (*In Proximity*, 2012-2014) and *Anonymous Portrait* (2010-2014). Attempting to reflect my experience of engaging with people with dementia and losing my own sense of identity in Boronia Hostel, I employed the strategy of over-painting in impasto in creating both series of works. The doctoral exhibition combined the photographic series *Absence* (2011-2014) and portraits of residents *Presence* (2012-2014) of Boronia Hostel, together with the series of self-portraits. The series of works in the gallery were installed to convey an empathetic narrative of people with dementia in relation to healthy others.

The autobiographical narrative in this chapter addresses my marginal identity in the social dimension of engaging with dementia. It is a platform for viewers to encounter another layer of the sense of disappearing identity which parallels that of people with

dementia. In a sense, this chapter illustrates the dynamic relationship between the identity of the artist and that of the sitter represented through the painting. This chapter examines the impact of the symptoms of dementia on the artist who *catches* some elements of dementia during three years of investigation. The representation of this perplexing relationship comes with a double frame of subjectivity in which private and social identities overlap in the viewers' perception of my exhibition.

5.1 Methodology of over-painting as empathy: Stephen James Newton's analysis of Philip Guston's changing style and representative subjectivity

Following on from the discussion in Chapter Three, adopting the *I-Thou* relationship as a framework in understanding people with dementia, Kitwood (1997) constructs several methods for healthy others to *experience* dementia. In particular, artistic expression such as creative writing and performance were both employed to represent the experience of living with dementia. In particular, the *I-Thou* relationship was made without "taking the role/perspective" of another person, or other similar imaginary process of understanding. For example, during the period of face-to-face relationship, both the subject and the person who s/he engages with must immediately share the same feelings of experience including each other's emotion. However, the creative strategies that were recommended by Kitwood (1997) as well as most contemporary art that addressed dementia as a subject stressed the importance of the viewers' imagination during the

process of viewing.²⁰ Paradoxically, the very concept of imagination indicated clearly defined positions of (and separation between) people with dementia and viewers that are contradictory to the radical *I-Thou* relationship.

Listed in Chapter Two, the symptoms of mental illness were widely employed by artists like Dubuffet to create a refreshing perspective for modern aesthetics. Having considered Dubuffet's strategy (Chapter Two), I aimed to take a step further in Chapter Three. Instead of directly reproducing the works made by people with dementia (such as Connie's drawings of me), I suggested that the act of portrayal assimilated the symptoms of dementia and defined the represented inner reality in portraits of people with dementia. In particular, the visible portrayed image, as suggested in Chapter Three, significantly embodies the history and identity of the artist. But at the same time, my identity as the artist oscillated with the symptoms of dementia. For example, the unpainted white area on the surface of *Connie* (2014) (Figure 29) and *Doris Y* (2014) (Figure 26) represented my difficulties in being myself, as a realistic artist who was used to having control over his sitter during the process of portrayal. The white area became the open space for imaginary engagement where viewers might understand my

²⁰ *Meet Me* (2007-2014) is one of the most celebrated projects referring to dementia. Held by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA, New York) this project was based on the interaction between art educators, art works in the MoMA and people with dementia. By guiding the perception of people with dementia, this project created links with the pictorial narrative of the paintings that stimulated the empirical response of people with dementia to the exterior world.

predicament during the process of portrayal.

In the same regard, the increasingly unfinished areas in the self-portraits of Utermohlen (Figure 41) represent the artist's fading technique of painting and his desired identity while the procedural memory ironically embodies a sense of selfhood in his history (Chapter Four). Undoubtedly, Utermohlen was struggling to represent a coherent subjectivity through self-portrayal while the drastic deterioration of his capacity for painting prevented him from representing what he was still able to perceive from his portrayed faces (the eerie quality that he was dissatisfied with). To viewers who are unable to experience dementia on an empirical basis, they can only study the perspective of Utermohlen through their imagination while their own cognitive ability actually prevents them from experiencing the suffering of an artist under his deficit cognition.



Figure 41: William Utermohlen, *Erased Self-portrait*, 1999, Oil on canvas, 45.5 cm × 35.5 cm.

In her book *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005), Australian visual culture scholar Jill Bennett pointed out that *empathy* was the term to describe the experience of the subject in relation to some art works that facilitated emotion and mental affect. Quoting from fellow Australian visual culture scholar Nikos Papastergiadis (2002), Bennett suggested that empathy is created not on the basis of sameness but of difference. When one encounters another subject and her/his traumatic suffering, one is in the process “of going closer to be able to see, but also never forgetting where you are coming from...empathy is about that process of surrender...but also the *catch* that transforms your perception” (Papastergiadis and

Zournazi, 2002, p.94-95). Different from sympathy and emotional contagion,²¹ empathy is enacted through both the act of imagining the suffering of other people and the understanding of the ultimate difference between the self and others. Therefore, what empathy asks for in a viewer is neither her/his uncertain or fluid identity absorbed in an *I-Thou* relationship with the art work nor the total vacuum of imagination, but her/his affected identity through the transaction of imagination and an awareness of the dissimilated difference between her/his identity and that of others.

However, Bennett also noted that contemporary arts practice which addresses certain empathetic subjects such as trauma often distanced themselves from a phenomenological analysis that gave rise to visual objects that directly influenced viewers without applying associated theory (2005, p.150). Resonating with Bennett's concern, argued in Chapter Three, my strategy focused on the first-person experience in the residential care institution. This allowed me to construct an empathetic narrative without fully assimilating the direct psychological impact then transforming it into

²¹ American philosopher Amy Coplan (2004) differentiated three different emotional responses one had during the engagement with suffering others: empathy, sympathy and emotional contagion. Empathy and sympathy were both created under the circumstance of "knowing the difference between oneself and other people," but when emotional contagion occurred, one automatically entered the emotion of other people around her/him and lost the autonomy of selfhood and emotion. For example, without holding a particular emotion, a newborn baby cried when s/he heard another baby crying simultaneously.

She suggests that the difference between sympathy and empathy is the existence of "role/perspective-taking." Empathy was enacted when the subject imagined her/himself in a similar situation with the corresponding emotion of the suffering other. Yet sympathy could be felt without imagining the emotion of other people though the subject is still concerned about the well-being of a suffering other.

representation. While the white area in the *Presence* series (2012-2014) suggested the potential of imaginary engagement, the symptoms of dementia continuously appear in the series of self-portraits *In Proximity* (2012-2014) (Figure 44 and 47) and *Anonymous Portrait* (2010-2014) (Figure 54- 56) that were constructed through the act of over-painting in impasto during the years of my project.



Figure 42: Xi Hsu, *Self-portrait*, 2011, Oil on board, 20.1 cm × 17.8 cm.



Figure 43: Xi Hsu, *Self-portrait* (Painted on Figure 42), 2013, Oil on board, 20.1 cm × 17.8 cm.



Figure 44: Xi Hsu, *Self-portrait* (Painted on Figure 43), 2014, Oil on board, 20.1 cm × 17.8 cm.

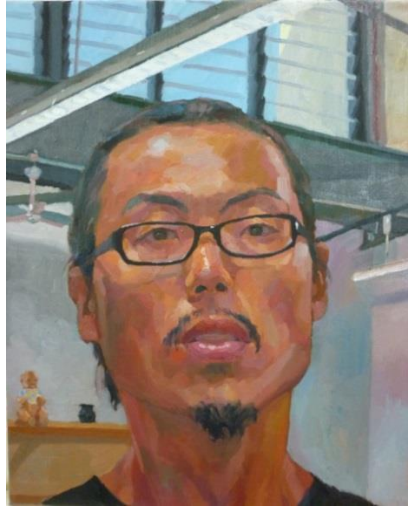


Figure 45: Xi Hsu, *Self-portrait*, 2012, Oil on board, 50 cm × 40.2 cm.



Figure 46: Xi Hsu, *Self-portrait* (Painted on Figure 45), 2014, Oil on board, 50 cm × 40.2 cm.



Figure 47: Xi Hsu, *Self-portrait* (Painted on Figure 46 one month later), 2014, Oil on board, 50 cm × 40.2 cm.

Since the launch of the project, I worked on more than ten self-portraits and the *Anonymous portrait* series simultaneously. My process of creating these works required long periods of intermission and multiple layers. Working on the same canvases during the three-year period, I took the process of portrayal as the precipitation of my unconscious and a reflection of my experience of engaging with people with dementia. According to the documented pictures, my self-portraits showed some interesting aspects including fragmentation and discontinuity. For example, in Figures 42 to 44, my image was becoming increasingly disintegrated throughout the three years but nevertheless represented a sense of figurative continuity; whereas Figures 45 to 47 literally illustrate the impulse of covering of my self-image in the past through totally engulfing layers of paint and brushwork.

The process of making the self-portraits indicated the strong tendency to remove the ideal self-image from the representation. Figures 42 to 44 show that subjectivity in the self-portrait was shattered by pictorial effects such as the techniques of lumping and scratching paint that were eventually seen on the surface of the final work (Figure 48) that reached a minimal level of recognisability. Figures 45 to 47 represented a similar pattern, however the features eventually came back from the chaos to become an estranged and almost unrecognisable identity. In a sense, the abstract elements in both

self-portraits prevented the identity from being recognised in the social context. For example, the background of Figure 45 represents my working space with objects (infant doll and candle lamp) that I often use in still life painting. The need to destroy the coherence of the face represented my attempt to question the authenticity of the essence of traditional self-portraiture. As discussed in Chapter Three, rather than a simple mask to cover the truth beneath it, the face-to-face encounter always created a whole identity *in* the face of others. However, my experience in Boronia Hostel reflected a situation where my identity was challenged by residents who could not recognise me during the process of portrayal. In a sense, my project of portraying residents in Boronia Hostel became the interrogation of selfhood of an artist who was unable to represent his whole subjectivity, and the lack of wholeness was seen in the white empty area on the canvas while the fragmented subjectivity transformed into the marks on the surface of his self-portraits (Figure 48).

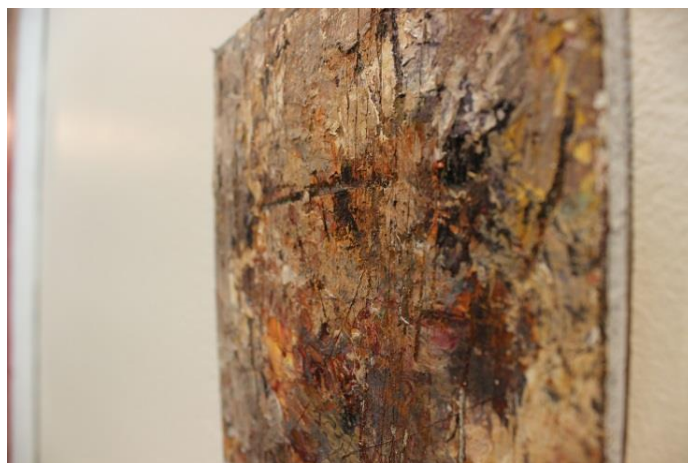


Figure 48: The details of *Self-portrait* (Figure 44). The marks were made with a knife.

Employing German art historian Wilhelm Worringer's classifications of *abstraction* and *empathy* (1953) in visual art and the corresponding psyche of the artist, writer and artist Stephen James Newton (2001) suggested that abstraction "arises out of a desperate psychic need for transcendence and redemption, whereas empathy involves a more rational and humane approach to naturalistic reality, with its implicit connection to conceptual and materialistic development" (p.102). According to Worringer, artists in personal crisis often seek abstract forms to echo the inner feelings. In particular, *real empathy* is acquired through the process of art-making that reveals the authentic psychic constitution of the artist that could eventually resonate with the perceiver (Newton, 2001, p.104). As the result of the mutual relationship built on unconscious interaction during the process of perceiving a painting, disorganised and inarticulate forms could both represent the truth of an artist's inner need.

In this regard, Newton employed the works of artist Philip Guston (born Canada, 1913-1980) to argue that changes in representation suggest the hidden emotion of the artist. Starting his career as an artist of social realism, Guston's early paintings created strong political narratives mainly through the composition and arrangement of symbols (Figure 49). Although Guston had success in his early works, he was not satisfied with

the figurative form that could no longer represent his inner psychic landscape. In the late 1940s, the forms in Guston's works became more abstract which gave him the freedom to investigate and express his "manic phase of creativity" (Figure 50) (Newton, 2001, p. 124). Interestingly, since the mid 1950s, several figurative images returned to Guston's works that integrated both unconscious flux and symbolic reality (Figure 51). In Figure 51, a dark grey image was made in the right part of the painting through the brush marks that appeared around it. Although the image had minimal likeness to real objects, it could still be recognised as a man with shoulders. In particular, the sharp outline of the conjunct area from head to left shoulder clearly suggested Guston's conscious intention to separate the chaotic background from the figure meticulously.

Although Figure 51 has never been named a self-portrait of Guston, it could be called a portrait of the reality of his process of painting. To describe the ambiguous human figure that appears in Guston's work (Figure 51) as "an organic self-portraiture", American art critic and curator Robert Storr (1986) quoted Merleau-Ponty's words on art: "It formulates and amplifies the metaphysical structure of our flesh. The mirror appears because I am at once seer and seen...all of me that is most secret emerges in this 'face', a flat and enclosed being which reminds me of my reflection in the water" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.33). According to Newton (2001), Merleau-Ponty's perspective

on art resonates with Guston's works since the latter created a type of "phenomenological *transubstantiation*" that embodied a dynamic relationship between the artist and his world (2001, p.134). In other words, rather than representing the world from a detached viewpoint, Guston's works projected an image of himself, as a being that was transformed by his surroundings.

Newton (2001) also suggested that two of the most important sources of Guston's anxiety are the post-traumatic effects of the experience of world war and the nuclear holocaust in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, and his disbelief in the omnipotent power of the artist in relation to God. Far from refining his *rubric* (Chapter Four), Guston's quick response to world events inspired him to create fresh perspectives. But rather than being able to *represent* the world, Guston chose to be affected by the force of world events to generate a potential *transubstantiation* in his works (p. 134). In other words, Guston took the figurative image as the anchor to stabilise his endless unconscious flux, travelling in the sea of an inarticulate projection of himself onto world events. Visualising his concerns with his identity during the process of painting, the re-emerging figurative image was his acceptance of being a part of painting that was embodied through his perception of both the world and painting. Unlike his abstract works that represented the world in his mind, to Guston, semi-realistic painting became

a proactive way to test the boundary of his empathy for the crisis of losing identity and the consequent redemption rather than an access-point for viewers to analyse his position in the work.



Figure 49: Philip Guston, *Gladiators*, 1940, Oil on canvas, 62.2 cm × 71.1 cm.



Figure 50: Philip Guston, *To B. W. T.*, 1952, Oil on canvas, 121.9 cm × 129.5 cm.



Figure 51: Philip Guston, *Looking*, 1962, Oil on canvas, 170.2 cm × 203.2 cm.

Like Guston, I was striving for a new realistic form in self-portraiture that conveyed my new position after several engulfing layers of metaphorical self-destruction throughout the years of “experiencing” dementia symptoms. Yet unlike Guston’s works that showed the transformation of representation, the radical transformation of my works (Figure 45 and 46) eventually caused a disappearance of recognisable imagery on the surface of my self-portrait (Figure 47). To examine the link between dementia and my self-portrait, I make parallels with how Guston created his semi-figurative painting. I was consciously aware of my identity as an artist during the process of portrayal while an *I-Thou* relationship provided me with abundant unconscious flux to represent the symptoms of people with dementia during 2012-2014. For example, the act of painting such as over-painting, scratching out and eventually destroying my self-image echoed the loss of social identity I experienced in Boronia Hostel where I was not remembered from one day to the next (Figure 42- 44).

However, as Newton (2001) argued, since the plastic form of abstraction soon became a pattern that could be easily reproduced by the artist, the artist could be driven by the impulse of generating new symbols in order to picture her/his reality authentically (p.134). One month after Figure 46 was made (2014), my innermost feelings found the urgent need to relocate *myself* somewhere in my exhibition *about* dementia where the

viewers could also access my identity to investigate the psychological suffering I had experienced during the project. In the context of the impact of dementia in the relationship between artist and sitter, I unconsciously resisted the simulation of dementia and the permanent regression to an unrecognisable status in self-portraits.

Reframed in the narrative of self-redemption, my empathetic perspective was created through the act of disfiguration. In Chapter Three, according to Gombrich's suggestion of the ethical perception of seeing the reproduction of a face (1995, p.41), one experiences the primitive uneasy feeling of hurting the implicit subjectivity of the face through poking the image of an eye. However in the case of making my self-portraits, I soon ignored this sense of discomfort. A different empathetic perspective towards the person in the self-portrait was made through the act of over-painting as if I was no longer *that* person since I had a firm position outside of the portrayed space: *I* depicted *him* who shared only very limited likeness with the naturalistic look of *me* such as long dark hair and a moustache. When the whole new image in Figure 47 was finished, I quickly realised the inauthenticity of the previous self-image (including Figure 46). In a sense, over-painting became my method to partially disintegrate my identity in the eyes of other people in a face-to-face encounter. My desired identity was then authenticated by a minimal level of likeness and my unshared memory of the previous layers. As a

result, the representation of Figure 47 implied an irreducible subjectivity (though ideal) that was once positioned in a face-to-face relationship and became covered underneath the plastic form on the surface. Ironically, my memory of my self-image in the past, which embodied a transformation of my identity will also be forgotten by the creator: I could only obtain the identity in the present, and use it to polarise my self-image in the past as if it belonged to another person.

In this way, empathy was evoked through the act of both constructing and destroying: during the process of constructing the ideal image of myself (Figure 45), my identity was framed in the desire to make the representation *become the real me*; whereas the act of destroying in Figure 46 freed me from the controlling naturalistic image and returned the painting to a formless status. In a sense, having the social practice and commitment of an art exhibition triggered the sudden change from Figure 46 to 47 that corresponded to my need to be recognised as someone in the wider community.

A reversion of Levinas's theory of the face-to-face encounter is embodied in the form of my self-portrait (Figure 47). It resists the projection of the ideal illusory image of the artist and eventually suspends viewers' perception and the corresponding empathetic perspective. In this regard, Figure 47 represented my intention to transform the narrative

of the exhibition from the idea of the inter-subjective entity into a clearer sense of autobiography after *catching* the symptoms of dementia. However, this autobiographical account, as discussed in Chapter Four, cannot be guaranteed because of the failure of the self-referential function of self-portraiture.

In a sense, my identity was not created in the same way that an autobiographer might create a fictionalised account of her/ himself. Such an account might ultimately be an effective channel for readers to redeem a sense of true existence behind the words of self-description. Rather than an attempt to create a truthful autobiographic narrative by over-painting my self-portraits, my process of portrayal conveyed the dissimilarity between present and past, and the empathy I had for the identity of the *me* in the past, as a survivor of dementia symptoms after the engulfing waves of oblivion.

5.2 From the symptoms of dementia to the *symptom* in looking at the series of *Anonymous Portraits*: Georges Didi-Huberman's analysis of abstract image in the realistic painting

As another response to the experience I had in Boronia Hostel, I created a series of *Anonymous Portraits* (2010-2014) during 2010 to 2014 (Figure 54- 56). All of them were many times bigger than my self-portraits, and they looked visceral, viscous and somewhat confronting. Although the *Anonymous Portrait* series was also created

through the strategy of over-painting like that in my self-portraits, the meaning of the former was not constructed on the process of self-removal. As a contrast, the *Anonymous Portrait* series focused on the sensational feeling of paint in creating the grotesque and expressive face-like images from the beginning of the process of painting (Figure 58). In particular, the lumping paint constructed the swirl-like brush marks that recalled the sensational feeling of tentacles or body organs. Therefore, unlike the absent layers that actually constructed the narrative of my self-portraits, the physical paint on the surface of *Anonymous Portrait* series was the key to evoking feeling in the viewers.

According to art historian and critic James Elkins (2000), the substance on the surface of the painting directly registers the content of the representation. In particular, when the congealing paint forms the image of a self-portrait, the portrayed face becomes “a portrait of the substances” that represents the mind of the artist (Elkins, 2000, p.116). In other words, with the sensation of the paint, a self-portrait becomes a ground for a transaction between the mind of viewer and artist. In this regard, Elkins wrote about the self-portrait of Dutch artist Rembrandt (1659) to illustrate the function of the paint to create the integrity of the portrayed face:

Rembrandt is well-known for the buttery dab of paint that he sometimes puts on the ends of the noses of his portraits, and this nose is certainly greasy and

has its little spot of white. But touches like that do not stand alone: when Rembrandt was interested in what he was doing, as he was here, he coated entire faces in a glossy, shining mud-pack of viscid paint. The skin is damp with perspiration, as if he were painting himself in a hot room, and he slowly accumulated a slick sheen of sweat. It is impossible to ignore the strangeness of the paint...Paint is a viscous substance, already kin to sweat and fat, and here it represents itself: skin as paint or paint as skin, either way. It's a self-portrait of the painter, but it is also a self-portrait of paint (Elkins, 2000, P.114).

Employing the theory of Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1901), French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman (1989) explored the phenomenon of absorption during the process of looking at the details of paintings. Contextualising Wentworth's (2004) concept of *motif* (Chapter Four) through a phenomenological analysis, Didi-Huberman suggests that small paint strokes on canvas sometimes becomes a kind of visual *accident*, or *symptom* that eventually turns "meaningless, formless, incomprehensible, 'non-iconic' gesture" into the real meaning of the work (p.159). Illustrating *symptom* through the work of Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), Didi-Huberman suggests that when a viewer is drawn by the brushwork in the painting, her/his subjectivity is also challenged by her/his perception of the work: on the one hand, the brushwork was the absolute material that was made artificially; on the other hand, it has significant symbolic meaning in the narrative of the painting which gives rise to what is, in effect, an illusory sensation (p.161). For example, the thin lace

and strips of the garment in Vermeer's painting *The Lacemaker* (1669-1670) (Figure 52) were made in an extremely economical way. Vermeer created the form of the entangled lace through free brushwork that simulated the texture of the object, at the same time, the meaning of the painting was changed by the viewer's shifting perception (Figure 53). According to Didi-Huberman, this kind of image effect, as a kind of accident, refuses to be simulated by the narrative and structure of the painting, and its meaning is permanently suspended in the work. It is also important to note that this *symptom* is not a simple indicator of the psychic landscape or illness of the creator, but a representation of the dynamic encounter between the unconscious of viewers and the artist. In a degree, the experience of viewing a work with *symptom* is different from the traditional process of understanding a painting through the viewer's gaze.

Correspondingly, the subjectivity of the viewer is also changed by her/his shifting perception of the painting. Breaking into phenomenological terms, during the process of viewing Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*, the viewer has an initial understanding of the content through an unsophisticated gaze: a lady, her action and the meaning of other objects and their connection with the lady. Then, by catching the *symptom* of viewing the details of *The Lacemaker*, s/he temporarily loses her/his sovereign position as the reader who can decode the pictorial narrative. Eventually, s/he might step back and

reconstruct the meaning of *The Lacemaker* again. And through this act of changing the relationship between her/him and the painting, s/he regained her/his identity.

At the same time, the *symptom* nevertheless remains in the work and waits to be engaged. In a sense, Didi-Huberman's concept of *symptom* was beyond the open-ended reading of a painting in which viewers simply choose the way they define the meaning of a brush mark in the structure of a painting. Echoing the concept of Levinas (Chapter Three), looking at the form with *symptom* is like confronting the face of another person and surrendering to it. To Levinas, only by objectifying another face to a certain degree can, the viewer of another face avoid having responsibility for its carrier. Likewise, the position of a viewer of *The Lacemaker* can be stabilised through her/his recognition of figurative and realistic images. On the other hand, the viewer's subjectivity is destabilised by the inevitably dynamic relationship between her/his own conscious understanding and the unconscious sensation that s/he experiences. To Didi-Huberman, another layer of the narrative of a painting is created through this kind of intensive looking rather than the passive perception of representative images.



Figure 52: Johannes Vermeer, *The Lacemaker*, 1669-1670, Oil on canvas, 24.5 cm × 21 cm.



Figure 53: The details of *The Lacemaker*.

Taking the same approach to analyse *Anonymous Portrait*, unlike the function of abstract elements in Vermeer's realistic paintings, the *Anonymous Portrait* series fundamentally reverse the relationship between abstract and realistic images in the form. Turning the abstract and sensational images inside out, the *symptom* became the main body of the *Anonymous Portrait* series. During the process of viewing the series of *Anonymous Portrait*, the viewer initially fails to capture the content of these big paintings. Although these paintings leave very limited space for the viewer to withdraw her/his attention from visual stimulation (Figure 55), the visceral feeling of *Anonymous Portrait* nonetheless lures the viewer to define the meaning of the realistic form: a shattered face, animal organs, an interior inspection of the body or even a landscape (Figure 57). However, due to the perplexing quality (semi-abstract/ semi-realistic), s/he always fails to recognise the realistic images to stabilise her/his identity in relation to the series of *Anonymous Portrait*.

Discussed earlier in this chapter, the artist Guston anchored his unconscious flux through recreating the realistic image after many years of abstract painting practice. However, to the viewer, the therapeutic function of creating realistic images became problematic when viewing the series *Anonymous Portrait*, and forces a reconsideration of her/his identity in relation to these big paintings. Since the *symptom* initially

prevented the viewer from articulating the sensation of the paint, one can argue that her/his conscious gaze, which attempts to create a coherent meaning from the *Anonymous Portrait* series, generates another identity as the outsider then eventually destabilise her/his identity in the radical relationship with the *symptom*. Interestingly, the *symptom* in painting signifies the opposition of identities: leaving the *symptom*, my identity was rescued by creating a realistic image after the process of painting in realistic then abstract style, whereas the identity of the viewer who fails to define the meaning of actual physical paint, is destabilised by her/his conscious gaze and imagination.



Figure 54: Xi Hsu, *Anonymous Portrait No. 1*, 2012-2014, Oil on canvas, 152.5 cm × 229 cm.



Figure 55: Xi Hsu, *Anonymous Portrait No. 4*, 2013-2014, Oil on canvas, 160.2 cm × 240.7 cm.

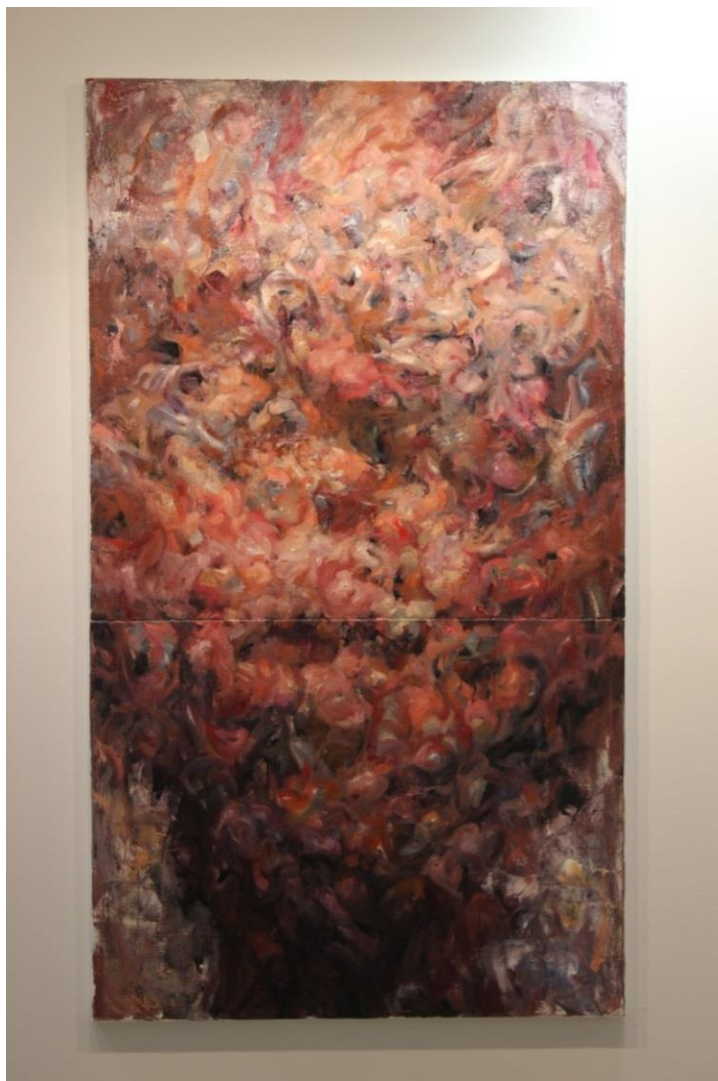


Figure 56: Xi Hsu, *Anonymous Portrait No. 3*, 2010-2014, Oil on canvas, 177.2 cm × 101.3 cm.

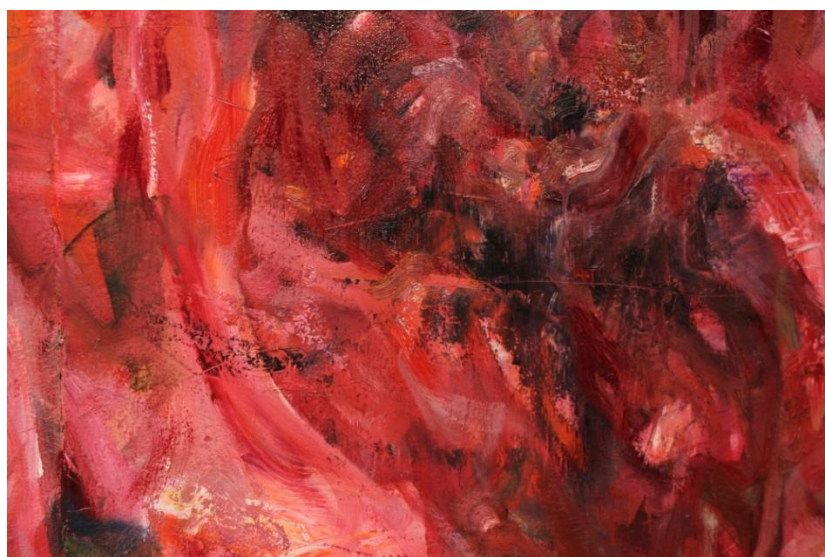


Figure 57: The detail of *Anonymous Portrait No. 4*.



Figure 58: The early stage of making *Anonymous Portrait No. 5*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 165 cm × 165 cm.
This image suggested my intention to combine human feature with sensation of paint in series of *Anonymous Portrait*.

5.3 Beyond empathy: the installation of *Presence*, *Anonymous Portrait* and *In Proximity* (Self-portrait)

French art curator Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) suggested that this inescapable inter-subjective relationship that the viewer has with the art work actually represents the desire of both artist and viewer. Contextualising the concept of French movie critic Serge Daney (1992), Bourriaud observed that:

producing a form is to invent possible encounters; receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange, the way you return a service in a game of tennis...form is the *representative* of desire in the image. It is the horizon based on which the image may have a meaning, by pointing to a desired world, which the beholder thus becomes capable of discussing, and based on which his own desire can rebound (Bourriaud, 2002, p.23).

Resonating with Casey's concept of *glance* in the face-to-face relationship (Chapter Three), Bourriaud suggests that an art form is like a face looking at us and waiting to be interpreted and engaged with in the inevitable relationship between the viewer's attentive gaze and the art work (p.21). At the same time, it also threatens the existence of the viewer when it looks back as if it has a life behind the surface. In this regard, the form of *Anonymous Portrait* and *In Proximity (self-portraits)* represents different levels of understanding and rejection of another subject created via the actual substance of the paint.

For myself as an artist, transforming the symptoms of dementia included the self-removal and forgetfulness of self into the metaphorical *symptom* of succumbing to the attraction of the substance of the paint, the *In Proximity* series generates a conversation between the perception of the viewer and my illusory selfhood. Argued in Chapter Four, the selfhood in the self-portrait of an artist who *lives with* dementia symptoms should be analysed through the physical reality that shapes the representative identity on the canvas. Interestingly, my symptoms of *catching* dementia were also represented through the physical gestures such as over-painting that ultimately projected a transformation of my untraceable and invisible identity throughout the time at the Boronia Hostel: the surface was the only subjectivity that the viewer perceived, but it

was unable to authentically represent the artist with his loss and unique history.

Compared with the series *Anonymous Portrait* that opened up the *symptom*, the obscuring of meaning of the *In Proximity* series could never be rediscovered. In contrast to the overwhelming effect *Anonymous Portrait* created through numerous *symptoms* that gave the viewer limited physical and psychological space, more intimacy was created by the *In Proximity* series. Firstly, the size of the *In Proximity* series was much smaller than *Anonymous Portrait*, and a strong contrast was made by the intentional juxtaposition of the two series of works on the wall of gallery (Figure 59). Unlike the experience of viewing my self-portraits, the viewer needed to move and perceive the *Anonymous Portrait* series because it occupied a large space. Because of their installation on the left hand side of the gallery the viewer had better control of my self-portraits through her/his *glance* (Chapter Three). In other words, my self-portraits were mainly the receiver of the viewer's *glance* created from her/his physical position in the gallery. Secondly, symbol-like human features including the distinguishable shape of the head and face were both found the *In Proximity* series. By contrast, having the sensation created by various unrecognisable paint marks, the *Anonymous Portrait* series not only suspended the viewers' perception, but also mobilised their subjectivity by constantly shifting the perception of art works with different sizes and forms. As a result,

the viewer experienced the feeling of being embraced or rejected by her/his *glance* on these two series of works. To a degree, this experience of viewing these two series of works resonated with my feelings in Boronia Hostel where the *glance* of Doris B and Doris Y polarised my identity in two different ways.

Intending to represent the series of *Anonymous Portrait* and *In Proximity (Self-portrait)* in a juxtapositional context, I installed the works in such a way that they could be better understood through the face-to-face encounter rather than photographic reproduction. The symbolic meaning of the face-to-face relationship was represented literally in the installation. Being hung on the same wall, the series of *Anonymous Portrait* and *In Proximity (Self-portrait)* embodied a subjectivity and its gain and loss in the *glance* of the viewer. Arranged like a triptych, they expressed the need of the presence of the viewer in the wider connection of three parties: the subjectivity of dementia, the artist and the viewer in a transitional state of mind of the latter: s/he sometimes assimilated her/himself into the paint substance on the canvas through the interrogating *glance*, or was rejected by the same work from a different perspective. At the same time, for the viewer, the way to read the series of *Anonymous Portrait* and *In Proximity (Self-portrait)* (Figure 63) was also linked to the series of *Presence* (Figure 62) on the opposite wall across the room. Turning her/his back to her/his own destabilised identity found in the

series of *Anonymous Portrait* and *In Proximity* (Self-portrait), the viewer inevitably empathised, in an imaginary engagement, with the experience of the sitters with dementia and the artist. These three series of works represent not only the mobilised identity of the viewer through the *symptom* of viewing created by a tactile painted substance, but also the imaginary identity of the artist who had portrayed people with dementia on site and how this experience influenced the artist to represent himself in self-portraits. In a sense, through this installation, the viewer constantly experiences different levels of consciousness and unconscious association, and the identity that corresponds to them, embedding another literal face-to-face relationship in the exhibition space.



Figure 59: The installation of *In Proximity* (Self-portrait). Three small portraits were hung near *Anonymous Portrait No. 4* to create a symmetrical effect like a triptych.

5.4 The end and the beginning of self-redemption: the installation of *Absence* in relation to the appearance of the viewer

In the exhibition, I created a corridor as the only entrance and exit to the larger area where the paintings were hung. The viewer of my exhibition may experience the works in the following order: s/he enters seeing the photographs on the wall of the narrow, dim corridor (Figure 60) then immediately notices the sequence of small naturalistic portraits of residents of Boronia Hostel along the left hand wall of the large space (the series of *Presence*) (Figure 62). Turning to the right at the end of the gallery, the series of *Anonymous Portrait* and *In Proximity (Self-portraits)* (Figure 63) convey a sense of turbulent self-redemption. The viewer exits the gallery through the same narrow corridor, viewing the instant photographs on the wall again.

The width of the narrow corridor was about ninety centimetres, therefore the viewer was forced to see the photographs that the resident Alan and I took for each other close up. Limiting the free activity that the viewer took in the gallery, I wished the viewer to look into the details of photographs and the several empty spaces in between one picture to another (Figure 61). In a sense, the viewer was asked to analyse and study the nothingness, and perhaps realise that one can read the missing photographs as representing the loss of Alan's physical coordination and cognition. In addition, it also represented my loss of self-image in the eyes of another person: it was a fading memory

of my face and my identity, and a literally disappearing face-to-face understanding in the inter-subjective relationship. After experiencing the effect that I discussed earlier, the viewer returned to the corridor and went through it. At the same time, the story of Alan and myself was told in reverse: my image appeared more steadily and Alan regained his capability of taking pictures and communicating with me. In a sense, the design of the exhibition incarnated my testimony as an outsider in Alan's dementia.

American art historian Ernst Van Alphen (2006) suggested that the works of French artist Christian Boltanski (1944-) represented the need of testimony for contemporary artists who had worked with traumatic experience. Van Alphen argued that being able to articulate the traumatic experience indicated the significance of the artist as a survivor rather than a sufferer. Building on the argument of American Geoffrey Hartman (1996) and Israeli psychoanalyst Dori Laub (2013), Van Alphen pointed out that Boltanski's work established a position of the listener who created a connection with the testifier as survivor while the listener constructed "a retrospective frame of reference in the present"(p.225). Demonstrating in his work *Mail art* (1970), Boltanski sent out several hand-written letters to unknown addressees:

You have to help me, you have no doubt heard of the difficulties I have been having recently and of the very serious crisis I now find myself in. I want you

first to know that everything you might have heard against me is false. I have always tried to lead an honest life, I think moreover, that you know my work; you certainly know that I dedicate myself to it entirely, but the situation now is at an almost intolerable point and I don't think I will be able to stand it much longer, which is why I implore you, to answer me *as quickly as possible*. I am sorry to bother you, but I have to find some way out of this situation. (Boltanski trans. Gumpert, 1994, p. 9)

In the piece *Mail art*, Boltanski focused on the connection between the sender and receiver rather than the actual referential function of words as the receiver could not fully grasp the information that Boltanski offered in such a short letter. Moreover, once the letter was sent, this art work became a kind of testimony that gave Boltanski a position as not only the witness of his own suffering, but also a listener who externalized the first-person experience into a narrative that integrated the subjectivity of the artist (Van Alphen, 2006, p.226). In a sense, the therapeutic function of the art work was partly created by a society that perceived the artist as someone who had requested help. Whether the content of the letter was true or not, the viewpoint of the public was essential in embodying the identity of the artist as the narrator. One can suggest that Boltanski intended to create this dislocated sense of his identity in the perception of others, and the act of evoking the speculation of the public actually created the traumatic effect rather than representing the experience *about* trauma.

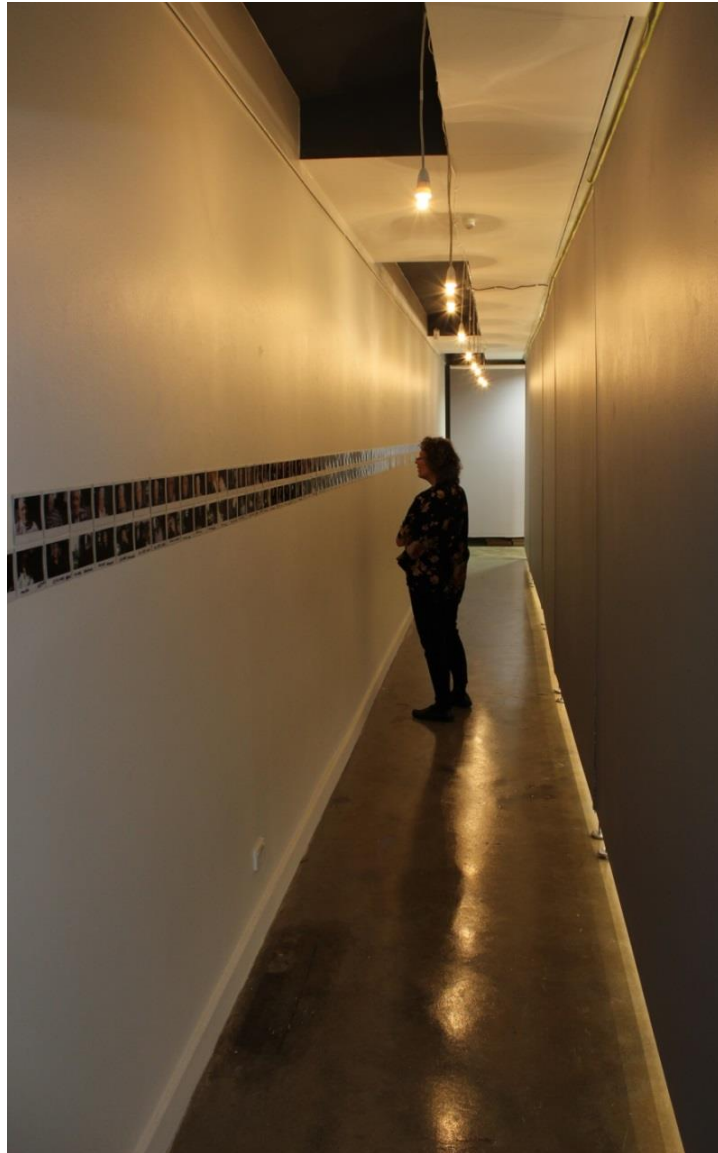


Figure 60: The installation of *Absence* in the FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2014.

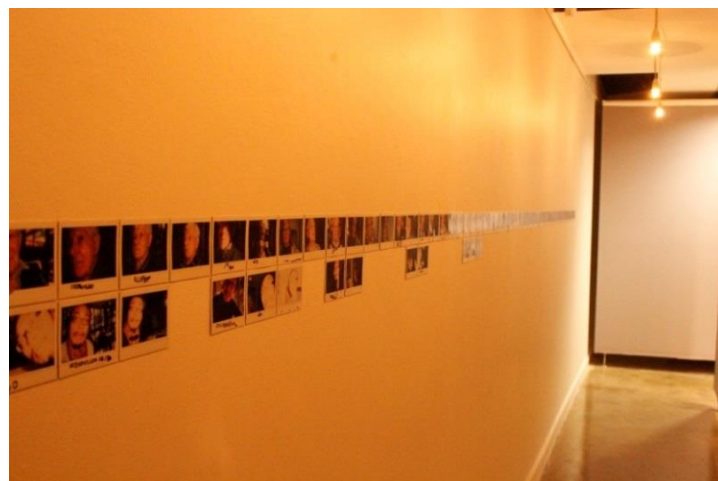


Figure 61: The installation of *Absence* in the FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2014. At the right end of the corridor was the only entrance to the area of paintings.



Figure 62: The installation of *Presence* and *Anonymous Portrait No. 1* in the FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2014.



Figure 63: The installation of *Anonymous Portrait No. 1-4* and *In Proximity* (Self-portrait) in the FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2014. The other side of the right long wall was also a part of the corridor that was painted in grey (Figure 60).

My exhibition *Searching for the vanishing subject in portraits of dementia* at FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong evoked public awareness of the living conditions of people with dementia and dementia's relationship with the visual arts. After twice holding an exhibition referring to dementia (2014, 2012), I found that my identity was

gradually constructed by the public media which attempted to endorse the meaning of this unusual project. For example, the sense of empathy was intensively stressed in two newspaper articles titled *Man who collects memories* (2012) and UOW exhibition *searches for the personality within dementia patients* (2014) both written by Australian journalist Angela Thompson. In the earlier report in Wollongong's Mercury newspaper (2012), perhaps due to the potential of my project in the study of public health, Thompson described my works with a soft touch, including the importance of engaging with people with dementia in a residential care facility, and its benefit in understanding their sense of self. In the article in 2014, she highlighted a sentence that I said in the interview with her: "I'm basically anonymous for them... after three years". Interestingly, I did not particularly address the autobiographical meaning of my exhibition in our twenty minute interview. Within the limited space of the article, I was described as an artist who perceived a similar situation between my subjects with dementia and myself as outsiders to society. In two years, my identity was transformed from the researcher of people with dementia who knew a few of the idiosyncrastic residents in Boronia Hostel, to a person who discovered the sufferings of people with dementia through his own marginalised identity in the community.

The community became the crucial character in attaching my identity to that of people

with dementia. Through holding the exhibition and creating the narrative for the public, I had a clear position to articulate my experience. In other words, my identity was recognised as that of the survivor rather than the sufferer of dementia and my own psychological distress at being an outsider in Australian society as a Taiwanese artist. Exemplified in Thompson's reports of my two exhibitions, the community perspective on people with dementia and me became unified. In other words, I was known by the public because of the residents of Boronia Hostel and vice versa. Ironically, residents and I gained this sense of recognition through the irredeemable loss of identity. Residents of Boronia were remembered because of their loss of identity in the community, whereas my identity was constructed in the exhibition through my loss of identity in the residents' memory.

To me, the experience of being an outsider in Australian society (as a Taiwanese artist) was indeed similar to the experience of the residents of Boronia Hostel. Despite being in differing states of cognition, age and ethnicity, our marginalised identities were both open to the public through a form of exhibition. However, as Boltanski stressed in his body of work, my aim was not to authentically represent the experience of living with dementia through painting and photography, but to create the chance for the viewer to contemplate the instability of her/his subjectivity in relation to (the face of) people with

dementia and their symptoms. In a sense, the viewer neither captured the panorama of dementia, nor the total assimilation of its symptoms and its transformation into art work that was created by the artist. By attending my exhibition, the viewer was not only able to experience her/his own unstable subjectivity, but also became the witness to my testimony of being an outsider of dementia after being influenced by the symptoms of dementia for three years.

To summarise, my exhibition was not a free social encounter between viewers and the works of an artist. It was a request for the community to re-identify my subjects and myself, and the connection between my subjects, myself and the viewer. As explored in Chapter Four, in comparison with writing, painting does not have a self-referential function in representing the thought of the creator. What a viewer sees in a self-portrait is not the authentic identity of the artist but a narrative in a social and historical context. By repetitively imposing the facial images that were entitled *portraiture* on the viewer, I asked the viewer to recognise not only her/his unstable subjectivity, but also to question the notion of subjectivity that is often associated with the genre of portraiture. At the same time, the viewer was the crucial point in actualising the subjectivity of people with dementia and me: without her/his understanding, the subjectivity of the portrayed face remained obscure.

As an essential part of the context of my exhibition, the installation of the corridor became the metaphorical meaning when the viewer walked in and out from the gallery. Suggested by the series of *Absence*, the chronological order of the photographs guided the viewer to experience the transformation of the relationship between three subjects (the sufferers of dementia, the viewer and the artist) under the affect of dementia. At the very start of the corridor, the viewer witnessed the existence of the identity Alan through our paired photographs. Later on, my suspended identity in our disappearing mutual relationship overlapped the invisible position in the series of *Absence*. As both the exit and the entrance of my exhibition, the narrow corridor represented the end and the beginning of my experience of *catching* the symptoms of dementia. Conversely perceived, the increasingly mindful photographs of Alan and myself defined the viewer as an outsider of the true experience of dementia. However, going out from the gallery also indicated my intention to be an outsider after painstakingly experiencing the symptoms of dementia and losing myself (Chapter Three). Connecting inside and outside, the narrow corridor represented the fact of absence in the true sufferings of people with dementia, but it nevertheless expressed their absolute need for the viewer to recognise them through the co-created identity of the viewer her/himself and that of the artist as survivor of the experience of losing himself. As a result, the installation as well

the faces in my exhibition asked the viewer to react to the condition of people with dementia who could *never be the outsider of their own experience*.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that the act of painting embodied an empathetic perspective towards both people with dementia and myself. The documentation of my process of painting self-portraits and other works created the narrative of an artist who expressed his transitional subjectivity after *catching* the symptoms of dementia. Attempting to transform the similar feeling of losing and rescuing my subjectivity in the face-to-face relationship with people with dementia, I demonstrated that over-painting was both a metaphorical and a literal representation of losing my identity in portraying the residents' and my own affected subjectivity in Boronia Hostel. My series of works *Anonymous Portrait* embodied Didi-Huberman's (1989) concept of *symptom* whereby the process of viewing the paint substance eventually created the arena for the viewer to contemplate her/his own subjectivity in relation to people with dementia and their artistic representation.

In addition, the exhibition itself became an essential part of the narrative and my research referring to dementia. I suggested that the design and installation of my

exhibition intensified social subjectivities in the relationship between the people with dementia, the viewer and me in the social context. In particular, the installation signified an interconnection of the identity of people with dementia, the viewer and the artist though they are fundamentally different. The exhibition became the arena for the encounter of three parties and more importantly, their interdependency in the social context of dementia. To illustrate this relationship, I argue that the viewer of my exhibition witnessed my testimony of being the survivor of the psychological distress that I employed to experience the suffering of people with dementia.

As a result, by revealing these two layers of subjectivity referring to dementia in both the symbolic and the social context, I suggest that the viewer (the public) is both interpreter and creator of the subjectivity of people with dementia. In disintegrating the viewer's identity through the incoherent experience of viewing my works, and highlighting her/his metaphorical position inside and outside of the gallery, I point out that the representation of the complex identity of people with dementia should be constituted by the viewer's experience in the gallery including the identity of the artist and the viewer's own identity in the public sphere.

Conclusion

The significance of portrayal from life in the study of subjectivity of people
with dementia

Since 2013, Australian contemporary artist Ben Quilty (1973-) has exhibited a series of portraits around Australia. Resonating with his long-term interest in the human condition, this series of portraits largely drew on his personal experience of engaging with Australian soldiers in Afghanistan, and his emotional response to their stories in the battle-field. In an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 2012, he expressed his unsettled feeling at portraying soldiers from life and his experience of being a war artist in Afghanistan in 2011. In particular, he considered that his unique experience also reflected his fear of violence and his interrogation of masculinity. Quilty described this series of portraits in another interview with a journalist at the Australian War Memorial in 2013:

All of them, in some senses, I think, felt that I made portraits of them the way they felt, rather than the way they looked or heroic portraits of soldiers, was about the emotion of being there (Australian War Memorial, 2013).

Without having the actual experience of participating in war, Quilty assimilated its emotional quality into his works. Conveying strong emotion that emerges from circumstances such as the threat of death, fear and psychological suffering, his works not only express his feeling towards his subjects, but also affect their viewers' consideration of their perspective on his paintings. To reflect his high level of emotion, this series of works was made on huge canvases, with bold compositions and thick paint. Figure 64, for example, represents a contorted figure whose unnatural pose implies his subject's experience of hiding behind a low mud-brick wall for eighteen hours (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2012). Through Quilty's combination of expressive gesture and colour, viewers are confronted by a pictorial narrative of the relationship between the artist and Australian troops. In a sense, Quilty became the interlocutor between two social groups, and his experience and deep engagement with his subjects reflects his fear to a certain degree (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2012). Therefore, for Quilty, portraying from life and being affected by his sitters were both essential in recreating felt emotions in his works.

Similarly, representing the symptoms of dementia as another kind of life battle for some people, I employed portrayal from life as my strategy to investigate the overwhelming feeling of losing my identity in the inter-subjective exchanges with residents of Boronia

Hostel. As discussed in Chapter Three, I suggest that total immersion in the living environment of people with dementia reflected the instability of my identity in the discourse of dementia: on the one hand, an unconscious interaction was actualised in the face-to-face relationship; on the other hand, my conscious act of portrayal was often accompanied with the *glance* that agitated the residents of Boronia Hostel.



Figure 64: Ben Quilty, *Captain S after Afghanistan*, 2012-2014, Oil on linen, 210 cm × 230 cm.

In Chapter Four, I highlighted the inauthenticity of the subjectivity of people with dementia in representation through the case study of British artist William Utermohlen. Unable to recreate what he perceived, Utermohlen's late self-portraits were evidence of his struggle to be himself. At the same time, a sense of self was created for him by the interpreters of his late works. Contrary to the common belief in the authentic expression

of Utermohlen's late self-portraits, I suggest that his sense of self should be analysed through his procedural memory of painting and as a consequence never fully represents the truth of the inner feeling of the artist with dementia. Paradoxically, the essential position of other people in constructing the identity of the artist with dementia through his works mirrors the relationship between the social identity of the artist and the narrator of his life and art works. It appears to me that the perspective towards the works referring to dementia and their creator were not totally contingent from one viewer to another, but it was often intentionally constructed in the narrative of others.

Employing the case study of Canadian artist Philip Guston in Chapter Five, I argued that the act of painting embodied an empathetic perspective towards people with dementia and the artist himself. As mind and the physical substance of paint were always inter-related, I suggest that the strategy of over-painting signifies two opposite meanings for myself and the viewer: on one hand, over-painting the series of *In Proximity (Self-portrait)* (2012-2014) that eventually created the symbolic images was a therapeutic act, anchoring my subjectivity in the flux of unconscious power during the process of losing my identity in Boronia Hostel; on the other hand, in the series of *Anonymous Portrait*, the visceral images that I created through over-painting constantly demanded for recognition from the viewer.

To help understand the intertwining subjectivity of people with dementia and my own, the perspective of the viewers completed the transaction between different identities in my exhibition. At the same time, the process of understanding was not easy. In contrast to my journey of integrating my identity with that of people with dementia through creating their portraits (Chapter Three) and the attempt to rescue my identity in self-portraits (Chapter Five), the empathy in the process of viewing was neither the total loss of oneself nor obtaining the position of the outsider. Like the victim who does not speak about her/his sufferings, the viewer temporarily loses her/his identity through experiencing the overloading *symptom* in the series of *Anonymous Portrait* (2010-2014). However, tactile sensations and the contingent meaning of the forms in the series of *Anonymous Portrait* constantly lured the viewer to construct identity through her/his conscious gaze, even though s/he could not construct a pictorial narrative through analysing forms and composition (Chapter Five).

This doctoral project and the exhibition *Searching for the vanishing subject in portraits of dementia* have brought to light the importance of employing portrayal from life to represent insights regarding the social identity of people with dementia in residential care. In addition, this project and exhibition also stress that the meaning of portrayal

from life and exhibition should be contextualised in the social dimension so that the acts of painting and viewing are seen as inter-related in the context of the subjectivity of people with dementia.

The project and exhibition drew the attention of the public and also of dementia care experts such as Australian Professor Richard Fleming, who is also the director of the NSW/ACT Dementia Training Study Centre. He commented that my project and exhibition focused on studying the intersubjectivity between people with dementia and healthy others; the concept of intersubjectivity was interrogated, and at the same time represented through the *act* of painting and photography rather than the works themselves (R. Fleming, 2014, pers comm., 28 May). A future platform for these explorations is to highlight the position of portraitist in the social encounter. As the painter Ben Quilty has demonstrated, this encounter is inevitably intertwined with the subjectivity and the sufferings of the sitter and the empathetic viewer.

Portrayal from life thus becomes a kind of performance art that requires the instant resonance between art work and the viewer through the physical act of the artist. In my case, the experience of being affected by symptoms of dementia relies on the openness to the vulnerability of my identity in relation to my sitters with dementia during the

process of portrayal. In order to deepen this sense in the future research referring to art practice addressing dementia, explorations of the subjectivity of people with dementia should not only be represented through metaphorical meaning in creative writing and theatrical play as Kitwood (1997) suggested, but also through the impact of the symptoms of dementia on the artist, who also parallels in identity between people with dementia and her/himself, as both of them often present themselves in the battle between unconscious and consciousness under the threat of losing identity.

Finally, to answer the first question that I raise in the introduction: “What is the perspective of an artist in relation to people with dementia during the process of portraying from life?” I suggest that the existential states of the artist inevitably influence his sitters with dementia and vice versa. The dynamic between the consciousness and unconscious in the face-to-face relationship consequentially becomes an essential part of their portraits to evidence the loss of subjectivity of both parties. The second question: “How is a reflexive sense of subjectivity represented in their portraits?” should be addressed in a broader social dimension that invites the viewer to participate in the experience of being constantly pulled in and pushed out through perception. Temporarily experiencing the condition of people with dementia and the artist, an empathetic perspective is created. Analogically, by walking out from the gallery through

the corridor, the viewer leaves the agitating situation and retrieves her/his identity as if s/he also experiences the desire of the artist: wishing to retain his identity in the wider community while coming close to the loss of people with dementia.

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Appendix

Human Research Ethics Approval from University of Wollongong



INITIAL APPLICATION APPROVAL

In reply please quote: HE12/027
Further Enquiries Phone: 4221 3386
GH:CJ

27 April 2012

Mr Chao-Chin Chang
2/8 First Street
WOLLONGONG NSW 2500

Dear Mr Chang

I am pleased to advise that the Human Research Ethics application referred to below has been **approved subject to the following conditions:**

1. Please revise the Participant Information Sheet to include information about where the artwork will be exhibited and submit a copy to the Research Services Office prior to commencing research.
2. Please ensure that all participants are re-consented on the new version of the Consent Form.

Ethics Number: HE12/027

Project Title: "Under the escort of darkness: How do visual artists manifest the subjectivity of dementia in both autobiographic and reflective strategies when registering face as the signifier?"

Researchers: Mr Chao-Chin Chang, Dr Penny Harris, Mr Jelle Van Den Berg

Reviewed Date: 26 April 2012

Approval Date: 26 April 2012

Expiry Date: 25 April 2013

The University of Wollongong/ISLHD Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the *National Statement* and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document.

A condition of approval by the HREC is the submission of a progress report annually and a final report on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/rso/ethics/UOW009385.html>. This report must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

2

As evidence of continuing compliance, the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

If you have any queries regarding the HREC review process, please contact the Ethics Unit on phone 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Yours sincerely



A/Professor Garry Hoban
Chair, Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Dr Penny Harris, Acting Head of Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Creative Arts

In reply please quote: HE12/027

3 March 2013

Mr Chao-Chin Chang
2/8 First Street
WOLLONGONG NSW 2500
oliveroliver@hotmail.com;

Dear Mr Chang

Thank you for submitting the progress report. I am pleased to advise that **renewal** of the following Human Research Ethics application has been **approved**.

Ethics Number: HE12/027
Project Title: "Portrait of dementia": How do visual artists manifest the subjectivity of dementia in both autobiographic and reflective strategies when registering face as the signifier?
Researchers: Mr Chao-Chin Chang, Dr Penny Harris, Mr Jelle Van Den Berg
Date Approved: 3 April 2013
Renewed From: 26 April 2013
New Expiry Date: 25 April 2014

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date. Please remember that in addition to completing an annual report the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Yours sincerely



A/Professor Garry Hoban
Chair, Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

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