

# Photology

Photographers and Metaphor



Aldobranti  
(*editor*)





# Photology

photographers and metaphor

*... the entire history of our philosophy is a photology, the name given to a  
history of, or treatise on, light...*

*[J Derrida, Force and Signification 1978]*

**Aldobranti**

(editor)

*Derrida[4, p.31] claims that the metaphoric force of Light and Dark entirely shapes our [Western] thinking. Darkness for concealment and Light, necessary for revealing, while at the same time as being tools of the trade for every photographer, carry immense weight in their expressive impact.*

*As visual animals we are given to thoughts of what we do and do not see. In historical times before the exploitation of fire our ancestors will naturally have been fearful in the night hours. Only very recently have we been able to flick a switch, to shine a light on any unknown.*

*To reflect these fears, the English lexicon is loaded with negative value judgments for words stemming from darkness and black colouration; and words stemming from light and white are predominantly more positively valued.*

*A shadow, moving in the periphery of our vision demands our instant attention – friend or foe, menace or simply our own? Our own shadow is an uncertain quantity between optical reality and immateriality and so has become the stuff of myth, often acquiring personality and agency.*

*Fear of the concealed, the unknown is to be countered by confidence in a certainty, a fixed point – in short, what Derrida will term a transcendental signified. And in support of this confidence, a clear-cut, unequivocal, black and white distinction between opposing views can seem to deliver certainty and a sure footing for action while nuance and indecision are to be avoided. Darkness and its inhabitants will not bear comparison with the virtue in Light but our own cast shadow has too strong a relationship with us to be so easily dismissed.*

*Our aim is to understand the intention and impact of Derrida's assertion and investigate how metaphor manifests itself in the [photographic] image – we bring together 19 photographers from around the world who explore the nuances of expression in Light, Dark and Shadow in their photography while these two elements play out in their lives.*

## beginnings

This project has its origins in a longterm inquiry into the cast shadow of the self beginning with a visit to the 2010 exhibition ‘Shadow Catchers[3]’ at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum and the question that emerged “how can one catch a shadow, could this be recorded as a photograph, and what would this act be?”. The first attempts were to hold a camera focused on the photographer’s own shadow while either attempting to trap the shadow by jumping upon it, or in jumping away to escape the trailing shadow. As the project continued two or more elements became apparent. The work became more performance driven and through giving the Shadow presence, the enquiry took an interest in the Other. Continuing in this direction soon introduced CG Jung’s identification of a Shadow archetype as the repository for an individual’s disregard of self – those elements of the individual less attractive for external presentation, but potentially a resource of creativity[8, §423].

I first encountered the frontispiece text and Derrida’s use of the term photology while trying to understand negativity expressed through a belief in the supernatural qualities of the cast shadow. The natural tendency to externalise from an individual’s shadow archetype and proceed to project them onto persons outside of the individual’s social group – the Other – might explain the linkage or entanglement of the cast shadow with otherness.

This printed collection brings together photographers answering a call inviting them to consider the cast shadow and its significance to their work given this loading of metaphor. The call focused on metaphor because while we understand the polar extremes of what is Light/visible and Dark/concealed, the cast shadow of the person is ambiguously both real and physical yet un-material and intangible: it seems as if it has to occupy a space between Light and Dark. So is our cast shadow good or bad, virtuous or vicious? Not being of us yet always with us we do not know how to relate to it – there is an unmet need for a clear cut distinctiveness that makes us uneasy.

And why photographers ? A photograph is widely viewed as evidential and literal. It superficially appears to have very little of the metaphysical in it and light and dark are unequivocally the building blocks of the craft. Understanding the optics, chemistry, or electronics of image creation strengthens our conviction that the scene captured in front of the lens actually existed at that moment.

## metaforce

“In order to respect this strange movement within language, in order not to reduce it in turn, we would have to attempt a return to the metaphor of darkness and light (of self-revelation and self-concealment), the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics. The founding metaphor not only because it is a photological one—and in this respect the entire history of our philosophy is a photology, the name given to a history of, or treatise on, light but because it is a metaphor. Metaphor in general, the passage from one existent to another, or from one signified meaning to another, authorized by the initial *submission* of Being to the existent, the *analogical* displacement of Being, is the essential weight which anchors discourse in metaphysics, irremediably repressing discourse into its metaphysical state. [4, p.31]”

What Derrida is getting at here is the unreliability of metaphor as a device or a tool for critically examining the world around us. His Jewish family origins left him exposed to the institutional anti-semitism of pre-war society, sensitising him to the abuse of metaphor in the divisive rhetoric of demagogues, and leads him to set out “an alternative to the hegemonic Western philosophical and scientific tradition in which gross material things are ‘illuminated’ by the ‘light’ of transcendent human reason[13]”.

Derrida is writing in this essay, ‘Force and Signification’ about the impact of metaphor in terms of its ‘force’ and he does so in a physically accurate [Newtonian] way where force is that which unopposed will modify the motion of an object. So what we are doing here is to understand how the metaphorical properties of light and dark generate force to effect change in the path of thought, to create feelings and affect. But beyond this, we should note the more general thrust of the essay is to critique Western philosophy from Plato through Husserl for its equation of existence with visibility – Seeing and Being, if you like.

To Derrida again: “Metaphor ... is the essential weight which anchors discourse in metaphysics... “. His concern is this anchoring, this tying up of a boat, tethering to the cut-and-dried, the unarguable position, and the restriction of discussion. His new word *différance* in spoken French is indistinguishable from the French word *différence* and has roots in the verb *différer* having both meanings of being

different and of deferring. Différance is to establish the sense that a resolution of differing meanings towards similarity can be deferred.

He introduces the term ‘transcendental signified’ for the illusion of some ultimate, privileged signified as independent and prior to all other signs and referents, and goes on

At the point at which the concept of différance, and the chain attached to it, intervenes, all the conceptual oppositions of metaphysics (light/dark)—to the extent that they ultimately refer to the visibility of the object become non pertinent. They all amount, at one moment or another, to a subordination of the movement of différance in favor of the presence of a value or a meaning supposedly antecedent to différance, more original than it, exceeding and governing it in the last analysis. This is still the presence of what we called above the “transcendental signified”.

The force of metaphor is directed toward maintaining a dominance for a critical stance reliant on this metaphysics. However a new ideology may succeed in ‘borrowing’ the force of metaphor supporting a previous system and so establish itself in a new dominance. Thus in history Neoplatonism focused on the Monad, monotheists focused on God, Romanticism focused on consciousness, and so on. And in this sense the transcendental signified is temporally qualified, lacking universality, an illusion.

But each new dominance can use that power to marginalise difference, to restrict discourse, shut down discussion, and make enemies of dissident and dissenter — if, however the uncertainty of this deferral can be prolonged and exploited, further meaning may be revealed to celebrate differences freed from an arbitrary subordination.

We can begin to look at the artists’ contributions and to consider how the values of Light and Dark have driven their practice and to what extent the metaphoric force of these elements has impacted on them. What may be of interest is to see how each has handled the undecidable factors in their project and in what way they have related to the invisible and the unknown.

## Ismail Odetola

## Nigeria

Isn't wonderful to be two in light and one in darkness. One grows up with many questions you don't need to ask but which you might need answers to, the question of light and shadow is one of them. It's very easy for you to lose the will to seek answers and accept the universal order of things. But the human interpretation of light and shadow over the years ignite my will to address the interplay of light and shadow. Light only exposes us facially through our face and body and sharp, whereas our shadow conceives us and encourages our oneness with ourselves. Darkness for instance allows us to be private and lets us search for ourselves through our heart. If not, what do we see when we close our eyes, we see nothing but more of ourselves and it is when we open those eyes that we see the world and see people who reflect how we see ourselves in the darkness?

In photography light is important to achieve a balanced exposure but yet what happens when an image needs to be taken in darkness or low light or even with one source of light where the shadow can't be eradicated, the shooter becomes more creative to achieve his aim and in doing that the shooter reveals more of himself putting his imagination by playing with light and shadow. Darkness is a gift as much as light to humankind. Even in the light, our shadow remains, revealing another of us. reminding us of the dark part of us, the mysterious part of us.



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## Lewis

## UK

I produced this image because during lockdown we were all relying so much on technology to get through the isolation. We used it to entertain and communicate and yet we were stripped back to the basics of existence. Therefore, although we now see this type of telecommunication as obsolete it represents a simple time where to connect with others we had to engage with the world around us. It is increasingly hard to have faith in a future that no longer requires us to venture beyond the walls of our home, a future controlled by the reliability of corporate service providers who hold the key to our sociability. In this instance seeing glimpses of a world we know provides comfort in the light and warmth of something old and familiar.

I look around and notice light dancing through the streets ever changing. Tonal shifts and patterns re-arranging. Nothing is still nothing is certain, a scary place to live for some as when the light is strong the shadows come. In the darkness then comes fear, but with this the light is near. A brightness that can not be repressed with a light that touches with the warmth of a smile.





@photographybylewis

## Judith Gait

UK

The reach of the shadow can be long and existing in space as well as time. It is however dependant on a light source for without a light all would be darkness and we would never perceive our shadow. This image is the shadow cast by a fragile hand; it is a self portrait and a glimpse into the painter's studio. But it is an image dependant on the shadow of night. The reflection caught in this photo could only be taken at night, and the fragile hand is raised against this darkness yet without the dark shadow the perception of the artist would not appear. Interestingly the darkness is only an adjunct; it is not overtaken by the portrait, but subsists as a way of reflecting the image of the self.



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## Deborah Abe

UK

This image happened in a spontaneous moment, as do all of the images I photograph. There wasn't so much thought into the process of the image however, once reflecting upon it, I recognised something.

The beauty of light cannot be expressed unless it is in darkness.

The image is parallel to a familiar saying that 'there's light at the end of the tunnel'. Looking at it from the perspective of my beliefs (Christianity), how can we recognise the pureness of light if we have not seen darkness? In this case, Jesus is light. Experiencing him while in the midst of darkness is poetically substantial. During the time of mental struggle, hardship and trauma, a time of darkness, his light shines.

Looking at this image from an alternate yet similar perspective, the shadow cast on the surrounding of the subject adds a deeper symbolism of meaning. It is no longer that she is just walking underneath a tunnel but instead, is looking beyond, searching. It begs to question the meaning of life, the purpose of going forward, going forward to what? The light?

Light and dark are total opposites factually. The image appears so familiar with the darkness to the point that exposing light to this darkness can seem alien because the two differ from one another. But seeing both together in this image appears idyllic.



@d\_o\_abe



The call-out was made in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impossibility of a public exhibition was plain. This printed collection is a poor substitute for a gallery-hung show with the opportunity for participants to meet each other in person for the enrichment of experience. Our selection process had therefore to build an ordered reading of the works, structure a journey through the text, but to lose the excitement of a zig-zag process through a gallery to revisit a piece, to compare and contrast with another.

## the images

The first photograph presented here by **Ismail Odetola** introduces some of the key themes around the cast shadow bringing a sense of anonymity and unknowability. The shadow here seems alert, attentive perhaps more present than the boy who wearing colours echoing the wall before him might begin to disappear into the wall. I am reminded here of Ralph Ellison's novel 'Invisible Man'[5] which detailed the author's sense of social invisibility – 'invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me'. The narrator lives in an underground room, too brightly lit by hundreds of lightbulbs for any shadow [of doubt] to fall and allow anything to be hidden. '[people] see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me.' This understanding that what we see and what we know, or what we think and what we do reflects gaps in our psychological make-up.

All the works collected here will address these cognitive gaps to explore what is there and not there and each artist's thought processes toward that distinction.

This beautiful art-photography monochrome by **Lewis** here exalts the shadows and reveals the strength of the photographic mark – that in literally drawing or painting with light the photographer reveals content with shadow.

Lewis' attention to the classic advice – "expose for the shadows, develop for the highlights" – gives the shadowy corners of this shot their place as a source of content and a place of interest. Driven by the angled verticals, the 'Dutch Angle', the low level lens position brings our eye line to the ground, the natural habitat of the cast shadow.

### **...what is next?**

These next three works return to more metaphorical treatments. Once early peoples were able to see beyond hunting and gathering operations in support of the next meal, a popular after-dinner conversation must have been to ask “what is it all about?”. And even in the absence of any answer, a sense of the progress of the seasons, time, and mortality leant toward the metaphorical usage of life as a journey.

The metaphor of existence as a journey is dissected by Lakoff and Johnson[9] to identify its inner structure: a traveler, points of origin and destination, a route and obstacles, dangers and waymarks en route.

The darkness beyond the firelight must have seemed a very dangerous space for early peoples: humans have adapted to rely on sight and hearing over a sense of smell. Our peripheral vision is acutely aware of movement and the movement of a shadow might indicate a more threatening reality. **Judith Gait** eloquently expresses a conflict of feelings about darkness and shadows. By introducing the mirror these elements are kept at a distance and this plays to a control of focus and depth of field. The appliqué hand device then serves as a determined barrier against the background while confessing its own frailty.

**Deborah Abe** has explored an understanding of existence as a journey. Here the focus of the viewer is for the expectation to share a sense of relief on gaining the open air. The young woman in front can downplay any anxieties brought on by the following footsteps which have been amplified in the enclosed space. To belabour the point, the reward for completion of the journey is factored into the risk-weighted cost-benefit analysis.

As remarked above, Lakoff and Johnson also identify the relevance of the start and endpoints of the journey and by titling the image as ‘Enter’ **Rachel Letchford** stresses the impossibility of inaction, requires entry into darkness, light immediately beyond with possibility of repetitive cycles of light and dark beyond, echoing the uncertain progress of history.

## Rachel Letchford

UK

"When the Soul wants to experience something she throws out an image in front of her and then steps into it." Meister Eckhart (Ronnberg and Martin, 2010)

House Studies is an ongoing series of un-staged images that began when we moved home last March. Just days before the first national lockdown we moved to a remote setting in Kent, not far from where I grew up. I already had memories of the wooded lanes and how dark and cold the winters could get, this bought an uncanniness to the place; everything appeared enchanting to me, from the black dead trees, the hooting of owls at dusk, and the transformation of light from day to night. Set well back from the road the house had been empty for several years and the landscape was starting to take hold.

These experiences coincided with my discovery of Jung's shadow work, which, given the long, early days of lockdown and extended time alone, gave me plenty to ruminate over. Running parallel to my thoughts and feelings, the images developed over the months and seasons ahead and my inner self began to synchronise with my surroundings. What started out as a documentation of a new physical space, slowly became more about a psychological one. This can be seen in images such as Enter, a moon lit portal into the dark, neighbouring woodland and My Chandelier, a giant stalactite found in a dilapidated outbuilding. Lit with a torch and casting a defined, heavy shadow, it was a discovery that was at once both terrifying and beautiful.

All of the images in the series were made using an iPhone, the freedom of this small, handheld device allowed me to photograph the images as they appeared, without any planning or reconstruction – they were just all around me and I photographed them.





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## Catalina Aranguren

## USA

As I was reading the submission parameters for this exhibit, I was very much visualizing my parental guides for my kids about good and bad. I have three boys under the age of 14. When my oldest was little, I refused to buy him toy guns because, living in the states, and the constant fear of mass shooters, I figured it was a safe thing to stay away from. Until the day he ate around a toast to create one while sitting on his high chair. I couldn't even understand where he knew the reference from, we barely let him watch tv until he was 2, and I was pregnant with twins, and just didn't have enough energy. But somewhere, somehow, he had seen and understood the reference to a pew pew gun, and comestibly fashioned one for himself. As all three boys got older, their interests starkly lingered in the Star Wars and Marvel universes, worlds of obvious good and bad. When "Civil War" the Marvel movie came out, I was absolutely thrilled to be able to have the very obviously executed conversation of grey, somewhere in between good and bad, light and dark. People are neither good or bad. There are exceptions, of course. But mostly people make good and bad decisions. People ARE good AND bad, light AND dark...the shadows in between. I love photographing abstractly and this image is what happens to us...there is light and there is shadows surrounded by the normal grey.



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<https://argia.photos>



## Parumveer Walia

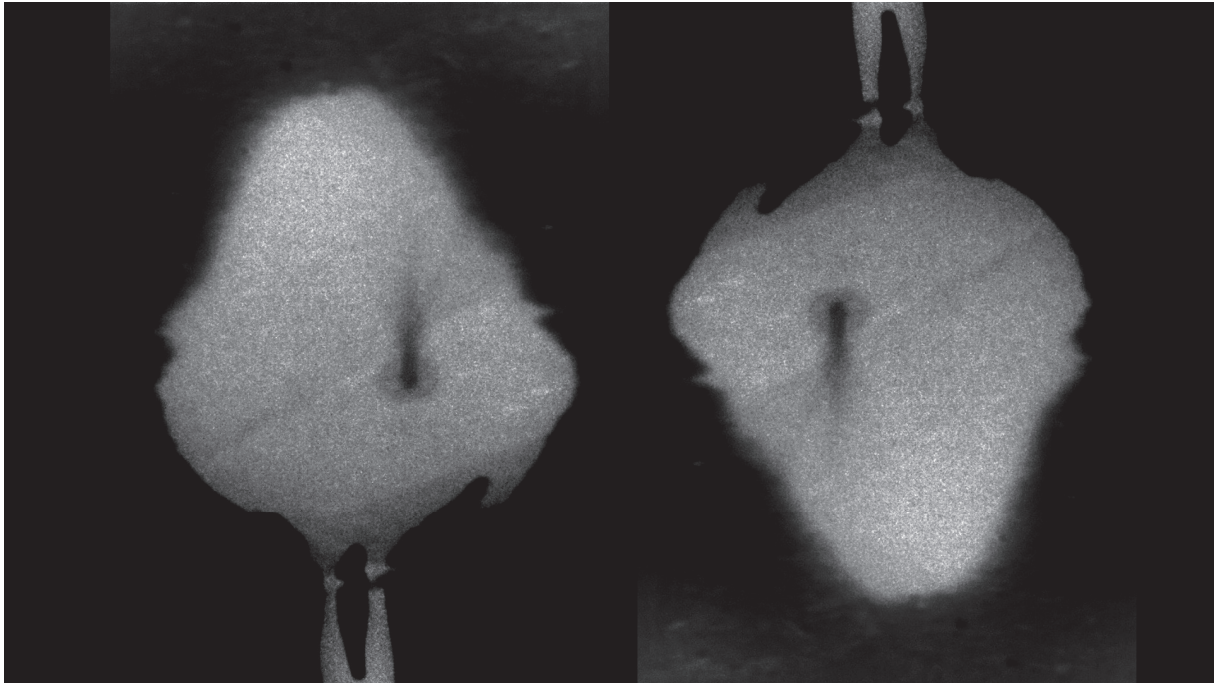
## India

The photographic reversal of the image alters fact into a sort of fiction, an imaginative and alternative visual existence which toys with our understanding and emotional associations to this phenomenology.

Through this picture, I intend to challenge our perceptions, myths, and values. In it, only the shadow remains hence becoming its sole visual point. Its distorted, disproportionate, ambiguous form takes centre stage and the discomfort associated with the cast shadow is put first and foremost. Through this, the image probes at many questions: what makes us distant and fearful of the cast shadow? Does it threaten our humanness? Or make visible another aspect of it altogether? Is its constant presence comforting or threatening? Is its ungraspable materiality but real occupancy of space bewildering? Alienating? Is this intangible yet tangible shadow and shape evocative of certain emotions due to its association with darkness?

It is here that the interplay of light and dark and the emotional and the historical language synonymous with the same is challenged. If a shadow relates to the darkness and its tendency to hide, conceal, and be connected to vice and evil, what would happen if these shadows were 'light', as the image visualizes. This absurdist inquiry disseminates our emotive associations of the light and the dark with those of the cast shadow to understand what values are inherent to it and what is dependent on the culturally associated values of darkness. If all things containing light or all parts of an image displaying it were replaced with the dark and shadows and vice versa, would good become bad and bad become good? Hence, is the goodness and badness of these elements inherent and absolutist or dependent and situational? Through such inquiries, we can understand how (un)accommodating our cultural, religious, and traditional beliefs pertaining to the light and dark really are.

*Light is dark and dark is light,  
Fear and fright shines blinding and bright,  
The dark is on and it holds the night,  
And all its creatures, oh so tight!*



@parumveer.art

### ***...abstraction***

The abstract photograph confounds an expectation of literality in a photograph from the wider public, our knowledge of the optics drives some belief that the scene was in front of the lens when the shutter was released. Inevitably we will try to recognise components of the image for the sake of extracting meaning in favour of experiencing affect in the viewing of the image. The freedom of cameraless photography with photograms enables a departure from recording the object and commodity and movement towards a photography about things and of ideas. In its way the deferment of understanding plays to this entire project.

Time spent puzzling out a picture may allow for shift of focus to think beyond the object, **Catalina Aranguren** presents everything crisply in focus – the cracked paint of a board's edge is the only detail – but nothing is revealed before a sneak glance at the title and we are mentally taking the next step to share a journey through darkness.

Avoiding naming the subject **Parumveer Walia** twice deploys inversion as a tool towards abstraction, inverting the illumination scale and then repeating the image in a 180° rotation to offer thoughts of spun sugar candy-floss or white lilies with central black spadix. Each of those thoughts offers riches of its own but the presence of one's own cast shadow is a familiar certainty.

### ***...identification of the self***

For a great deal of the time our cast shadow is sharing our footsteps, after all the flat ground on which we walk is where we as three dimensional bodies interface with the two dimensional world of the shadow.

Nearly every photographer has at some point with the sun at their back pointed the lens down and caught their own cast shadow stretching away from them. Looking into the genesis of Walia's image I noted that these next three images have this commonality of looking at images of our legs.

**John Bird** and **David Green** have started with the image of the photographer's shadow and playing with the image transform the top left to reveal the mass of a larger presence with its arm around the

photographer. Rachel Letchford notes Mark Fisher's impact on her work but here John Bird and David Green make a fuller reference to his memory to question society's path toward a covid-accepting existence and the question of what normality we may expect. Perhaps, thinking that it was the [old] normal of capitalism that got us here through unrestrained economic growth, stressing the natural world with its viral biome: it cannot be too soon to question the part we played in supporting that [old] normal. For sure, we have come very close to enabling the Capitalist Realism that he portrays with the same certainty as Derrida's transcendental signified.

**Niko's** image again shares technique in inversion but points a way forward with a sense of interior lighting with the notes of corroded bronze and the subaqua feel of body armour retrieved from an ancient site of shipwreck. By going into the negative frame Niko empties these legs and creates shells. The former occupant of this armour has been recomposed as a glowing mass of photo-luminescent plankton: their lifecycle measured in days ceaselessly outliving the former occupant.

As photographers, we have become accustomed to the negative image – mentally transposing it towards a desired result in the positive image – but in contrast the radiographer is always interpreting the shadows of bone, organ, or growth and finding evidence for life in the negative frame.

Here is a view of a shadow created over an interval of time, it evokes the 'residual' image left on the retina when a light source is taken away. Like that perception the unfixed image will in time again fade away: in other work **Samuel Joshua Richardson** explores the fragility of the medium and exposes photosensitive cyanotype material to the weather. Here he submits Self to time and the psychological force of sleep – the lengthy creation cycle of this work acts as a contradiction to the 'selfie' culture of today. In short, the function of social media is the monetisation of the Self: the 'selfie' an alleged democratisation of the portrait available in another age to the upper classes. With the aid of green screen backgrounds all may live in stately home, castle, or palace but time, the attention span of followers, and limits of memory-space will erase these.

### **...searching**

The outgoing call referenced Jung's psychoanalytic development of the Shadow archetype and we have welcomed a refreshing matter of fact approach to mental health expressed among all contributions.

## John Bird and David Green

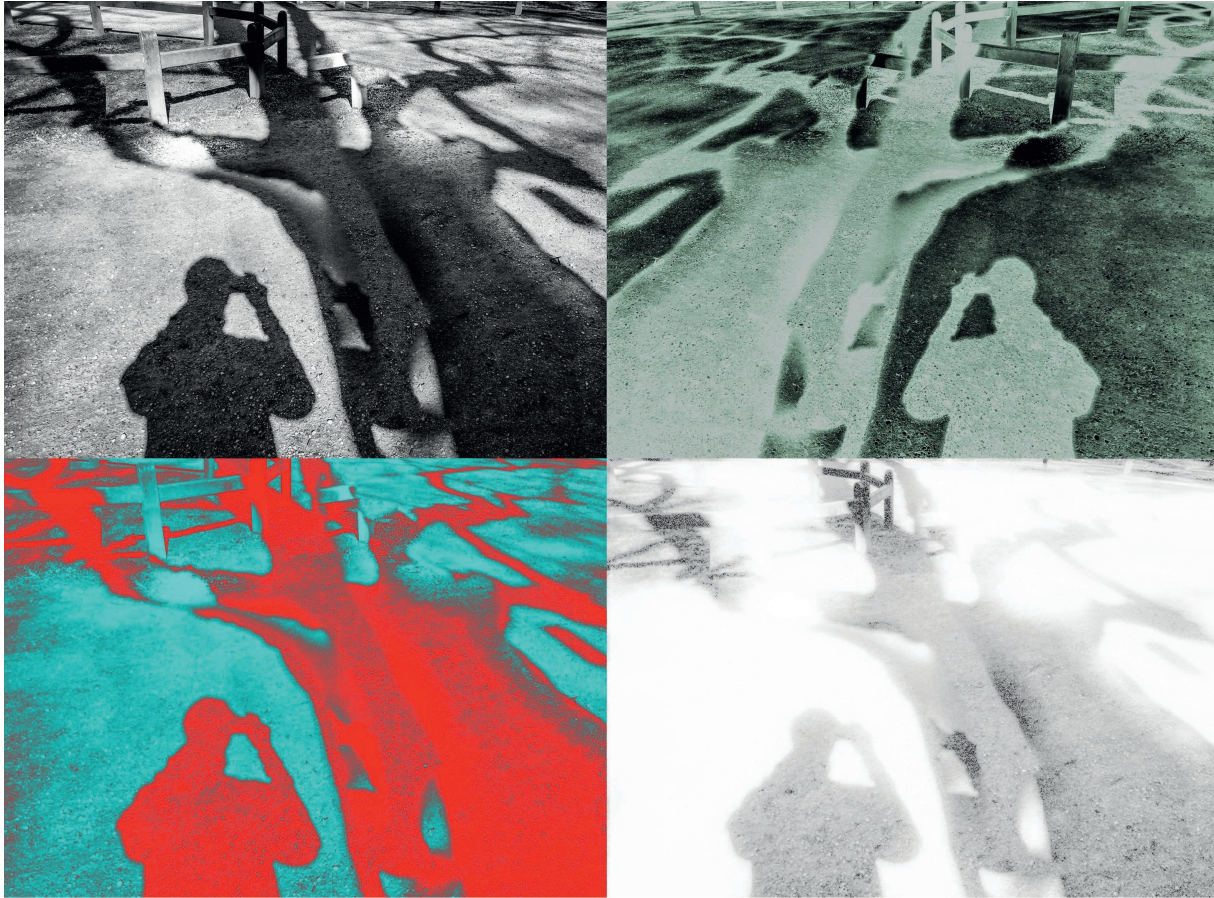
UK

This tetrptych shows something that is not really there. Here a paradox of visibility is exacerbated by the emergence of the digital. Images become too perfect; become more than reality. Shadows, however, are always imperfect, have fuzzy edges, cannot be reduced to data that can then exist in the cloud. The original photograph, top left, is an image taken serendipitously on a sunny day revealing shadows that almost engulf the photographer ... well, not the photographer, his shadow. This is an attempt to use shadows as a way to say something about Covid 19 and the strangeness of the pandemic; to say something about loss and about the way we are haunted by the contrast between the normality we used to have and took for granted and the cliché of the 'new normal'. Put another way, the image as a way of evoking something that is not easily visualised, indeed entities that may be ghostly, spectral and "written with light".

This tetrptych references the social theory of the late Mark Fisher. Before his premature death Fisher obsessed about the ways in which our shadow selves haunt our existences in terms of memory, trauma and depression. In particular he contrasted manifest reality (top left) with uncanniness, weirdness and eeriness in a reworking of Freud. The image top right, therefore, shadows the *unheimlich*, the uncanny; that which does not fit into categories; that which disturbs, subverts and inverts. The shadow of the vampire or the *doppelgänger*. The weird, bottom left, shows something that is not easily representable; an entity which hides in the shadows; something not of this world which breaks our bonds with earthly reality. The presence, perhaps, of something extra-terrestrial. Finally, bottom right, the eerie suggests something that we once took for granted has disappeared into the shadows leaving behind it a faint spectral trace. This barely perceptible shadow haunts us with its wistfulness and melancholy. A lonely ghost hinting of past glories.

In Fisher's oeuvre, such shadows variously reveal the redemptive quest for lost futures and specifically for alternatives to the old and new normals of Capitalism. What will emerge from the shadow of Covid? Will it be a return to the old normal? A new normal that uncannily shadows the past? A complete break with the old, or societies haunted by their political histories? Shadows of a new future?





@social\_visual

## Niko

## UK

The idea of illusion as per Josef Albers is the 'discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect'. Introducing the concept of distortion through inversion of qualities, a negative image of my own legs aims to visually illustrate overwhelming feelings of anxiety by generating a symbolic space of renewal.

With the subject being a control variable, what changes is the balance between 'Light' and 'Dark' in an effort to visually represent distortion and reflect on the passage of time. Exploring how images relate to memory while taking inspiration from own heritage, the reversal of photo's characteristics introduces an archaic aesthetic alluding to ancient Greek warriors' greaves. Retreating into history through this allegory, body fragments become devices of a defence against suffering as the corroded armour stands suggestive of emotional battle. Playing ping-pong with time, the action of metabolizing history captures dynamics of evolution, commenting on an individual relationship to growth and experience of being in the world.

Considering body central to how we understand facets of identity and treating the process of perception being of great importance, deliberate falsification creates the effect of strangeness through the reversed qualities that confuse. Allusive of their ability to support, legs stand as indicators of fragility while light reversal swaps skin grain for corroded metal, referring to oxidation process as analogous to deterioration, hinting on the slow disintegration of mind.

In a state of war and descriptive of inner fight, the protective armour negotiates uncertainty resulting from the decline of mental instability. Skin texture intensifies the feeling of a body gradually degrading, while archaeology references to 'bronze disease' hint on oxidation as both destructive and defensive. Examining the notion of change by creating a momentary escape from reality, light inversion is used as a metaphor for inversion of values, indicative of effort to transform weakness to strength and able to establish a dialogue among the past and the present. As the elemental forms become contemporary interpretations of the ancient, the dichotomy between old and new heightens awareness of ageing, with present imbedded in the past revealing the way photography can capture and blend different layers of time.



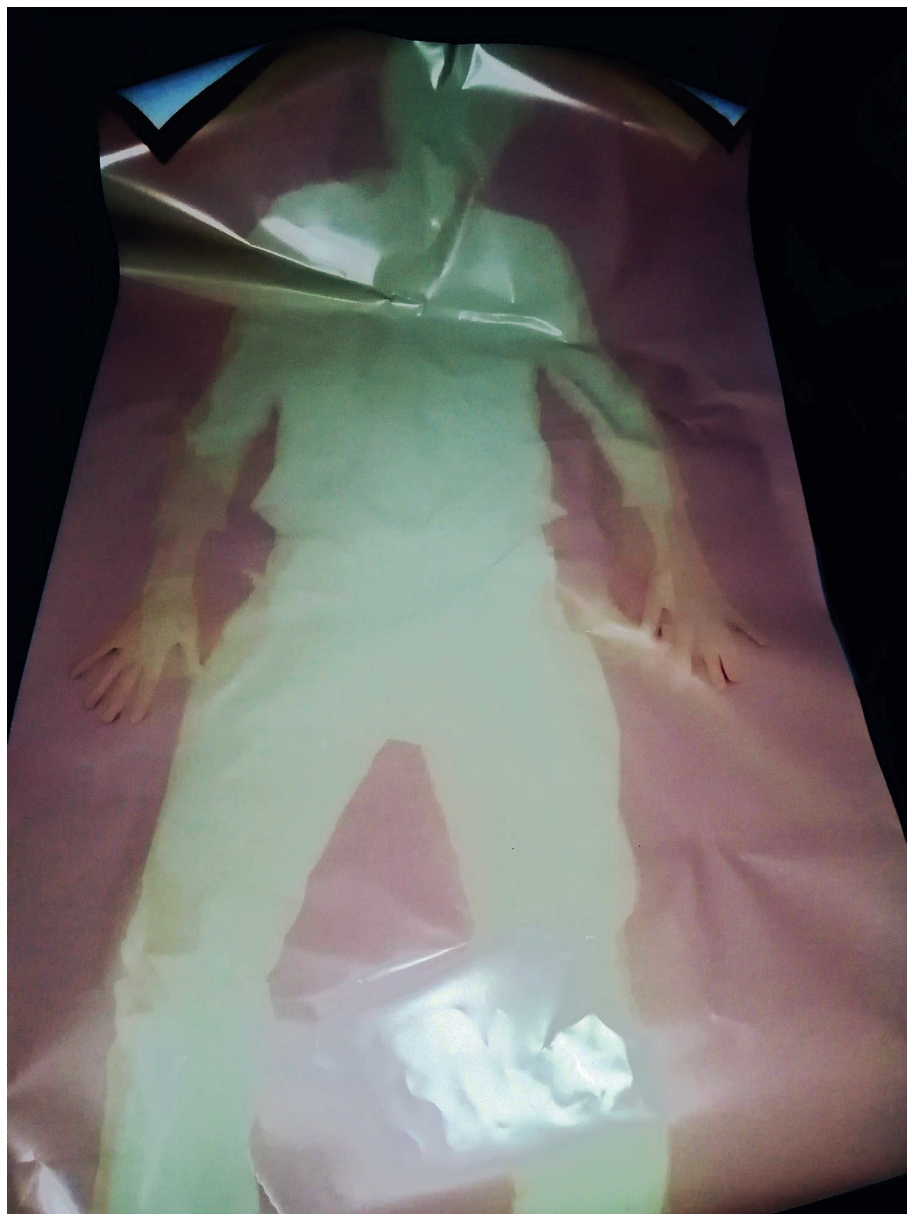
## Samuel Joshua Richardson

UK

Interrupting the performance of sleep, this piece is just that, a performance. However, this does not change the fact that this piece is also a photograph. Presented in the form of digital documentation, the performance appears as a past event, however it continues in its journey still. A time-lapse video consisting of 2469 pictures, one taken every ten seconds, documents the photographic paper laid on a bed with a body on top and a light facing them from above. Digital photographs of the paper were also taken with each interruption of sleep and days after the initiation. Sleeping was challenging with the disturbance of the cold, hard paper on the skin, without a quilt, under a UV light and with the constant thought that I was being watched by a camera, that I was performing. The act of recording one's self is a phenomenon of mass production as the smartphone screen is integral to the western consumer. With the popular 'Selfie', an experience is reduced into a small moment of time and through lessening the exposure by fragmenting and refracting light, an understandable representation is created. Using an experimental analogue process, spread over the course of one night's sleep, the paper is exposed to a multitude of moments flooded with light which in turn reduces the figuration of the representation. By removing the pinhole and not fixing the paper, the boundaries to which one perceives a photograph is questioned. The result is an ambiguous work which parallels the unquantifiable experience of sleep. As the image is not fixed, its permanence is questionable, and it continues to change with daily exposure to light and thus, a trace of what once was is left behind, a reminder of its physical state as a finite substance; but the presence of what is continues the paper's performance.

As this piece is all about the process of recording a personal unquantifiable moment such as sleep, this video documentation showing a time-lapse of the photo being created helps to understand the concept: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYuus36vMss>





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## Martin Vallis

UK

As someone who lives with a Mental Health diagnosis, I have often viewed shadows as 'My Darkness' make of that what you will but what comes to mind and may give you a better clue, is the story of 'Dr Jeckyll and Mister Hyde' by Robert Louis Stevenson.

I have also been conscious for quite a long time that I have many unintegrated 'Others' within my personality but had never considered that they all came from the same source/self, they always felt separate from the whole.

Having done a lot of psychological work on myself, I now know that they do belong to the whole but my many 'Others' were created to protect me as a child and to some extent they still try to do so in adulthood and often surface, inappropriately, uncharacteristically and sometimes scarily!

I tend to use shadows as expressions of my 'Others' integrated or not and they can form a better picture to understand myself from a very different perspective and help inform others who might be interested in understanding me better.

The image uploaded titled 'Other Self' is a portrait of one of my many others and initially I found the image a little unnerving but now I feel more comfortable because of course as humans we all possess a scary or 'Light and Dark' side of ourselves, some perhaps, a little more than others.

I think it's important to get to know our many others because after all, they do normally come with a message, whether we recognise that or not is another matter.



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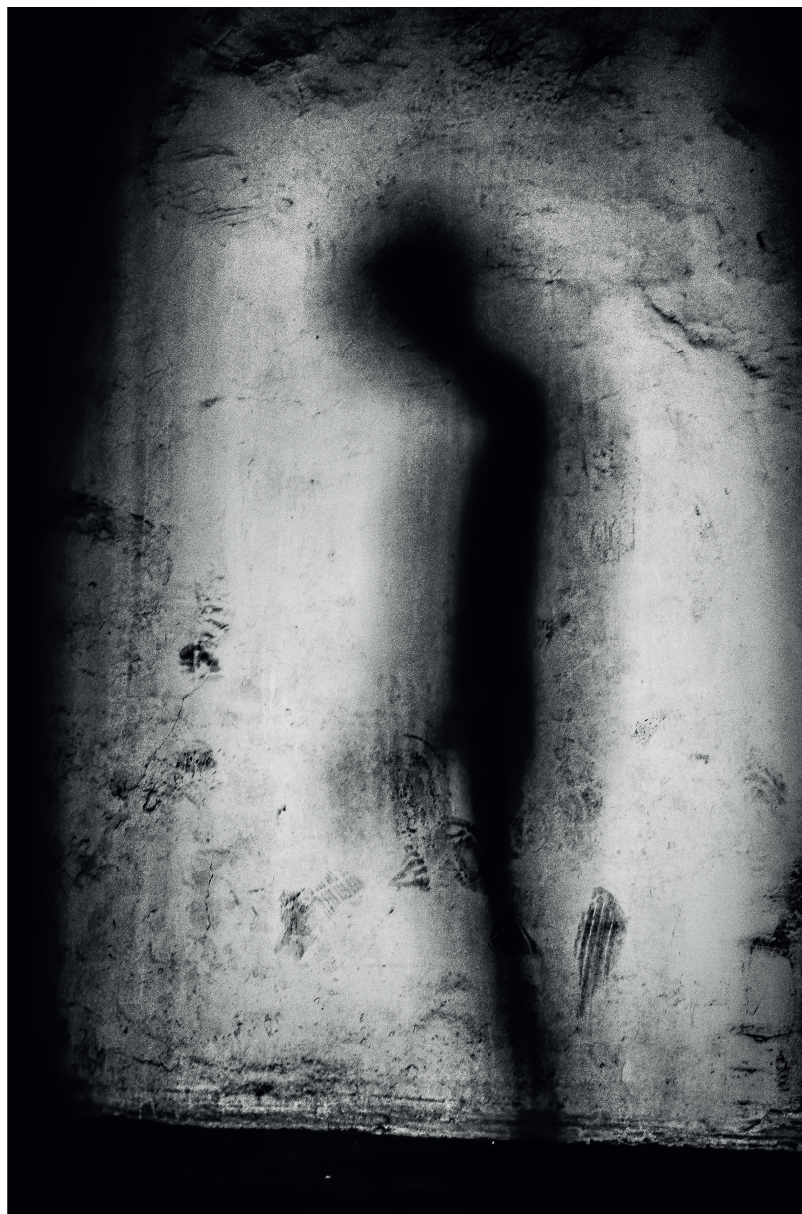
## Bingqin Zhang

## China

This is one photo of a series called The Death of Zhishen Lu. This series talked about how people die in this world. I agree that people will die 3 times in the world. The 1st time is when people's body die, the second time is when the person lost all his statue and influence in the world, and the last time is all the people forget about him. In the photo, the shadow cast means a question of how people really exist in the world. Are we real? Or we are just the shadow in other's mind? The shadow is self-doubt but also a prove of existence, it between real and nihility.

When shooting the shadow, the photographer is hidden. The shadow is the photographer, but it is not. Such a visual trap will make people doubt the identity of the shadow when watching, and also doubt whether it is a person's shadow. And this kind of doubt is also our own doubt about identity, our constant search for self.





@zaccheooooo

<http://zaccheophoto.com>

Wispy strands of fabric or skeins of floss draw a veil across the portrait of an Other identity affecting our understanding of the image. Do I fancy I see an echo of Niko's armour in a Grecian helmet? Not quite seeing is more conducive to thought than perfect knowledge. Would we ever know the self? **Martin Vallis** identifies this subject as one of a community of other selves – a personal response is to find echoes of this work in the barely comprehensible quality of an ultrasound scan of an unborn relative which with time and grace is yet to be revealed.

Vallis talks of a multiplicity of others which perhaps matches the understanding of neuropsychologists working on decision processes. They find these processes are more haphazard than the subject can reveal and driven from competing emotions. Any post-hoc rationalisation is searching for plausibility and little more.

**Zaccheo Zhang** brings us back to the metaphorical description of life's journey to reveal the uncertainties of an endpoint, the undecided moment of death of an identity. Moreover our curatorial interest was piqued when we found a shadow figure. We knew that classical Chinese and East Asian artists had not backed their figurative work with the cast shadow of the self and recalled the story of Giuseppe Castiglione, a painter and Jesuit missionary to the Ming dynasty imperial court. His first portrait painting of the Qianlong emperor required him to forgo his western *chiaroscuro* technique and let no shadow fall on the emperor's face to be interpreted as dirt.

Zhang rightly points out that presenting an image of the shadow of a person without reference to the person opens up the question of what sort of person is being illuminated. Here the work is titled for Lu Zhishen, the larger-than-life hero of the 14C Chinese novel 'Water Margin'. We may imagine a noble thug, a Robin Hood with anger management issues. He lives his life in contradictions, though an outlaw he can readily take on mercenary roles for the State, he joins a buddhist monastery but sneaks out for drinking sprees, and while righting the wrongs done to poor folk his taste for violence encourages him to provoke the wrongdoer into physical action which can only end badly. By the end of the novel, he still has options but recognising that a prophecy is fulfilled he accepts that karma must prevail and embraces physical death.

Can the personality of Lu Zhishen be preserved through the record of history? Everytime we walk in a ruined cemetery we must note the death of memory. And through Time therefore history is concealed.

## ...discovery

Odetola recommends us to close our eyes, to voluntarily enter a personal darkness. Then to open them again to “see the world and see people who reflect how we see ourselves in the darkness”. My own practice in analog film requires me figuratively to close my eyes after the shot and wait for the development cycle before I can see again. These next artists, engaging with the photograph, performing for the camera similarly change the dynamic of the moment. The space in the photo is modified with consequences of returning the gaze – the viewer is made external and the photographer owns the space by virtue of their presence.

The small patch of sky at the upper corner of **Thomas Oscar Miles**’s image, guides his advance into the outstretched arms of the branches and trees of the forest. Nature reaches out to embrace the human as reward for pressing on into the darkness, feeling the fear and embracing fragility, vulnerability in a difficult physical environment.

Being the shadow, being the unseen, enunciating the unspoken word means that the pairing of text with image works both ways for **Kerry Rawlinson** – the Mallarmé-like typography draws our attention to the dark space between words, what is not said or not heard in that darkness becomes as felt, as significant as the visible word. We are also reminded that through *différance* Derrida is critiquing the phonological primacy of the spoken word before the written word

Myth and legend are a rich source of understanding the way in which earlier societies explained the natural world around them. Greek myth believed that darkness, Nyx, was the progenitor of light. According to Aristophanes’ *The Birds*, Nyx lays an egg from which emerges Eros with *glowing* wings and the appearance of a whirlwind – the creation having been previously without movement of air.

**Gen Doy** uses stories from Homer’s *Odyssey* and presses on into the shadow world occupied by Odysseus’ unfortunate companions. In the story Odysseus needs to understand why he is fated to take 10 years to make the geographically short hop from Ilium to Ithaca. Circe can tell him to descend into Hades where the dead live out their existence as shadows and search out the famous prophet Tiresias. Gen Doy here will make contact with her own shadow but pressing closer still is to deny her shadow existence. Odysseus will learn from Tiresias the importance of the ritual performances of sacrifice he must make to patch up his cosmic / karmic relationships.

## Thomas Oscar Miles

UK

My art looks to inspire self empowerment, through embracing our vulnerabilities. This is celebrated through fragile and detailed imagery, centered around the narratives. In my work, I talk about personal fears and darker experiences. I give my characters opportunities to wear these like a crown. How can we appreciate our light when we brush the darkness under the bed, ignored? I hope that my work can show people how multi-layered each one of us is, showing a unity in our humanity.

I talk in my work about personal experiences such as mental health and my ever-growing relationship with my autism. I choose to represent these in my work through visuals such as decay, bones, and shadow filled corners of a woodland. My new series 'Our Beautiful Demise' speaks on a similar theme: wearing our fears with pride, binding them tightly to our flesh. I have grown up fearful of my personal shadows, I now instead hope to educate others on this and create a platform to spotlight issues we all go through.





@thomasoscarmiles

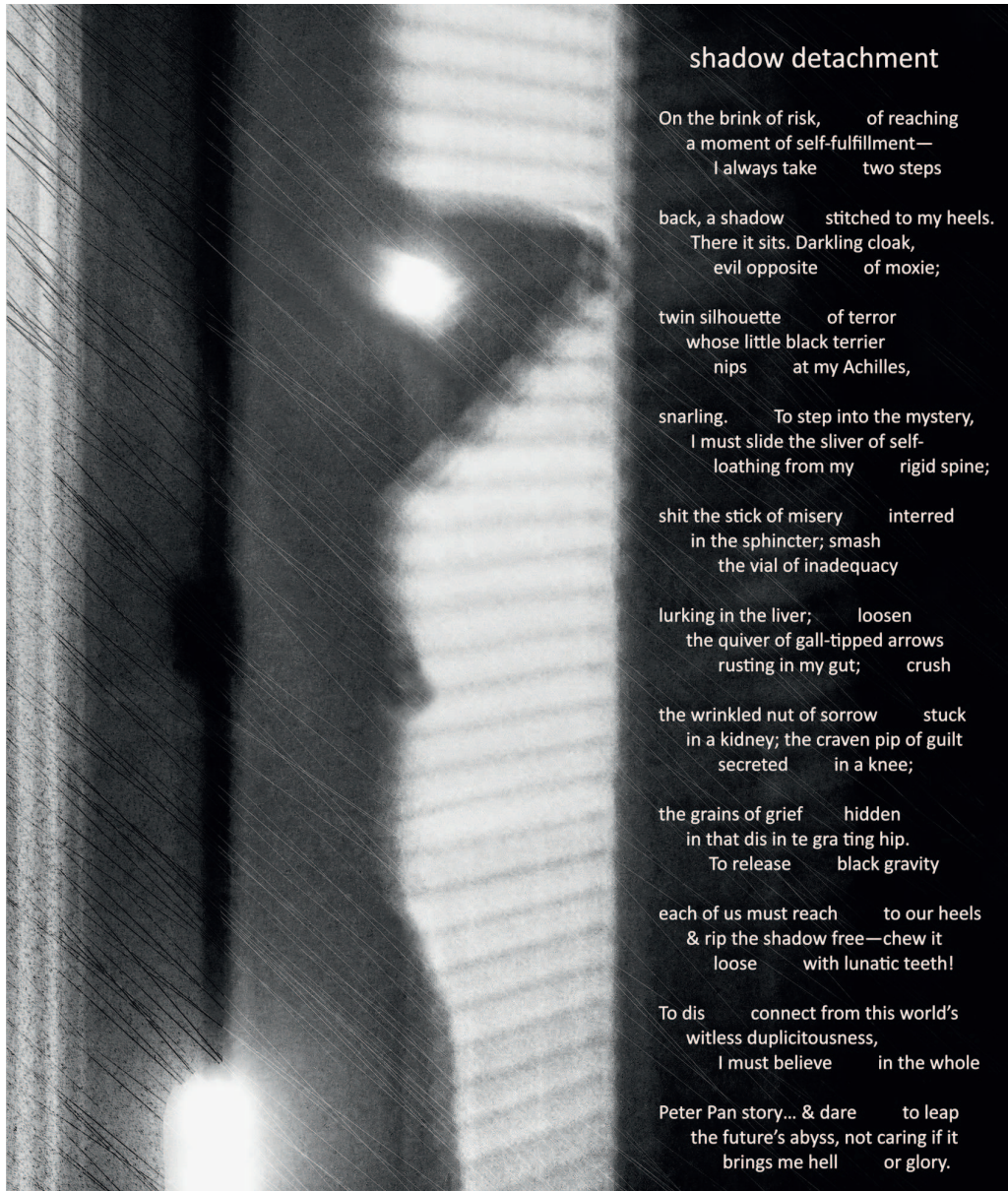
<https://www.thomasoscarmiles.com>

**kerry rawlinson**

**Canada**

My creative leaning is expressionistic, towards exposing the battle-lines of people vs place; exploring the edges & intersects of nature/construct, culture/chaos, order/anarchy. And my poetry leans towards the philosophical & metaphysical. The nuances of humanity drift between the blackest black & the purest clarity, and I'm particularly interested in the dark nooks and crannies of psychosis and revelation. In this piece I focused those creative processes on myself, to see what leaked out...





## shadow detachment

On the brink of risk,      of reaching  
a moment of self-fulfillment—  
I always take      two steps

back, a shadow      stitched to my heels.  
There it sits. Darkling cloak,  
evil opposite      of moxie;

twin silhouette      of terror  
whose little black terrier  
nips      at my Achilles,

snarling.      To step into the mystery,  
I must slide the sliver of self-  
loathing from my      rigid spine;

shit the stick of misery      interred  
in the sphincter; smash  
the vial of inadequacy

lurking in the liver;      loosen  
the quiver of gall-tipped arrows  
rusting in my gut;      crush

the wrinkled nut of sorrow      stuck  
in a kidney; the craven pip of guilt  
secreted      in a knee;

the grains of grief      hidden  
in that dis in te gra ting hip.  
To release      black gravity

each of us must reach      to our heels  
& rip the shadow free—chew it  
loose      with lunatic teeth!

To dis      connect from this world's  
witless duplicitousness,  
I must believe      in the whole

Peter Pan story... & dare      to leap  
the future's abyss, not caring if it  
brings me hell      or glory.



@kerryrawli

<https://kerryrawlinson.com>

### ...playing

The long, delicate fingers of the shadow figure met by **Eva Marschan-Hayes** one evening are at first reminiscent of the shadow fingers of the vampire as it climbs the stairway in Murnau's 1920 film, *Nosferatu*. I should rather reference Nietzsche[10] who draws a dividing line between Apollonian and Dionysian responses to existence – mind and order co-existent with passion and chaos – the ivy strands creeping over the tree in this image and the puckish response of the Shadow combine to conjure thoughts of Maenads gathering in the woods.

The German cinema before 'talkies' was dissected by Eisner and Kracauer who were swift to point out the psychodramatic force of the Shadow but this shadow is more playful and it may be time to move on from the Gothic identification of Shadow as Other towards an understanding of Shadow as a counterweight to Life[7].

Nietzsche's Zarathustra[10, §69] is at first irritable, finding the sedulous attention of his Shadow difficult and tries to outrun it. He fails to get away and turns suddenly to confront it. At length he is more empathic for the Shadow's miserable life as a follower and mimic. He becomes quite kind and offers his Shadow a home in his cave for the long unlit hours of the night, promising dancing too. Nietzsche is most precise on this point: the route to spiritual health and power is to face his shadow follower, to acknowledge it and accept it.

Later in Derrida's text he takes issue with Nietzsche's injunction to dance with a pen[4, p.34] pointing out that writing is essentially a sedentary occupation, and for him writing must always be the connection with the other through interrogation of meaning. However Nietzsche through Zarathustra says that a day without dancing is a day lost [10, §23] and **Aldobranti's** image of the shadows of dancers is created in a wordless moment in dance, in an interrogation of the space between dancers.

### ...becoming

In her exceptionally playful work **becky beamer** moves her cameraphone to throw her whole self into an endlessly recursive *en abyme* game of reflections in her sunglasses. As an equal the shadow of the phone registers its presence and complicity in a local culture of gaze accentuated by face covering. The

mirrored lenses of the sunglasses worn, for her to keep the low sun out serve for us to know the vast extent of her arid surroundings.

This considered act of portraiture in **Ram Samocha**'s work nicely rounds out the collection. In this Zoom-enabled age bringing the other's likeness to our screen in front with their voice and animation is to get as close to their shadow as is permitted. Leaving aside a question as to whether one's correspondent has turned on the mirroring functionality of their camera to present themselves in their own image; leaving aside the mischievous thought that a business meeting might be enlivened by scribbling over a boss' face as Dalí could add a mustache to Mona Lisa: this piece reveals that as with Bingxin Zhang the presence of the face of the other is how we know them. In reimagining the face of his interlocutor Samocha redefines a relationship.

## to summarise...

As with any art project where we end up is very rarely where we intended as a destination. A beginning was to investigate Derrida's assertion of the metaphorical dominance of light and dark through the medium of photography.

A self-description/manifesto I laid out for my personal involvement was

...to bring together a shared interest group with other artists, and my hopes for a better understanding of the entanglement or confusion of the cast shadow with the Other – those other people who we feel are too different from us for comfort. My desire is to work to reduce that difference

The call-out was

...for photographers who take a fresh look at the cast shadow of the person, even another person; or, who can take a step beyond the cultural comfort zone that light is right and dark is not, and [to see that] the cast shadow can be free of these ties.

## Gen Doy

UK

I made this image when I was working on an installation with sound and images. One of the sources for the installation was the story of Odysseus (Ulysses), and his journey home from the siege of Troy as recounted in Homer's *The Odyssey*. One of his adventures on the way is his encounter and relationship with the sorceress and semi-divine Circe. In some versions of the tale Circe turns Ulysses' men into various creatures, and in others she turns them into swine. Ulysses craftily avoids this fate and becomes Circe's lover, while his men are transformed, as in this image, into "shadows of their former selves".

I was interested in experimenting with projections and shadows and here used a kodak slide projector without slides to illuminate me from behind, and small toy models of birds and animals hanging from the ceiling, whose cast shadows create an otherworldly atmosphere. As I move towards my shadow to become united with it, it disappears. I can never become one with it. This is as far as I can get to the wall while the shadow can still be seen.





@pepedoy

<http://gendoy.com>

## Eva Marschan-Hayes

UK

An early evening on a late summers' day, walking through an old English cemetery.

Pockets of light, shadows  
my photographic eyes see.

And there on the ivy overgrown tree  
it grabs my attention,  
it looks like a He

I use my arms, my hands & start to play,

A figure emerges,

a shadow of me,

It is here to stay.

I created this image, and now it is over to you,  
what comes to mind, what do you see?  
Let your associations flow, run wild, feel free.

Maybe, a lurking man, behind a tree?  
An angry ghost of a deceased,  
who is not ready yet to leave?  
An escaped prisoner,  
A mad man...  
Who else it could be?

We project scary, mysterious, crazy figures on to the tree,  
Is it "the Other" who we see? Or just Mirroring what is within you & me.  
As a woman I am a little bit man,  
a little bit mad, a little bit bad. At times angry, at times scared,  
it is better understood when it is in the open & shared.





@evas.poetic.imagery

## Aldobranti

UK

A lot of my work is concerned to unpick the entanglement of the cast shadow of the self with the negativities of the Other -- the migrant, the passer-by, simply the un-me -- with an aim of self-improvement; to find ways to more kindness and fewer judgemental moments.

Current projects have encouraged me to imagine interactions with this Other as recorded in my photography; these include playing ball or, as here dancing. I have been interested in the alterities that crop up in quiet moments of creativity.

The unknowability of sources of awareness, of influences as influx.

Movement and the lowered inhibition of dancing as expression may enable a lowering of defences against these: inspiration as inward drawn breath, and insight as a turning of the gaze.





@aldobranti

<https://aldobranti.org>

## becky beamer

UAE

As a camera person, educator, documentarian, and artist, my appearance rarely appears in my photographs. This photograph is a humble self-portrait of the artist, me, becky beamer. It was intended to be private but, upon self-reflection, publishing the photograph demands an audience to contribute to the discourse of the day.

The shadow represents a statement of my ideology as an artist, a selfie shadow that reveals the camera and camera womxn behind the lens. The shadow is a statement on the current state of the world, a digital marking of the iPhone and society obsessed with documenting the self. The shadow veils my face, like a veil covers many women in the region in which I reside, the Middle East. It stamps my face like a permanent tattoo, meant to conceal my true identity. Without the shadow, I am vulnerable, open to the same criticism that I long and desire.

The duality between light and shadow stands out in the reflection in my sunglasses. On close inspection, any questions left regarding the subject and the observer is revealed. They are one in the same, a metaphor for the pandemic that brings everyone in the world closer together. So, in the end, there is hope and community in the darkness.

The “House of the Rising Sun” refers to the location of the photograph. It was taken in the desert of Sharjah. Sharjah is an Emirate in the United Arab Emirates and its name in Arabic translates to the rising sun. I am currently a resident and an Assistant Professor at the American University of Sharjah.



@beckybeamer

<https://beckybeamer.com>

## Ram Samocha

UK

Just before the pandemic started artist Violaine Lafortune asked me if I would like to take part in a new print project and a group show. As she was in Canada and I was in the UK, I suggested that she and I would be doing a collaborative project where we paint each other on the computer's screen and then print the final images on paper.

We did not know then how very relevant this way of collaboration and communication would come to be.

Through a collaborative performance, combining video and printmaking, we used the theme of Black Ink to question the reality of virtual conversations.

In a Skype meeting, we used black ink, covering plexiglass placed in front of the computer screen to gradually obscure/reveal the image of the other. While the conversation was digital, the marking was physical.

The black of the ink captures most of this image. Spaces and contrasts mark the passage of time.

I took this photo with my camera just before I went to print the black marks on paper. There are a few ways to capture a shadow; for me this one is a shadow of a digital image.





@ramsamochoa

<http://www.samochoa.com>

The scope for this project widened as we moved forward. It became apparent that Light, Dark and Shadow could not remain isolated physical phenomena and the expression of metaphorical force should become the focus of this study. Retitling the project to address photographers and metaphor reflected this where several contributions used the physical elements to explore life's journey.

A new title for the project will only result in questions that remained unanswered in the initial project and new questions that emerge. Among these, the most pertinent, is Derrida's concern still valid? His assertion is now 50 and more years old. The transcendental signified has moved over time and so, if the view that the shift to consciousness removed a centrality for religion is correct, have attitudes changed to promote the self above the social? Do Light and Dark still sustain a previous transcendental signified? As we read the submissions it seemed 'Life is a Struggle' could supplant 'Life is a Journey' for many. Metaphors supporting self-reliance, of strength, and conflict might now be more significant. The 'struggle' metaphor will bear further analysis as did 'journey' to reveal actors of wins and losses, rewards and penalties, and opponents. Are metaphors of self-reliance drivers for consumer capitalism? Are other metaphors more forceful, and how might they play out in photographs? A personal message has emerged to take home: to enjoy these new questions – unanswered and deferred.

A very explicit element of the call-out was the requirement for the expression of the artist's lived experience in their own words. Very many artists might prefer to believe that their work stands on its merits or in some paraphrase of the adage 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. However, this project has been about understanding each contributor's feelings and experience of the cast shadow – we had to decline many beautiful and exciting images for a lack of this verbal explanation.

It has been a pleasure to read some contributions presented as poetry – perhaps it helps to change voice when writing becomes difficult. So we respond in kind, using the words of Fernando Pessoa[11] – Portugal's great Modernist poet – speaking as Alberto Caeiro, the 'Keeper of Sheep'

"I look, and things exist // I think and only I exist" [§71]

And, aptly for this project's origins in metaphysics

"There's metaphysics enough in not thinking about anything" [§5]

## reading list

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Front cover: #1375, Play At Ball (detail) Aldobranti, 2020

Back cover: #1375, Play At Ball Aldobranti, 2020

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It has been a pleasure to work with these artists not only for the mental stimulus of their contributions but also to commend their professionalism during the later stages of production: their attention to detail and timely responses have greatly facilitated getting this volume into print. We wish to note our gratitude to Dr Fiona Harvey for many helpful discussions.

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*Aldobrandi*







Western philosophy has always privileged the visible, relying on Light to reveal certainty and truth over Darkness, doubt, and the unknown. The photographic image — built of Light — accesses this privilege and is considered truthful but moreover, its technology allows for recording transience, intangibility, and the liminal. This flexibility empowers the photographer who may deploy the metaphorical force of Darkness to explore feelings and uncertainties.

A starting point for these photographers was to study the cast shadow of the Self which has gained a burden of metaphor through its intimate relationship with Light and Dark.

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