



17 May 1976.



July 5 - '76



Identity/Alterity Re-De-Constructed in Repetition and Difference

Katy Deepwell

Before selfies and polaroid cameras and before digital photography, the photo booth presented people with a near-instantaneous copy of a photograph to document their identity or visual appearance, as well as the means to create memories of time together by capturing their face with that of their friends. Until the Instamatic self-processing photo, and prior to digital images, some readers will recall that to obtain a print on paper required film to be processed and then prints made from it by the photographer, photo-studio or processing plant. The photo booth has, since its early invention (1888 in France or 1925 in New York), remained a quick and cheaper substitute than the studio portrait.¹ Photo booths are automatic cameras set on a timer and although the subject(s) of the photograph can arrange themselves in the proscribed space, focus and format, there is no photographic 'I/eye' of a photographer altering any of these key elements. No film is produced in analogue photo booths. The relatively quick production of small photographs provides an opportunity to play with and around the booth's intended 'official' use for facial recognition to accompany identity cards, visas and passports for legal identification purposes. This is why, as artist Alfredo Jaar has reminded us, 'we don't take a photo, we make a photo'.² In the photo booth, however, it is the subject and not the photographer who, within its proscribed format, 'makes' the photograph.

Without subverting the product of the typical photo booth format of a strip of four images, British artist Verdi Yahooda repeatedly recorded herself each month, starting in 1974 and continuing to 1990, when she changed the process to a quarterly schedule. She continues this record-making to the present day. What does this document of moments in a life, a visual record of a person's appearance, reveal over a forty-year period? And what kind of art do these documents, when seen together, represent? Reading them as images alone, the repetition of her action does not reaffirm her identity or her portrait as singular or fixed, so much as demonstrate one woman's constantly changing face, offering indications of many differences in hairstyle, physical appearance, make-up, style of clothing and health over time. The photographs themselves also change from black and white to colour, printed on different papers and with different intensities of light and focus: even how the dates are scribbled on the back by the artist shifts over time, capturing the month of each strip's production. Until 2006, Yahooda never showed this project as an artwork, though she continued to make it, uncertain of what it would represent as either a document of her life or as a piece of conceptual art.

The photographs were first shown in a group exhibition, *Said* (at Camberwell Space in London in 2008), in which the artworks selected by artist Fran Cottell were

Detail of Verdi Yahooda, *Photo Booth Classic (plate 2)*.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDeriv License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

DOI:
10.1111/1467-8365.12579
Art History | ISSN 0141-6790
44 | 3 | June 2021 | pages
554-571



I Verdi Yahooba, *Photo Booth Classic*, ongoing (begun 1974), installed on wall as continuous strip in *Said*, Camberwell Space, Peckham, 2008, curated by Fran Cottell. Photo: Mark Harwood.

positioned as ‘records and remnants of their private and public “performances”’ (plate 1).³ Prior to this, in January 2006, they were presented as two artists’ pages in *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal* (plate 2).⁴ It was this presentation, edited and enlarged, that was reprinted to poster size and exhibited alongside an almost two-metre-long framed digital scan of a sequence of the actual photo booth strips, dating from April 1974 to September 1977, in the exhibition *Now! Now! ... in more than one place*, organized by the *Black Artists and Modernism* project at Cookhouse and Triangle Space, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, in October 2016.

The three displays of Yahooba’s photo booth work were different in form and these differences are not insignificant for how it might be read. The first exhibition presented the photos in the original four-photo format offered by the photo booth and made by the artist, pinned on the wall in sequences of time, like a calendar, and organized in groups of six from left to right in two long lines along the wall (plate 3 and plate 4). Only the images themselves were visible. In the pages of *n.paradoxa* this work was a grid of forty photographs (five by four on each of the two pages), using a single frame from each sequence of four images, with a scan of the handwritten date from the back as a caption. The single images were chosen by the artist from strips crossing a thirty-year cycle. This reduced selection of images from across the series emphasized the differences over time, highlighting changes in the artist’s appearance from her student days at Goldsmiths to life as a mature artist and lecturer (plate 5, plate 6, plate 7 and plate 8). In the work shown at Chelsea, one page of *n.paradoxa* was taken in digital form, enlarged in format and presented as a digital print (plate 9). If editing is always a form of ‘sense-making’, like the transition from any artwork to its catalogue reproduction,

these transitions and changes emphasize a shift in how a work might be read in different contexts, from the original format of the actual photographic strip, to print reproduction, to a poster-size digital print. The artist also has plans to turn the entire sequence into an artist's book, emphasizing both the back and the front of each strip.⁵ Which of these iterations is the realization of the work? Or is it all of them?

In this essay, while reflecting on these self-portraits, I want to ask questions about what the work highlights if focus is placed on different historical moments since it began in April 1974, in order to interrogate potential readings it might have acquired had it been shown earlier than 2006. *Photo Booth Classic* (1974–present, artist's collection) is a highly unusual document of a person's life, captured in the same way at regular intervals, which even today, with the ubiquity and range of snaps taken by thousands of individuals recording their daily lives on digital cameras and phones and often circulating on the net, is unmatched because of the consistency and extended time frame of recording. The fascination with photo booth pictures by artists and collectors rarely focuses exclusively on one person's life over time.⁶ While there are many self-portraits by women artists taken in photo booths or restaged as photo booth images, none of these arrive at the same sustained durational treatment.⁷ In *n.paradoxa* the artist argued that even though the work was produced as a systematic documentation, ultimately, 'the self-portraits chart a private journey that resists a definitive statement'.⁸

Yahooda's inclusion in the *Now! Now! ... in more than one place* exhibition, alongside other non-white British artists, as well as the invitation to consider the work in the light of Stuart Hall's 2006 essay 'Black Diaspora artists in Britain: Three "Moments" in Post-War History', raises many interesting questions: about identity politics, 'otherness', shifting definitions of 'Black' and the experience of different generations of the Black diaspora in Britain, as well as how works or groups of artists are positioned at key historical moments. The 1980s is one of the moments that Stuart Hall selected

2 Double page spread from Verdi Yahooda, *Photo Booth Classic*, ongoing (begun 1974), *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*, 17, January 2006, 70–71. Photo: KT press.

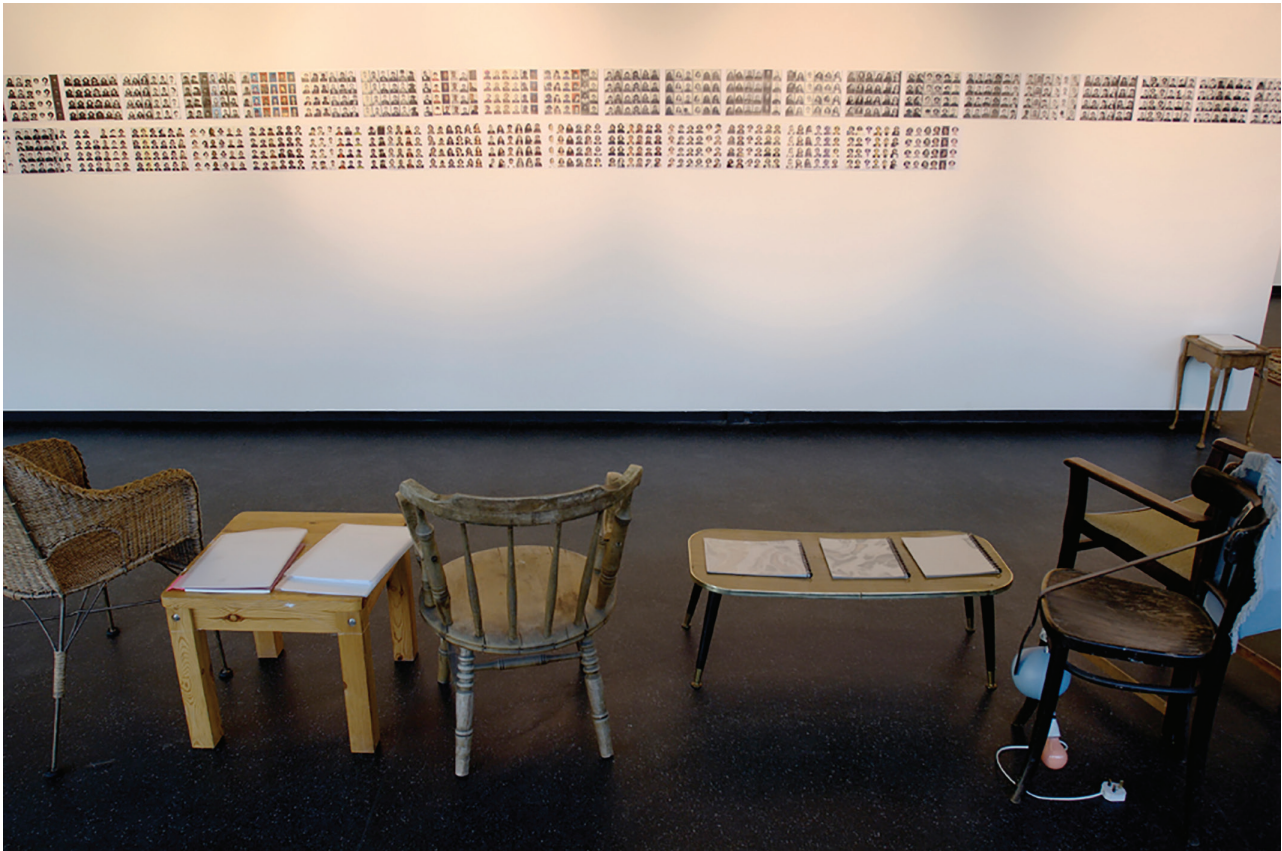


as representing an important conjuncture for Black British diaspora artists, one, as he comments, that was ‘characterized by deep fissures which in turn set in train new trajectories that diverge rather than “adding up”’.⁹ Verdi Yhooda is Jewish, not Black (if that term is primarily reserved for skin colour definitions or those of African and Afro-Caribbean descent). She was born in Aden, Yemen (a British Protectorate from 1839 to 1967). She moved to London as a child and has lived there ever since. She is a contemporary of many of the Black artists of the 1980s whom Hall identified and discussed. She also shares with them an education in British art schools, having studied at Goldsmiths and then the Royal College of Art, both in London. In Hall’s view, borrowing terminology from David Scott, these artists have in common the same ‘problem space’: namely, a cosmopolitan art world, dominated by London, even when the diasporas and routes of migration which informed their lives are very different.

Hall further defined, in ‘Three Moments’, how this second generation of Black artists is distinct from an earlier generation because they did not embrace either abstraction or international modernism when they moved from different countries in the former Empire, including newly independent nations of the Commonwealth, to Britain between 1945 and the 1960s. Not all were part of the Windrush generation or children of it; the picture he presents is considerably more diverse than this. The majority of these Black artists were second and third generation immigrants brought up in Britain, but some, for example Zarina Bhimji (from Uganda), came with their families to the UK as children, as Verdi Yhooda did. In Hall’s reading, and as a result of their life experiences, this second generation explored questions of identity and belonging overwhelmingly mediated by the category of ‘race’ and their encounters with forms of racism in Britain. Hall further characterizes their stance as ‘post-colonial’

3 Verdi Yhooda, *Photo Booth Classic*, ongoing (begun 1974), installed on wall as continuous strip in *Said*, Camberwell Space, Peckham, 2008, curated by Fran Cottell. Photo: Mark Harwood.





4 Verdi Yahooda, *Photo Booth Classic*, ongoing (begun 1974), installed on wall as continuous strip in *Said*, Camberwell Space, Peckham, 2008, curated by Fran Cottell. Photo: Mark Harwood.

and their work as ‘anti-racist, culturally relativist and identity-driven’, while its content was ‘politically polemical and collage-based’, subsequently embracing the figural and the more subjective strategy of ‘putting the self in the frame’. Verdi Yahooda’s work could superficially be seen to fit this model of ‘identity politics’ and be described as a self-examination ‘in the frame’ which is anti-racist, anti-sexist and culturally relativist. But to read it in this way requires simplification, focusing only on the images and their presentation as a self-portrait about her identity, ignoring any other possible readings. In some of her other photographic works and artist’s books, Yahooda explores migration more directly in diasporic and international terms.¹⁰ A feature found in these works is their focus on formal processes of change, issues of displacement, traces left behind and obscure details; echoes of memories. These tropes ask us to question what we think of as reliable visual evidence and highlight the fragility of memory in the material left behind.

Hall argued that there is a transition amongst the works of second generation Black British artists in their use of figural representation towards a ‘consciously-staged image’, specifically in the 1990s. This rendered the use of the term ‘Black’ as marking ‘the end of the essential black subject’, for two reasons: firstly, because of the opening of a ‘kaleidoscope and proliferation of meanings around blackness’ and secondly, due to the highly contradictory forms of ‘globalization’ – ‘in the age of refugees, asylum seekers and global dispersal’ – of the 1990s. His characterization was prescient, with these tendencies becoming more marked through the last twenty years as migration has accelerated in changing global political and social conditions, and as the art world has embraced a global contemporary, reviving problematic questions of national representation and difference. Citing Fanon, Hall suggested that how the body is represented needs to be considered in terms of an “epidermal schema” or surface on which racism etches its indelible mark’, and emphasized how the Black body remains



5 Verdi Yahooda, worksheets for Photo Booth Classic used for selecting strips to be used for *n.paradoxa* (marked 'n.p'). © Verdi Yahooda. Photo: Verdi Yahooda.

'a ground of resistance from which alternative counter-narratives can be produced'. Yet, in the same essay, Hall repeatedly distinguished women artists in his comments as a gendered group – because they had to organize separate exhibitions to become visible as 'Artists' – a distinction which renders highly problematic his discussion of a 'black body' as without gender. He continued by drawing a further distinction between feminism and particular Black women artists (not least because of their critique of white feminism which he did not engage with or elaborate), though he did recognize how sexual politics and questions of difference, as well as explorations of sexuality and subjectivity, have changed the field as a whole. Throughout, Hall also made reference to his book *Different* (2001), where he was even more explicit about how the primarily UK and USA-based artists included in that book (published in collaboration with the arts organization Autograph ABP) had shifted all characterizations of what it means to be 'Black':

In this context, the term 'black' must be understood in a broad and inclusive way – as it was used, for example, in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s to refer to all those communities, of whatever ethnic or 'racial' origin, who were regarded as 'other' – different – and thus racially excluded. As used in this text, 'black' does not reference a particular racial group, with fixed characteristics, whose social being or artistic imagination is determined by skin colour, genetic make-up or biological inheritance [...] 'Black', as deployed here, is a politically, historically or culturally constructed category; a contested idea, whose ultimate destination remains unsettled.¹¹

This expanded notion of 'Black' in the UK includes Chinese, South Asian and a wide range of African and Caribbean countries, as well as, potentially (although not explicitly in his argument) Jews. Only in this very expanded sense of 'otherness' would the Jewish diaspora count as part of this definition, and, as Hall pointed out, such distinctions in this expanded sense are hard to maintain and may even have collapsed in discussions of contemporary art. Understanding Jewishness is highly problematic in such definitions for a number of clear reasons. It only works if and when 'Jewishness' is seen as 'other', a visible ethnicity, an accident of birth, and not a religion. Skin colour is a highly ambiguous trope on which to base Jewish identity, as there are 'Black' as well as 'White' Jews in spite of anti-Semitic slurs of 'swarthy'. More typical signifiers of negative and anti-Semitic characterizations focus on hair colour and nose structure: stereotypes which emphasize differences in physical features which are not universal amongst Jews. Many forms of anti-Semitism also focus on signifiers of clothing worn by Hasidic Jews, also highly problematic since they only represent one specific branch of Judaism. Similarly, identifying Jews as only aligned to the state of Israel in the Middle East gives rise to equally homogenizing anti-Semitic statements, given the diasporas of Jews around the world and actual politics pursued in Israel-Palestine, as well as ignoring the complex history of fleeing different kinds of persecution (Ethiopia, for example) and conflict (Russian pogroms to Communist regimes, not just the Holocaust) or those in search of a life in a different country from that of their birth.

The problem of identity and identity politics highlighted within Hall's text is about how to reconcile visible manifestations and explorations of ethnicities, when extremely diverse and distinct historical and political allegiances and identifications

6 Verdi Yahooda, worksheets for *Photo Booth Classic* used for selecting strips to be used for *n.paradoxa* (marked 'n.p'). © Verdi Yahooda. Photo: Verdi Yahooda.





7 Verdi Yahooda, worksheets for *Photo Booth Classic* used for selecting strips to be used for *n.paradoxa* (marked 'n.p'). © Verdi Yahooda. Photo: Verdi Yahooda.

exist, without constructing a 'local' ethnic ghetto in the West, or as only a 'difference' within the Western-driven globalization of the international art market, that is, as a lazy form of celebration of 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' in multicultural terms. Thus, to read Yahooda's self-portraits in terms of her 'Jewishness' and not her secular and historical identity as a woman and an artist from London, either adopts a specific religious or ethnic focus or limits the reading of her identity to one-dimensional perspectives based on visible signifiers of Jewishness. An artist's identification with different tendencies in order to exhibit is a different matter: Yahooda has taken part in several shows of Jewish women artists as well as women artists' exhibitions. Yet her inclusion in the exhibition at Chelsea seems to be rendered valid only if it emphasizes a post-colonial identity for all immigrants to the UK, and this signals a problematic on the verge of collapse through a potentially over-expanded definition.¹²

Quoting from his earlier essay, 'Minimal Selves' (1987), in 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain' Hall reaffirmed the problematic of identity as being what is at stake in his discussion:

Identities are formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of a history, a culture. And since the colonized subject is positioned in relation to cultural narratives which have been profoundly expropriated, he/she is always 'somewhere else'; double marginalized, displaced, always other than where the subject is or is able to speak from.¹³

Yet in *Different*, women's self-portraiture is often reduced to a form of identity politics which celebrates Black women's physical identity as Black subjects, especially in the discussion of two projects by Maxine Walker and Joy Gregory. Hall suggests that documentary photography is no longer employed as a device for 'an essential black subject' and that its prevalence is questioned and challenged by much of the 'staged' photography considered in the book. This tendency in favour of a 'non-essentialized black subject', he argues, gives rise to different kinds of explorations of 'travelling' or 'subjectivity' on the move.

Joy Gregory's *Auto-portraits* (1990), however, are read in terms of the fashion industry and models of beauty in Hall's text, even though he cites Sunil Gupta's reading of her work as negotiating 'a delicate path between the political demands of making the Black body visible and desirable'.¹⁴ Hall notes that these images are 'too close for comfort' in the close-ups of eyes and mouth. Yet his reading only acknowledges the woman photographed as something to be judged and evaluated as an image; it does not really emphasize the photographic ploy that Gregory uses to question the dominant expectation that women are supposed to 'flirt' with the camera. Gregory exaggerates the voyeurism of the (male) gaze in her focus on particular sexual features – lips and eyes – and through her close cropping of the frame. The photograph is the result of this renegotiation between the photographer, who knows these 'types', and herself, as a subject in front of the lens, who wants to interrogate their uncritical reproduction in the dominant culture.

Maxine Walker's 1995–97 *untitled colour sequence* is also considered by Hall in *Different*. This series mimics the form of the photo booth in front of a camera, in that

8 Verdi Yhooda, worksheets for *Photo Booth Classic* used for selecting strips to be used for *n.paradoxa* (marked 'n.p'). © Verdi Yhooda. Photo: Verdi Yhooda.



it is photographed in colour and presented in sequences of four, even though the photographs are actually made as studio portraits. Across the four images, Walker plays with different hairstyles, wigs, clothes, gestures, make-up and expressions. To Stuart Hall, her four personas were ‘challenging pre-conceived notions of black feminine identity’ which he characterized as: ‘the-young-working-girl-about-town; sober church sister; sophisticated raver; and “blonde-babe”’.¹⁵ Maybe it was too obvious to comment on, maybe he didn’t feel it was necessary to say, but it’s quite clear that he didn’t expand his historical, cultural analysis of this staging of femininities in terms of constructions of class/gender/race, social stereotypes of inner-city culture and/or recognizable social/historical ‘characters’ or stereotypes amongst contemporary Black women at work and at leisure, as visible in the UK media.

If Maxine Walker’s work is a performance, how are these ‘characterizations’ to be perceived as a challenge? Can this only be done if there is a ‘truth’ about Black femininities against which an acting out pushes back in order to question these representations? How do these images challenge or reinforce the limited or limiting identities placed upon contemporary Black women living in inner city conurbations in the UK? Are these images of Black women adopted by Walker because they are predominant or prevalent, or because they are absent and marginal? Hall alluded in very general terms to how identity contrasts with appearances and saw the purpose of this work as only visible by contrast with another untitled series in which the artist’s peeling of a face mask is read as a peeling of a second skin – a literal embodiment of not being able to escape Fanon’s ‘epidermal scheme’.¹⁶ The problem with this reading is that it does not consider Walker as an artist, only as a woman, and suggests instead there is a ‘true’ self which can be reached, underneath the fabrication. A counter-reading might be to see Maxine Walker’s self-image as the much more

9 Verdi Yhooda, *Photo Booth Classic*, ongoing (begun 1974), installed in *Now! Now! In more than one place* (organized by the Black Artists and Modernism project), Cookhouse and Triangle Space, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, October 2016. Photo: George Torode.



affirmative peeling away of dis/ease about a recognizable moulding of appearances to pre-set expectations, and an interrogation of whether it is ever possible to reveal an unmasked self.¹⁷

Reading works in this manner, as performances of self or stagings of identity politics, has become the standard model of how to talk about the many self-representations of contemporary women artists, especially in photography. Self-portraits are commonly read as either offering some insight into how 'the body' (without gender) is read, rather than 'whose body'; or as the projection of a 'future' and 'staged' self out to the world. Performativity theory, mediated through discussion of Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble* (1991) and her reading of Joan Riviere's theory of femininity as masquerade (1929), has been the alibi of choice in theoretical frameworks since the 1990s, providing obvious routes to explain works in terms of multiple staged identities or performance of a fractured/multiple/constructed 'self' produced through partial identifications with 'other' selves. Hall's two readings fall into this pattern. Rarely are the ploys of the artist discussed in relation to regimes of representation in visual culture or art history, because how the photographs are produced in relation to the scarcity or ubiquity of images is not examined, nor how the image gains its 'significations' from external sources. Many parts of the image – its use of colour as opposed to black and white, its scale or dimensions as an image, the printing processes under which it was made – go unremarked.

Such readings nevertheless rely on the 'truth' value of the photograph for what is staged in front of it, even though as the camera records, it still presents or re-mediate a fiction. As Marcia Pointon suggested in her book *Portrayal* (2013), the distinctions between self-portraits of the artist and portraiture as a genre have collapsed: largely because all portraits are now seen to function as 'mirror images' of the artist presenting themselves as a specular technology, morally, philosophically and materially.¹⁸ In photography, however, the relationship between the person behind the camera and the subject in front of it appears to be maintained only when we are examining how the 'truth' of the photograph's 'fiction' appears 'complete', fixed or automatically achieved, rather than skilfully unmasked in the image within the photo itself. This issue of how or whether we value the artist's skill or subjectivity as being absent or present cannot be resolved simply by focusing on the emotional impact of identification processes between viewer and image in the artwork: for example, if I consider the face in the image as a 'visage' or mask (rather than as a physical portrait) which looks back at me and presents me with an image of interchangeable versions of a displaced 'otherness' to myself.

The repetition, almost mantra-like, which is raised by this automatic line of enquiry about whether and how the subject's identity is perceived as 'fixed' – and this fixing of the photography as a moment in time caught in the frame – raises more precisely the question of temporality: something usually identified in the encounter between a 'past' in an artwork and a 'present' in the viewer. This contradiction between singular representations as 'fixed' or 'unfixing norms' is a displacement of the more interesting political questions about representation itself because it ignores how they circulate in economies or regimes of representation as 'the making present of something absent'.¹⁹ Identities are always in flux, moving and changing and, if demonstrating this movement were the only purpose of image-making or its analysis, the fetish of our culture upon certain images – their fixed symbolism or iconicity – would actually dissolve (a key feminist goal!), but cheap pornography and the overload of stereotypical images of naked bodies continue to be produced in the genres of 'the nude', for example. This is where 'performativity' as a concept is widely misunderstood because all identities are constantly being made and remade continuously 'every

moment' back into 'fixed' recognizable forms – even when it is not a question of wearing outlandish or fantastical clothing, make-up or hairstyles, but simply through a person's voice, manner, demeanour, behaviours and gestures and how they interact with other people around them. It is a process we are all engaged in every day in multiple situations. The camera's claim to capture one identity or seize a representation of that identity as a moment in time needs to be reconsidered beyond reading into it a simple construction/reconstruction of particular gender/race/class identities in representation.

Ernst van Alphen's book *Failed Images* (2018) draws attention to how details in the production of photographs, and alternative readings of the material properties of the photograph, might lead us to other productive ways of discussing photographic images.²⁰ Returning to Siegfried Kracauer's essays on photography (1927, 1951), van Alphen argues against Kracauer's four common-sense understandings of photography: (1) as a 'snap' of nature unmanipulated, (2) as stressing the fortuitous, (3) as appearing selective because it is cropped and (4) as isolating a temporal moment from a temporal continuity. The snap's 'realism' – read as 'truth' to nature – is an effect produced by the techniques of the camera; dismantling this, in van Alphen's view (after Vilhelm Flusser), is the project of most contemporary photography: 'in defiance of common sense, photographs are not mirrors but "projections that are programmed to make common sense appear mirror-like"'.²¹ Van Alphen's book points to features of photography which he regards as underplayed as a result – how the space outside the frame is indicated in the photo, how blurred and 'ghosted' images are produced and understood, how under- and over-exposed images are read, and how an archive is accumulated, presented or displayed. He does discuss 'staged' photography, in several senses: notably, how all photography is itself 'staged' by the decisions of the photographer to take the photo, even a 'snap'.²² Van Alphen reiterates the point that any 'veritable' likeness in a portrait to an actual person can only be known to the people who knew them in life, whereas most photographs circulate and are read without this first-hand knowledge and in 'translation', since readings of photographs are largely constructed by speculation.²³ This situation does not undermine either the impact of certain photographs nor answer how viewers may react to the ways in which subjects are depicted – from Barthes' 'punctum' in front of his mother's image after her death in *Camera Lucida* (1980), to sensing either alienation or identification in front of images of relatives taken before one was born.²⁴

So, in this essay, even though I know Verdi Yhooda as a person, it is not the 'truth value' of these photographs of her that interests me (their veracity), nor how this photographic series might work through any 'identification' with it as a viewer, nor its role as evidence of a very particular life to which I might attach some idea of exceptionalism: Jew, immigrant, woman, artist. How the photographs might convince us of their 'truth value', if this were all that were at stake, might involve more than simply paying attention to their content. It would involve thinking about the series in relation to the particular type of the subject's absence or presence in regimes of representation, alongside more literally how the photograph or the series renders them. Such an attempt to combine these two ideas neither returns us to a postmodern view of all meaning determined by context, nor to a traditional role where photography is seen to have an inherent nature or essence. To focus on questions of reflexivity on the conditions of photography or self-reflection on the medium might seem to return us to modernist readings of medium specificity, against which van Alphen cites Greenberg's disdain for photography as a second-order practice, but it means arguing instead for the 'multiple logics' of photography today.

With reference to Hal Foster's discussion of Rosalind Krauss, van Alphen draws attention to how photography now operates in an expanded field, not a deconstructed/reconstructed one, 'no longer defined in one code'.²⁵ In the same vein, he also questions Flusser's distinction, in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983), between technical images (post-digital, CGI reals/hyper-reals) and traditional images (of depiction), nevertheless retaining his idea of attention to the workings of these codes in any project. Van Alphen emphasizes how the construction of series or archives plays a central role in contemporary photographic works, not for what they show within each image, but in terms of how a framing device, a programme or project, registers as the basis for the work. The editing of Verdi Yahooda's series on the pages of *n.paradoxa* highlighted this through the selection of some images from the archive as a whole and the use of scans of the dates written on the back as captions. As van Alphen stresses, the archive shifts reading away from 'pictorial testimonies or the existence of a recorded fact' and produces the photograph as an archival object, where the motif or category is foregrounded over the referent.²⁶ He continues: 'This archival principle provides an order to images that when seen individually, are too ordinary or arbitrary to understand or appreciate'.²⁷ This feature is evident in how books or installations provide arrangements of series and grids of meaning in contemporary art which emphasize 'discontinuous moments', but this legibility as a presence is often the result of a negative 'absence which constitutes the series' as a series – and, in van Alphen's words, creates 'the greatest paradox of photography'.²⁸ This draws attention to how, in Verdi Yahooda's work, it is the repetition of the action of making the photographs at intervals and the production of the series overall which is central to the work. The real absence is in the paradox that the series does not tell us the 'truth' of the subject.

In another recent book exploring the relationship between the document and the artwork in post-conceptual art, Sophie Berrebi demonstrates how contemporary art has consistently questioned the relationship between photographic evidence and the role of art. She focuses on Walter Benjamin's distinction between document and art, arguing that the practices of contemporary artists from Zoe Leonard to Jean-Luc Molène have challenged his categories of 'masterpiece versus instruction, form versus content, an energy centre rather than a source of analysis, but also, subversion against tradition'.²⁹ This represents another line of argument from Boris Groys's discussion of the importance of the document in conceptual art and contemporary art in general.³⁰ Citing John Tagg's work on the development of identification photographs by the state as the extension of Foucault's thesis on apparatuses of state control to which the subject submits, she develops the question of what art can do to disrupt or question the role of these documents as evidence.³¹

Similarly, Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), that retraces physicist Niels Bohr's approach to scientific observation and the problems of mechanical devices (including cameras) to document or measure experimental interventions, suggests ways of comparing modes of representationalism to questions of performativity in order to consider further their intra-actions. Barad's analysis of how scientists through subject-object relations attempt to isolate atoms in experiments to determine their motion in waves or as particles may help us to reconsider this question, especially the idea of refraction. Her critique also suggests that the performative is not an alternative to social construction based on representationalism.³² Barad's book may seem a surprising reference for art history but she shows how quantum physics problematizes the relationship between matter and meaning as dislodging the 'taken for granted object-nature of things', particularly the properties of objects/individuals, so the parallelism in this debate is worth pursuing, especially for those of us who are interested in what

a materialist feminist account might look like. Barad makes use of Donna Haraway's critique of reflection, specifically that representations reflect reality, to problematize relations between discourse and the world, observation and comprehension and opts for 'diffraction' and 'intra-action' to explain her theory. Haraway's argument is that reflection reinforces mirroring and sameness, and Barad advocates seeking 'a way to figure "difference" as a "critical difference within", and not as special taxonomic marks grounding difference as apartheid'. For Barad, Haraway's concept of diffraction becomes more than a metaphor for indirect vision/deflected light beams; it forms 'patterns of difference that make a difference' that are 'fundamental constituents that make up the world'.³³ Diffraction presents a means to discuss complex concepts of entanglement via intra-action (to rethink causality in the production of their 'effects', not simply through simple interactions) and so, she expands the concept of diffraction by using the metaphor of waves, which have properties of both matter and movement.³⁴ The ambition of this theoretical approach is to avoid in advance the presumption of well-worn sets of binaries (black/white, nature/culture, masculine/feminine, etc.) and to look instead at 'patterns and reverberations' which would enable a Foucauldian genealogical analysis of how boundaries are produced, highlighting along the way how exclusions matter and how differences are produced. An approach using diffraction would emphasize intra-actions away from essentialist identity politics, in the manner Hall (cited above) envisaged.

Thinking about *Photo Booth Classic* in terms of comparisons to different strategies in contemporary art at different moments, perhaps some of these other readings or possibilities identify more precisely what the work does in relation to other kinds of entanglements in art history. Verdi Yahooda began the process of taking the photographs when she first cut her long hair short to create a new self-image in April 1974, whilst a student at Goldsmiths. The *Sammlung Verbund* collection of feminist avant-garde work in Vienna has provided an accessible, Euro-American picture of performance-to-camera photographic sequences by the many feminist artists in the late 1960s and 1970s whose self-picturing was intended as an act of resistance to dominant tropes or social expectations of femininity.³⁵ Cindy Sherman's early work, for example, gains a different reading in this collection as a development of other earlier feminist and conceptual art practices of self-representation by Suzy Lake, Linda Christanell, Geta Bratescu, Athena Tacha or Alexis Hunter. It was the critical bite of these transformations of self and the fracturing of women's roles which marked Sherman's early work as distinctive at the time, and since. Acting out in front of the camera, however, does not in itself provide any form of challenge or critique of expectations or social/cultural mores, even as 'drag', 'queer' or a 'masquerade' of performed identities.

The many playful performances of femininities from the 1970s require that a more subtle theory of representationalism be developed than simply corralling all images of women by women into proof of a feminism that attempts to unpick dominant truths circulating in media image-types about 'Woman'. Questioning the truth value of documentary realism's or popular cultures' claims to represent universal truths is a key component of Martha Rosler's production of photographic series and her writing, not just in juxtaposition of image and text in *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974–75) but also in *Body Beautiful, or Beauty Knows No Pain* (1966–72) through collage.³⁶ The representation of a self through the supposedly objective recording of photography has been an exploration of social norms and expectations as well as myths about 'Woman' and is a dominant theme in feminist literature on the visual arts and in many artworks. Focusing on 'series' in photography that document actions or a 'self' in different decades suggests other reference points for the work of Verdi Yahooda.

Although not in the Sammlung Verbund collection, Eleanor Antin's work *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) deliberately unmasks the pursuit of the perfect body as a sculptural object, underpinned by apparently scientific and 'objective' measurements of size and weight. During the course of the work Antin photographed herself standing naked in the same four poses every morning between July and August, whilst reducing her food intake over a six-week period. The objectivity of her weight loss in scientific terms is considered alongside the concept of self-sculpting towards an ideal: an intra-action within the artwork mediating several realities at once. Athena Tacha's work *36 Years of Ageing* (1972–2008), presented as a wall-piece in 2008, similarly uses multiple photos of the artist's face and naked standing body, seen both from the front and in profile, taken over thirty-six years.³⁷

So, how should one read Yhooda in these contexts? Cutting her hair was a declaration of her new identity as an artist and a young woman in 1970s London. At the time Yhooda's work could be regarded as an anti-fashion statement, a transformation or change in identity against the grain (as the then fashion amongst young people was for long hair). For many women, cutting off their childhood/teenage long hair is widely recognized as a sign of taking control over one's appearance, not simply a form of fashion-styling but a clear statement of independence in the face of limited and gendered expectations of young women's future. Repeating the process of documenting her appearance at monthly intervals added other layers as the series started to accumulate, beyond this first marker of independence. However, as Yhooda explains, it was not knowledge of other feminist art from the 1970s which inspired her project, since she was not even aware of such work, but like these artists she too was considering how photography could document everyday processes in conceptual art and what that might reveal.³⁸ Perhaps documenting actions rather than ideas of performance describes her starting points better.

By the 1980s other conceptual photographic series may have seemed more obvious points of comparison for her process-based works. One such example might be Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performance: 'Taking the Picture'* (1980–81), a one-year performance work produced in collaboration with Linda Montano. As an undocumented immigrant in the USA from 1974 until 1988, Hsieh's 1980s series of performance works were an exploration of identity change over time performed under different external conditions. In collaboration or alone, he recorded human actions and intra-actions as documentation to capture 'life' or physical presence at regular intervals, collapsing the distinctions between art and life, a key avant-gardist goal. Other comparisons of artists who used photo booth self-portraits in the 1980s might include Susan Hiller and Liz Rideal. In her *Midnight* series Hiller used photographs produced at midnight in different photo booths, enlarged them and then drew and painted across the results. In *Identity* (1985) Rideal used many photo booth images but with overlaid c-prints she reworked them into large collages, emphasizing the patterns of dark to light.³⁹ Yet not all of Rideal's images are self-portraits. The photo booth analogue portrait became the literal ground for the work. Verdi Yhooda, by contrast, does not draw or paint across her photographs. They are not the starting point for a further process; the original photo-strip is the work.

If Yhooda's work had been shown in the early 2000s it might have drawn more comparisons with methods and ideas pursued in other contemporary photographic projects that use facial portraits and photo booth images even though she does not duplicate other methods or approaches. Esther Ferrer's *Book of Heads: Self-portrait in Time* (2004) is a photo-work where the artist combines past and present images of herself in one portrait, in a multiple series where the resulting images are reproduced as large

black-and-white prints. Anne Deleporte's *I.D. Stack # 6* (1992) piles up different self-portraits and completes the 'stack' with a blacked-out image, positioned over the face. The failure of the final image to record or develop points to the very absence of identity in these 'identity' portraits – a blankness accompanying the illusion of the portrait's assumption of presentness. A similar poignancy can be found in Lorna Simpson's use of found images of photographic portraits of African Americans in her wall installation *Photo-booth* (2008, Tate, London), where the faces are juxtaposed with small frames of blackness, drawn by the artist. Again, the void or absence marks the constitution of the series itself, paralleling the absence of diversity among histories and representations of Black American lives in American culture. In the digital representations of Tomoko Sawada, particularly *ID400* (2004), the artist re-morphs her face in every image. Sawada's work plays with both difference and sameness; compressing all potential identities into one or projecting a single identity onto multiple ones as they also mimic stereotyped representations of the 'young Japanese girl'. *ID400* (2004) is an extensive photo-series, in which Sawada's face morphs into and assumes many different kinds of identities, in class or team 'group portraits'. Other works explore the photo booth picture as ID, but all Sawada's mutations into many other selves make use of dominant genres of photography which regularly capture young people's cultural identity. A reading of these images would not be complete without pursuing how these dominant forms of young women's portraiture circulate in Japanese culture to 'fashion' identities, secure friendships, foster representations of group belonging and at the same time problematize individuality, even as it is cultivated through very small changes in hairstyle, dress and photographic expression. These subtleties are even more nuanced in Sawada's *Facial Signature* series (shown in the 2010s), where single portraits are arranged in grids; again, the presence of multiple personalities produced by the same artist questions any concept of truth of a singular self evident in an appearance across the photographs.

Throughout this essay I have pointed to how questions of the real and the fictional are produced in the evidential truth of a photograph and in what we think we observe as a result of the discursive frameworks we deploy in order to question what is documented. I also wanted to point to how concepts of self are formed in partial identifications across race, class, sex and ethnicity not just in the subject but also in the viewer. Verdi Yahooda's *Photo Booth Classic* series registers this problematic and emphasizes, via her regular, repeated actions in making the images, how documents in the archive do not refer only to the referent but also draw attention to the process. The unique features of Yahooda's process of documenting art and life draw attention, ultimately, to the uniqueness of *Photo Booth Classic* as a very singular work of art produced over time.

Notes

- The date 1925 is when Anatol Josepho launched his Photomaton an automated photobooth, in his Broadway studio, New York; see Naikki Goranin, *American Photobooth*, New York, 2008. Marianne Kleivan, *Concerning the Photobooth*, Odense, Museet for Fotokunst, 14 October 2000–7 January 2001, gives 1889 as the start of her history of photo booth, with the French patent by Theophile Ernest Enjalbert. The year 1888 is the date of another US patent for an automated photo machine by William Pope and Edward Poole of Baltimore, <http://www.stickybacks.uk/booths.asp>.
- A slogan printed on one of the takeaway posters from Alfredo Jaar's solo exhibition at Kiasma, Helsinki, 11 April 2014–7 September 2014.
- Quoted on Fran Cottell's website, <http://www.francottell.com/artwork/said>, accessed 5 September 2018.
- n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*, 17, January 2006, 69–71.
- Discussion between author and artist in September 2018.
- Books of collections of other people's photo booth images include: Goranin, *American Photobooth*; Babette Hines, *Photobooth*, Princeton, 2002; Raynal Pellicer, *Photomaton*, Paris, c. 2011; and Günter Karl Bose, *Photomaton Frauen Männer Kinder 1928–1945*, exh. cat., Institut für Buchkunst, Leipzig, 2011.
- Gillian Wearing's 2003 series of photo booth images reconstructs an image of herself as a teenager; Susan Hiller's *Midnight* portrait series (1982–89) is based on photo booth images taken of herself at midnight,

- painted and written over. Both these works were shown in *Behind the Curtain: The Aesthetics of the Photo Booth*, exh., Musée de L'Élysée, Lausanne, 2012, which toured to Brussels and Kunst Haus, Vienna. Warhol's photo booth images taken between 1963 and 1966 and Jared Bark's taken between 1969 and 1976 are other well-known examples of artists using photo booths.
- 8 Verdi Yahooda, 'Photo Booth Classic', *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*, 17, January 2006, 69.
 - 9 Stuart Hall, 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three "Moments" in Post-War History', *History Workshop Journal*, 61, Spring 2006, 3. The comments on his framing of the Black diaspora in the next few paragraphs relate to this essay.
 - 10 See artist's website: <http://www.verdi-yahooda.co.uk/> e.g. the photo-series '...the rest is shifting sands' which explores migrants from Aden to Britain and Israel, 1947–67.
 - 11 Stuart Hall, *Different*, London, 2001, 35.
 - 12 Rubies and Rebels: *Jewish Female Identity in Contemporary British Art*, touring exhibition and catalogue, Barbican, London, Concourse Gallery, 8 October–10 November 1996.
 - 13 Hall, *Different*, 34.
 - 14 Hall, *Different*, 57.
 - 15 Hall, *Different*, 56.
 - 16 Hall, *Different*, 57.
 - 17 See discussion of Maxine Walker's *Black Beauty* series, 1991, in Elizabeth Robles, 'Maxine Walker: Imaging the Homeplace', *Oxford Art Journal*, 40: 1, March 2017, 169–183, which refers back to Sealy and Hall's comments in *Different* regarding a non-essential Black female subject.
 - 18 Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity*, London, 2013, 184 and 191.
 - 19 This definition is from political theorist Hanna Pitkin's *The Concept of Representation*, Oakland, CA, 1967, in which she discussed the dimensions of representation in terms of formal, descriptive, symbolic and substantive forms.
 - 20 Ernst van Alphen, *Failed Images: Photography and Its Counter-Practices*, Amsterdam, 2018.
 - 21 Van Alphen, *Failed Images*, 45.
 - 22 He draws attention to the question of 'artifice' in staging a scene to be photographed by returning attention to the nineteenth-century 'illustrationist' and pictorialist photographers who sought, like painters, to create narrative photographs which told stories, allegories or recreated mythic scenes. This has been the dominant method adopted by large-scale colour contemporary photography in the art world.
 - 23 Shirley MacWilliam's close reading of Frances Hegarty's *Auto-Portrait* (1999) and Abigail Davies's *Instant Exposure* (1999) makes the same point about the incidental quality of self-portraiture in women's performances, because it is necessary to attend to how these images are produced; Shirley MacWilliam, 'A Snapshot of Performance and Video Editing, Punctuation and Self-image in Auto Portrait and Instant Exposure', *n.paradoxa*, 5, January 2000, 27–34.
 - 24 See also the opening section of Sophie Berrebi's *The Shape of Evidence*, Amsterdam, 2014, 7–11; or the use of many anthropological/found photos of African Americans in Carrie Mae Weems's works, where the systematic documentation of social/cultural types for Europeans to classify and objectify are highlighted.
 - 25 Hal Foster's essay 'Re: Post', quoted in Van Alphen, *Failed Images*, 32.
 - 26 Van Alphen, *Failed Images*, 265.
 - 27 Van Alphen, *Failed Images*, 267.
 - 28 Van Alphen, *Failed Images*, 267.
 - 29 Berrebi, *The Shape of Evidence*, 23.
 - 30 Boris Groys, 'Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation', in Boris Groys, *Art/Power*, Cambridge, MA, 2008, 53–66.
 - 31 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, London, 1988.
 - 32 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, North Carolina, 2007, 56. Barad states, 'Agential realism offers the following elaboration of Hacking's critique of representationalism: experimenting and theorizing are dynamic practice that play a constitutive role in the production of objects and subjects and matter and meaning.'
 - 33 Donna Haraway, quoted in Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 72.
 - 34 See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 87–92, where the critique of reflection is linked to a critique of representationalism and the alternative model of diffraction is laid out.
 - 35 Gabriele Schor, *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s: The Sammlung Verbund Collection*, Vienna, Munich, London, New York, 2016; see sections in the introduction, 58–68.
 - 36 See Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001*, Cambridge, MA, 2004, for its critique of naturalism in relation to truth.
 - 37 Athena Tacha, *36 Years of Ageing (1972–2008)*, photograph, nine panels, 216 black-and-white digitized photos, was shown in 2008 at Eclipse Gallery, Arlington and in her major retrospective in 2010 at State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece, where it is now part of their collection. An earlier version also exists, *Seventeen Years of Ageing (1972–88)*, <http://www2.oberlin.edu/faculty/atacha/Catalogue>, accessed September 2018. She also published handmade booklets of notes on ageing, as she aged from thirty-five to sixty-five. In 1972 she made a poster, *Expressions 1*, of her face and self-published *Heredity I and II (1970–71)*. She was included in *C. 7,500* (organized by Lucy Lippard), which toured to London in 1973.
 - 38 Conversation with the artist, September 2018. She did not see the Lucy Lippard's exhibition *C. 7,500*, which featured twenty-six women working in conceptual art, including Tacha and Antin, when it toured to London in 1973. Lippard later wrote: 'In this branch [of conceptual art/dematerialized art] we were obsessed with time and space, body and mapping, perception, measurements, definitions, the literal and the quotidian, and with enigmatic, tedious activities that appeared simply to fill space and time, the kind of unexceptional lived experience that might not be available to those not living it.' Lucy Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers', *Tate Papers*, 12, 2009, <https://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7268>, accessed September 2018.
 - 39 Liz Rideal's website describes these analogue works as follows: 'Collages of multiple photo booth originals were mounted onto rigid museum board using Lascaux acrylic adhesive 360 HV which is light fast, elastic and age resistant. Edited photographic enlargements were made by re-photographing the originals onto 10 × 8 in stock using a 350 mm flat plane lens, these c-print enlargements were in editions of three, measuring, 152.5 × 102 cm (60 × 40 in).' <http://lizrideal.com/photobooth-archive/introduction/>, accessed September 2018.