Show Me Yours

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Show Me Yours

Britland Tracy
B.A., University of Washington, 2012

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
Interdisciplinary Media Arts Practices
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“To me, the truth is about performance – how we perform, how we project, and the truth can be staged, or it can be found.”

- Larry Sultan
This thesis, entitled: *Show Me Yours*
written by Britland Tracy
has been approved for the Department of Art and Art History

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The final copy has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet the acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
For every human being who has ever been told to go inside, and not talk.
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A Methodology
My artistic practice considers the nuances of human connection and discord. An ongoing interest in the contours of intimate spaces and relationships informs my use of photography, which often engages the medium’s complex relationships with text, performance, voyeurism, and absence to construct slippery narratives that allow for these intricacies of interaction to unfold and complicate themselves. Whether they appear within the fictional subplot of a movie or television show, the tenuous space between two dancers’ bodies, the meticulously documented archives of abandoned family slides, or the bedrooms and journals of men I do not know, the images they produce ultimately ask: What can we know about a person or an experience from looking at what it leaves behind? How does the presence of one thing negotiate and relate to the absence of another? And how can we learn to reconcile the fictions and frictions that emerge when we share our existence with others?
Show Me Yours
Over the course of a year, twelve men whom I do not know have granted me permission to spend an hour photographing their bedrooms and the objects and personal writings I find within them. What began as an experiment with a few acquaintances led me to broaden my scope of willing participants via online dating sites, eventually evolving into organically approaching strangers upon chance encounters. Utilizing a degree of sanctioned voyeurism, my camera becomes a mediator as I explore these charged spaces, fully aware that they have each been ‘curated’ by their owners before my arrival. I combine these individuals’ desire to be seen with my own curiosities as I search for poetic objects, snapshots, crumpled bed sheets, nooks and crannies and window views, and most significantly, revealing scraps of writing - uncanny in their banality, which I photograph as artifacts, or pieces of forensic evidence, thus rendering these findings as evocative indications of interiority in the absence of these men.

My interest in the diary, the personal journal, and the handwritten note as historically gendered objects stems from the public/private dichotomy that has for centuries delegated emotional self-disclosure to the realm of private, feminine, and therefore ‘inferior’, discourse, thereby silencing its presence and significance in the public sphere. In documenting and placing these acutely personal writings in conversation with the rooms and objects, I aim to reveal them as unlikely containers of a certain strain of masculine vulnerability, whose suppression is still perpetuated by hetero-normative expectations of gender role performance in our current social climate.

The role of desire as a gateway to this sort of access is palpable, but there is something that reaches beyond that of fleeting attraction. “Will I remain anonymous?” these men ask, shortly before or after, “Did you find anything worth showing?” My permission to invade, to capture, to ‘exploit’ is predicated on both their desire to be known as individuals and their emotional distance from me as the voyeur – a testament to the nature of human connection and the ultimate collapse of that which is private and public, distant and intimate, fact and fiction.
Artistic Influences
Of the many creatives who have influenced me, a selection of artists have had an especially prominent impact on my thesis work, *Show Me Yours*, in both concept and process. Some commonalities between their practices include:

- Combinations of images and text that complement, rather than illustrate, each other
- Translation of personal experiences into collective explorations
- Attention placed on editing as an essential role in the photographic process
- Conflation of fact and fiction through deep engagement with photography

Sophie Calle has established a practice that notoriously stems from her own personal experiences and expands outward into wide-ranging interactions with others. I am particularly drawn to her series *True Stories*, wherein she combines images that she has captured from her daily rituals and memories with short anecdotes whose accuracy is left purposely indefinite. The tenuous relationship that emerges between fact and fiction rely on the ambiguity that appears in both text and image – an attribute that threads through Calle’s many bodies of work.

Sophie Calle, installation of *True Stories*, Arndt & Partner Gallery, Berlin, 2004
Her project *The Hotel* (1983) has directly impacted my approach to voyeurism and the trace. In this project, she took a job as a chambermaid in a hotel in Venice, which provided her with access to various visitors’ private possessions in these temporary spaces of respite and transition. Calle documented her observations in detailed writings and photographs of possessions, forming portraits void of people based on her own projections onto artifacts of lives ultimately unknown to her.

The use of constraints, which often defines Calle’s practice, also informs the performative photographic series *Stranger* by Shizuka Yokomizo.

In creating this work, the artist placed a note outside of dozens of strangers’ front doors, asking them to open their blinds and stand facing a certain window in a specific room in their homes (usually the living room) at a specific time during the evening, if they were willing to allow her to photograph them. Nineteen portraits resulted through this process, which relied on the presence and participation of the subjects as much as the artist behind the camera. I am particularly drawn to the way in which Yokomizo gained access to these spaces through permission while maintaining a sense of vulnerability and voyeurism in her images.
Larry Sultan’s work coaxes vulnerability out of his subjects and complicates truths in their stories through his emotional proximity to them. In his 1992 photo-book and subsequent exhibition Pictures from Home, Sultan combines portraits he took of his aging parents over a period of ten years – some staged, some candid – with home movie film stills from his childhood, found photographs from his parents’ family albums, and an abundance of conversational, ruminative text in both his and his parents’ voices, alternating perspectives like different camera angles onto the same scene. Sultan allows for his own self-reflections to mingle with images of his parents, as evidenced in this particularly poignant passage comparing himself with his father that he includes in the book:

“I’m married and have two kids, own a house, shop in the malls, read the business section of the

Larry Sultan, excerpt from Pictures from Home, 1992
newspaper, take my shirts to the laundry, catch myself continually calculating my savings, and worry about dying from various terminal illnesses. Was it that different when he was forty-four? Did he feel the same intensity of doubt and confusion as I do? Was he haunted by all of the things he was unable to be? Would he have been willing to trade hours of his day to collect fleeting sensations of his childhood? Did he suck in his stomach every time he passed by a mirror?” (Sultan, 70)

Whereas the text that appears in both Sultan’s and Calle’s work is generated by the maker in some form – either through the artist’s own observations, or a conversation that the artist initiates – the written words which help drive the photographic narrative in Alec Soth’s Niagara are entirely found. While making photographs for this project, Soth collected a series of love letters from his portrait subjects – all strangers met through chance encounters – and interspersed them throughout his photo book and exhibition. As the narrative he has constructed through associative images unfolds, the love letters devolve from saccharine professions of affection, to ambivalent pleas for reconciliation, to hateful, violent lashes of anguish. These letters are less about their individual authors than they are about the overall mood and message that Soth is constructing. The way he strips these notes from their specific contexts and intersperses them with photographs to create new associations and drive a narrative about human passions, frailties, love, and death has deeply influenced my own way of working with found notes and journals.
Jason Fulford plays with photographic sequencing and text in ways that are simultaneously oblique and specific while attempting to mirror human perception and the innate compulsion to construct meaning through spatial, aesthetic, and thematic connections. He intentionally leaves room for interpretation and ambiguity, challenging the viewer to make connections, to project their own meanings onto the work, and return to the pages of his photo-books, or to the walls of his exhibitions, time and again to construct new associations with each visit. His most recent project, *Contains 3 Books*, is a three-part photo-book collection that explores the concept of ‘madness’, and combines images with fragments of text – some from Fulford’s own ruminations, others stripped from books and essays that has informed his image-making at specific moments in time – to drive a narrative that never quite resolves itself, and that perhaps asks more questions than it answers. The ‘prefatory note’ in the first of these three books reads: “I think that any book or picture or composition of any sort, once out into the world, so to say, produces a different effect on each person who seriously tries to follow it. I certainly do not think that the author of it has any monopoly in its interpretation.” (Fulford, v)

This type of work is difficult in its open-endedness, a quality that Fulford strives to preserve in his projects. He is not interested in presenting the viewer with content that has already been partially digested for ease of consumption; he invites the viewer to play with and
struggle for meaning in the same way that he does while making the work. I strive to create a similar effect while editing my images for the wall.

The tensions between narrative and ambiguity through sequencing, size, and spatial relationships are particularly apparent in Wolfgang Tillman’s photographic installations, which are often more meaningful and complex than the individual images themselves. I am particularly interested in the way that he challenges the viewers’ bodies in a space, forcing them to stand back, come close, crouch down, look up, conjure individual connections between images, and reflect on the nature of photography as a medium. Tillman’s work directly influenced my wall installation for Show Me Yours, which I developed in response to my own physical process of exploring and photographing my subjects’ bedrooms. Rather than engaging with Tillman’s attention to and subversion of the photographic medium – what constitutes it, its dissemination, and conventions in display – I am interested in the photograph’s role in constructing a fragmented narrative, and the way that those fragments, resisting or colliding with one another, static in space and time on the wall, invite the viewer to look, and bend, and strain, and snoop, and project.

Wolfgang Tillmans, installation of View from Above, Andrea Rosen Gallery, 2003
Explorations in Photography
I often ask myself, and am often asked by others, why I have continued to choose photography as a medium for the various projects I have produced in recent years. In his essay “Photography’s Expanded Field”, contemporary art historian and critic George Baker speaks to the internal crisis that photography seems to be perpetually facing in this post-modern, post-conceptual era: “Critical consensus would have it that the problem today is not that just about anything image-based can now be considered photographic, but rather that photography itself has been foreclosed, cashiered, abandoned – outmoded technologically and displaced aesthetically... And even the most traditional of a younger generation of contemporary photographers cannot now resist the impulse to deal the concerns of other mediums into their practice, less utilizing photography to recode other practices than allowing the photograph to be recoded in turn…” (Baker, 122-3). He fashions his treatise on the current state of photography – in the midst of digital imagery, advanced editing software, large cinematically staged images by artists such as Jeff Wall and Gregory Crewdson, and a new crop of artists moving into multi-media practices to engage with time, space, and kinetics in ways that still photography simply cannot manage, in a similar manner as Rosalind Krauss’s seminal “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” from 1979. Baker points out the ways in which photography has been explored by postmodern critics inasmuch as it has held a role in documenting other mediums that have expanded over the years, but never assessed in its own right. The rationale for my continued use of the photographic medium, one that I have embodied but not systematically defended, is simply: I use photography because it is the material and visual language through which I can develop the most compelling questions. I think with my eyes, not my hands. Space is not a set quantity in the way I visually navigate the world, and time is something that I prefer to construct through moments of stillness. The ways I perceive my own existence and that of others, and the ways I think about looking and making, all revolve around the use of the camera, or the photographic image. In an attempt to concretize this innate response, I return to photography’s deeply rooted ties with performance, voyeurism, the trace, and narrative with a specific attention to how they relate to my thesis work.
Performance

The roots of photography’s relationship to performance “lie in the conceptual art of the mid-1960s and 1970s, when photography became central to the wider dissemination and communication of artists’ performances and other temporary works of art…Conceptual art used photography as a means of conveying ephemeral artistic ideas or actions, standing in for the art object in the gallery or on the pages of artists’ books or magazines. This versatility of photography’s status as both document and evidence of art had an intellectual vitality and ambiguity that has been well used in contemporary art photography. Just as this form of photograph subverted conventional standards of what was considered to be an artistic act, it also demonstrated a more pedestrian mode of art-making. Art was revealed to be a process of delegation to ordinary and everyday objects, and photography became the tool by which to circumvent the need to create a ‘good’ picture.” (Cotton, 21-22) This relationship to performance instills the photograph with ambiguity, positioning it as both document of an act \textit{and} art object. Performance plays an essential role in \textit{Show Me Yours}, in both process and documentation – from propositioning my subjects, to searching through their spaces, to the act of photographing itself. As a result, the images themselves are simultaneously a performance and documentary ‘evidence’ of an external gesture. They convey what these men were willing to passively reveal (or possibly stage) in addition to what I was willing to frame through my own subjectivity and present to the viewer, calling attention to the collision of desires between myself and my subject(s). Like Sophie Calle, I am interested in the sort of performative photography that “recontextualizes the documentary photograph as an art object…by maintaining the links of ‘recording’ to representation and by maintaining the links between representational fiction and documentary ‘evidence’”, and thereby inserting an element of fiction “in relation to conceptual art’s history.” (Hand, 472)

Voyeurism, Projection, and the Other

Photography is an inherently objectifying medium, and therefore has a complicated relationship with voyeurism. In his essay “Do Not Look at Y/Our Own Peril: Voyeurism as Ethical Necessity, or To See as a Child Again”, Mark Ledbetter defends and advocates for what he calls the “ethical integrity of voyeurism” (Ledbetter, 3), which relies on “engaged looking,
vulnerable seeing” (4), and a sort of complicity between the see-er and the seen. In seeking out my subjects for Show Me Yours, and invading and documenting their spaces, I became very aware of my own presence in the process. The request for access and my own unspoken desire to look felt incredibly uncomfortable. Stumbling across a personal note or diary entry felt akin to standing next to a friend making a terrible joke, or watching a loved one experience rejection. Witnessing something vulnerable in another person feels vulnerable, as does purposely seeking out someone’s private space with the hope of finding and capturing that vulnerable thing, whatever it might be. Unlike Sophie Calle, my access to these men's bedrooms relies on their explicit permission rather than brazen intrusion, implicating them in a type of voyeuristic activity that Ledbetter compares to theatrical performance, whose nature is “holistic: everyone and everything is stage, performers, and audience…the same relationship between the subject and the object of the gaze.” (8) This is the type of voyeurism that holds my interest; not one that seeks to exploit the ‘Other’, but one that plays with power dynamics on both sides of the gaze, bringing to the surface the innate desire that we all have as humans to see and be seen.

In an anecdotal essay introducing the portraits by photographer Robert Bergman, Toni Morrison ruminates on our relationships to strangers, and how we react upon encountering the ‘other,’ concluding that, “…there are no strangers. There are only versions of ourselves, many of which we have not embraced, most of which we wish to protect ourselves from. For the stranger is not foreign, she is random, not alien but remembered, and it is the randomness of the encounter with our already known – although unacknowledged – selves that summons a ripple of alarm. That makes us reject the figure and the emotions it provokes – especially when these emotions are profound. It is also what makes us want to own, govern, administrate the Other. To romance her, if we can, back into our own mirrors.” (Morrison, 70) This ‘romancing’ of a stranger ‘back into our own mirrors’ is in itself a type of performance, and reinforces the extent to which we implicate ourselves when we choose to look at and objectify another person. The way we see an ‘other’ person perhaps tells us more about ourselves than it does about the person who is being seen.

The permission that my subjects provide creates a circle of desire. In allowing me to enter into their bedrooms, search through their belongings, and document what I find, they are ultimately saying, “I want to watch you watching me, and I want you to show me what you find.”
I am interested in a type of empathic voyeurism that acknowledges our position as visual beings with curiosity and compassion toward others. “Certainly to look, in private or public, has the potential of violation. But to look and see empathetically is in turn to be violated, to be vulnerable, and violation, if not indictment? culpability? empathy?, is at the heart of the ethical moment.” (Ledbetter, 8)

**Forensic Aesthetic, Absence, and the Trace**

Photography's relationship to absence, and the way that absence is articulated by the representation of what is present in a still image, has been acknowledged and discussed at length throughout the history of photographic discourse. Susan Sontag describes the photograph as “both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence. Like a wood fire in a room, photographs—especially those of people, of distant landscapes and faraway cities, of the vanished past—are incitements to reverie. The sense of the unattainable that can be evoked by photographs feeds directly into the erotic feelings of those for whom desirability is enhanced by distance.” (Sontag, 16) The photographs in *Show Me Yours* quite literally capture absence as they explore intimacy through distance. They come together to create 'portraits' that are void of people, comprised instead of interiors, objects, and writings – i.e., traces of the existence of men who are strangers to me. Ralph Rugoff calls these “enigmatic traces” in *Scene of the Crime*; fragments, not unlike evidence from a crime scene, which act as allusions to “violence and melodrama while draining it of its significance, reducing its semantic charge to the bare minimum…It gives us the empty room, the broken pane of glass, the isolated object, the pile of debris…We begin to sense an eerie parallelism between conceptual art and forensic photography, in the way that each of them involves providing a neutral documentary record…In this way the foundation was laid for a new kind of aestheticism, one that required a new kind of connoisseurship – an acute sensitivity to the trite, the futile, the banal, and the insignificant. This new aestheticism is one of atmosphere and of detail.” (Rugoff, 32)

This forensic aesthetic speaks not only to the content of my work (or the absence of people), but to the style in which that content is captured. I implement a clinical approach to the bedrooms, photographing these interiors with an aesthetic that is mostly void of affect or sentiment, whose poetics emerge from the uncanny quality of the objects themselves, floating in
a banality stripped of both context and owner. As Rugoff points out, “This is one of the virtues of the forensic approach: it inevitably returns us to the larger scene and allows a reading in which formal and social issues are not at odds but can be considered compatible clues.” (90) These ‘traces’ of men’s bedrooms do indeed conflate form and content. They serve as the raw material for my own authorship in editing, thereby relinquishing their original context for a fictional one, and calling as much attention to their surface qualities as to their metaphorical and conceptual underpinnings.

**Narrative**

A still photograph does not initially seem to lend itself to narrative. It is conspicuously free of movement, time, dialogue, and dynamic spatial relationships. And yet, what happens when two or more of those still images appear in sequence with each other, or a photograph is paired with a caption that enhances, rather than illustrates, its pictorial counterpart? What happens when we see a staged ‘tableau’ in which several characters are frozen in their interactions? We psychologically intervene, we project, and we make meaning where there is a void.

George Baker recognizes this contradiction between what he terms “narrative” and “stasis”, writing: “…the frozen fullness of the photographic image, its devotion to petrification or stasis, has seemed for so many to characterize the medium as a whole. And yet, by the moment of the early twentieth century, it had become impossible not to consider all the ways in which the social usage of photography – its submission to linguistic captioning, its archival compilations, its referential grip on real conditions of history and everyday life, its aesthetic organization into sequence and series – thrust the photographic signifier into motion, engaging it with the communicative functions of narrative diegesis, the unfolding of an unavoidable discursivity.” (Baker, 125-6) This unavoidable narrative quality that photography seems to simultaneously accept and deny is an essential component to the way I conceived of the wall installation for *Show Me Yours*. Each image is static, yet combined with another complementary image, or with scraps of text that hint at a story or a memory, they begin to unfold onto a narrative through time, space, and proximity.
Explorations in Narrative
A constellation of forty-nine color photographs expands on a twenty-six foot long by thirteen-foot high wall. Some of these images depict rooms, some objects, and others, scraps of writings in the form of Post-it notes, lists, journal entries, and hastily jotted thoughts. The smallest prints are just eight inches in length; the largest extend beyond four feet. They exist in pairs or small groupings, each forming a visual poem, or a group of thoughts, or perhaps an entire conversation. Twelve bedrooms of twelve very different people have been fragmented and dispersed onto the wall. Each photograph has been stripped of its owner, and now must take on new meanings within its new, two-dimensional context. These images are not about my twelve male subjects specifically; they serve as the raw material that I have collected and recontextualized to form my own story on the wall. In doing this, I am taking accountability for my role in ‘framing’ these bedrooms according to my own desires. In this installation, I chose to exert my voice in the way I edited, sequenced, and paired these images, rather than with my words. Even the wall text is primarily composed of words that are not mine, but rather, the first page of a diary entry that ends with, “...let the games begin.” My authorship is present solely in the context in which I have strategically placed these fragmented rooms and voices in an attempt to invite further questioning and contemplation. I have, in a sense, developed a game.

The negative space around the images alludes to what is missing, what is absent, and creates an open invitation to interpret, project, and make formal and conceptual connections between images and writings. It simultaneously provides visual ‘breathing room’ while challenging viewers to navigate their bodies uncomfortably through space. The placement and scale of the images are meant to physically challenge the viewer, forcing the body to bend down or strain upward to read certain notes and diary entries, move close to the wall to observe the smallest images of intimate objects, and to stand back to fully absorb the larger interior views. This physical engagement alludes to my own process of navigating the twelve bedrooms that are represented – crouching under beds, digging through closets, squinting to read different handwritings, straining to look out a high window…

While the narrative I have constructed for the wall installation is broken into pieces and intentionally open-ended, there are conceptual threads that I have weaved together through texts and images. From left to right, top to bottom, themes of boyhood and innocence develop into insecurities and tense relationships, evolve into varying levels of self-awareness, and conclude in
empathic, assimilated, yet perhaps even more complicated relationships that these men have with both themselves and others. The images of text and possessions explore the complexities of learning about the world and situating oneself within it. Windows and mirrors appear in a number of iterations on the wall, serving as portals — metaphors for seeing and being seen, looking in and looking out, framing the unknown, collapsing private and public spaces, and the photographic medium itself.
A Transcript

{a compilation of notes & journal entries}
Welcome to my journal. The following will be an attempt to sort out the emotions, feelings and thoughts of my solitary life. Without a strong support system of which I could discuss these ideas openly (i.e. a girlfriend), I must resort to retreating into these lined pages. So we begin, this journal will hold all honest thoughts and feelings. This shall be the one place in my world where I can be completely honest without fear of judgment or alienation. I am nervous as to what may come out, truths that may come to light as this is a tumultuous time in my life. Let the games begin.

Psalm 46. Trust in God in troubled times. He is the most powerful. And he loves us. The facts: God is real. He is alive. He loves you. He forgives you. He watches over you. He is the most powerful. He created you. Do a little at a time each day and you can accomplish a lot. Stay focused on your goals and write them down. Review your goals and reprioritize them if you need to. Write down your thoughts and take time to consider what you are buying into. Prioritize your goals. Figure out the most important things to do and move toward them. Sometimes there are multiple things that need work at the same time, but you should make sure to keep the most important things on top. Money is not nearly as important as God’s will for you.

It’s pretty obvious, you see, how long people hold onto their glasses and mugs; waiting to finish talking so they can empty their cups, we have a drinking problem today – not in what we consume, just the speed at which we consume it. I never learned how to drink, never really learned much about consumption, except perhaps that I was supposed to consume it.

Call Grandma.
Dear Andrew,

Hope that getting you these state of the art boots will make skiing even more enjoyable.
No more cold feet / cramped toes…

Love, Dad

I hoped the more my heart did yearn,
Would in her a higher interest rate earn.
But it was to no avail,
My love was an economy of scale,
And hers a diminishing return.

What do you want? Why do you want it?
I feel clouded. A haze has befallen my mind. I can’t focus on anything outside my own head. I catch myself staring at the ceiling or the floor, or the road while driving. Only aware of my own cognizance. I feel like a ghost floating through the world. I am consumed. I cope by constantly analyzing my emotions, my thoughts & reasons. But that isn’t working; the thoughts set my mind adrift I am no longer in control. Is this a result of loneliness, loss, love, confusion. I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know. Lauren. She fills my mind recently. I feel obsessed and at a loss with her. Complete radio silence for months. Nothing no contact. But also no indication that any message has been received. No matter how lighthearted or serious the message. Nothing. But why her to begin with? Why back to the beginning? Why her? I see her as a perfection incarnate. Everything I have ever wanted. I imagine the two of us attending ComiCon in Star Wars gear. Actually in most of my fantasies about our relationship I see us wearing Star Wars gear. She is brilliant, and beautiful, and vulnerable. She is broken, a victim of her own mind’s reckless abandonment. I am a fixer. I want to help her, be with her through all of her triumphs and struggle. It seems like fate that our passions would intersect as they do.

The monogamous thing. Please don’t. Back in the beginning we were just hanging out and you thought I was a cool person & I liked you and sometimes we fucked. Please don’t like me. I just want to be friends & love each other & hold each other.

Code Word: Muffin Top (773) 459-5552
Code Word: Screwvenir (773) 459-5552
Code Word: Te'oing (773) 459-5552
Code Word: Douchebag (773) 459-5552
Code Word: Tired High (773) 459-5552
Things I Hate About Myself:
  - Afraid of everything
  - Bad painter / artist
  - Not smart
  - I don’t enjoy being alone
  - I can’t find joy in anything
  - Can’t stop
  - No hope
  - Have done nothing with my life
  - Lazy
  - Ugly
  - Bad health
  - Broken body in pain all the time
  - No reason to live
  - Can’t find joy in anything
  - No luck
  - Nothing good happens to me
  - Don’t want the life others have
  - Can’t stop fucking up
  - Ruined Chrissy’s life
  - Can’t get over the past
  - Drunk

I am also realizing that I am uncomfortable in my own skin. Even as I sit here right now, naked, I realize that I am ashamed at how it looks. My legs are thick and beefy, my pubes are sparse and unattractive, my chest hair is stringy and patchy, my belly has a roll when I sit. Most all, I am pasty. I need to work on feeling better about myself, but I also really need help.

Worst Day…
Lost Chad 10am
Lost Callie 3pm
I SURVIVED… :)

1/25/14
The Cult of Whiteness. The Cult of Masculinity. The Cult of Privilege. How does a person engaged in these cults by a mere matter of their inherited traits, step outside of these cults to convey a message. The Injustice done to Michael Brown. The horrid UVA gang rape. Almost every murdering or sexual assault case to make the news in my awareness seems to implicate me in the same cult. That of abuse. What can a white man born into this horrible “Old Boys Club” do to fight against his own Cult? I am not seeking pity, and want no sympathy. What I want is fucking change. We all want systemic change, but if this past election is any indicator, we won’t be getting that anytime soon. What it seems we need at a cultural level is a heavy time spent in front of the mirror. A cold hard stare into our eyes, to wonder what we are doing to perpetuate such inhumane behavior. Stop worrying about your esoteric… obsession or your clothes fetish for
just a second and look in the mirror. Take responsibility for your actions, or your inaction, and ask, “What can I do better?” When we are at an age that our contemporaries are ruling this country and our parents are long and dead, are we going to want to see young adults that will be our children’s age murdered? Take ownership of your shit. Don’t put it on other people. Look into that mirror, your eyes, and see if you like what you see. I know I am just starting to, and let me tell you – there is a lot of shit I had never seen before.

Boulder, 17 de noviembre de 2015.

Amigo Bayan, te agradezco infinitamente lo maravillosamente bien que nos has tratado estos días, lo guardaré siempre en mi corazón.

He disfrutado muchísimo contigo y me he contagiado de tu energía y pasión por esta tierra.

Espero verte pronto por España y poder agradecerte todo lo que has hecho por nosotras estos días. Nunca lo olvidaré.

I love you brother!

(Prostoento aprender inglés antes de que voyas a España así que date prisa!)

Un abrazo enorme. Nos vemos pronto!

- Lorena

I don’t know when or where there were turtles laying eggs on the beach there was great compassion & empathy I don’t know when this was.

2/1/2016 10:30pm

I worry about my friendships. If my group of friends hadn’t grown up together, would we still be friends? What commonalities do we share? Hardly any. I have complete grasp of this, but I am not sure if it detracts from anything in our relationship. There is no doubt in my mind that if anything happened to me or my friends, every single one of us would be there. But if I want/need to talk about something deeply personal, I would not go to any of them. But I would also not go to my sister, or family. I would internalize it, and seek to understand it within myself. So perhaps they are not friends but family. Perhaps our relationships have evolved past the need for one another in such capacities; or perhaps I am emotionally crippled and lack the empathy to really be a friend to anyone.

2/21 10:06pm

Not sure I really have a topic of conversation for the night other than that I feel good. I feel content and at peace. Yesterday Dad and I went to the Paramount Theatre and saw “An Evening w/ Ira Glass.” It was wonderful! He was insightful and hilarious. And most notably it provided a hilarious ‘father/son’ moment for my dad and I. Ira was speaking about how he had never been hiking, and he told a story about how last time he was in Colorado he heard about the phenomenon of people having sex while hiking. So he polled the audience. It was an uncomfortable few seconds before I figured, “Fuck it. Dad knows I have had sex, what difference if it was while backpacking once?” So finally I sheepishly rose my hand, and a second later my father’s hand joined mine in the air. We both let out a chuckle and resisted the powerful urge to bump fists.
Also during the show I couldn’t help but notice the woman in front of me on her phone looking at Facebook. Here we are at a live show where the ticket price is $50 a ticket and you spend part of that scrolling through a newsfeed looking at an exuberant amount of photos of the mountains. This led me to think of what value is truly being gained from this activity? At worst, you value the event as equally worthless as Facebook. At best though you value this evening more because you paid for it. But really the question was “what knowledge did you truly glean from that time w/ Facebook?” For her I cannot say, but for myself I can say, nothing. There is rarely an occasion that Facebook provides me with any meaningful information for my life. So I deleted the app from my phone! No longer will my knee jerk reaction to having nothing to look at be Facebook. Now if I want to check in on the social network, I will truly have to be intentional about it. Good Riddance I say! I feel a sense of freedom and reinvigorated purpose washing over me already (unless that’s just smugness)!

Until Next Time.
Bedrooms & Diaries:
  Interiority,
  Performed Intimacy,
  Masculine Vulnerability
At its core, my thesis work poses questions about expectations of masculinity and the ways in which those expectations are performed in today’s current social climate. In an increasingly progressive culture where sexuality is fluid and gender binaries are collapsing, where feminism has turned a critical eye onto societal expectations of femininity and women’s roles, certain hetero-normative definitions of what it means to be ‘masculine’ continue to assert themselves in daily interactions. Accomplishment and status are valued over vulnerability, stoicism and aggression over emotional self-disclosure. I am looking at the most interior spaces of men who are attracted to women in some capacity, and who have still been subjected to a toxic ideology from past generations – what sociologist and author of *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, Michael Kimmel, defines as an “ideology of masculinity that we inherited from our fathers, and their fathers before them, an ideology that promises unparalleled acquisition coupled with a tragically impoverished emotional intelligence. We have accepted an ideology of masculinity that leaves us feeling empty and alone when we do it right, and even worse when we feel we’re doing it wrong.” (Kimmel, 9) This ‘crisis in masculinity’ often breeds what Kimmel has termed “aggrieved entitlement”, which is essentially a “gendered emotion, a fusion of that humiliating loss of manhood and the moral obligation and entitlement to get it back. And its gender is masculine.” (Kimmel, 75) The subjects I have chosen, therefore, are in a position to be highly susceptible to these enumerative and antiquated ideological holdovers from past generations.

The interiors I choose to investigate take the form of bedrooms and diaries, which, as Cinthia Gannett defines in *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse*, serve “as the container itself, as a locus, a site of writing, a palimpsest variously written over by different ideas of the self, the world, and the word.” (Gannett, 192) The bedroom is often the only space that is not shared, where identity is on display in all of its mundane and complex forms. The bedroom and the diary, or journal, are also spaces in which intimacy is performed – either for oneself or for another person, and often both. Whether that performed intimacy manifests in the self-conscious journal entry or a carefully arranged assortment of tchotchkes, it connects to an identity that is constantly being proved to and curated for oneself and the external world. Unlike private spaces and possessions, however, diaries/journals allow for a certain strain of emotional self-disclosure that “renders us vulnerable, not simply because of the content of our discourse, but
also because we are speaking only for ourselves, and therefore cannot invoke the power, the authority, of ‘the polis’ or ‘received wisdom.’” (Gannett, 75) This is problematic for men in particular, who have “historically held a dominant and dominating relation to language, building models based more frequently (but not exclusively) on the allocation of public verbal power, by means of hierarchy, exclusion, and displacement. Men’s journals have more often been public forms of writing in intention, topic, and audience, composed as demonstrations of knowing, autonomous selves built upon boundaried notions of self/other, text/life, speaker/hearer, and writer/reader.” (193) Masculine personality development “stresses firm boundaries between the self and the other” (75); men have therefore “learned both contempt for the term diary, which has been twisted over time to mean writing that is trivial, nonintellectual, and hyperemotional, and a certain fear of the supposedly feminizing influence of a genre whose safety and flexibility might encourage or invite undue self-disclosure, thus rendering certain aspects of the masculine identity vulnerable.” (188) Kimmel points to this aversion to vulnerability and self-disclosure as a breeding ground for “restorative violence” (Kimmel, 185) – most commonly directed toward women and minorities, “robotic stoicism, competition, aggression” (147), and “drive for power, domination, and control.” (184)

Thus, the space for emotional vulnerability opens up a realm of self-awareness that has “come to be both marginalized and yet empowering” (Gannett, 42) when put into writing, yet has long been suppressed in the public/male sphere and delegated to the realm of private, and therefore feminine and inferior, discourse. In fact, in her research on the diary/journal-keeping habits of men, Gannett only encountered exceptions in “either men who want to be writers and find their journals useful as writers’ notebooks or, occasionally, men who have been radically marginalized by specific events, their ethnicity, their sexual orientation, or some other factor.” (180) This is not a matter of petty, myopic musings; it is an indication of a cultural suppression of “the constructive and reconstructive power of language” to liberate, heal, and develop a more nuanced, compassionate sense of self (192).

Regardless of whether or not the subjects in Show Me Yours fit the ideological description of Kimmel’s ‘Angry White Men’, they now exist in a culture where clear-cut boundaries of maleness and masculinity are under question, and therefore must negotiate their identities accordingly. They do not all necessarily fit into a similar demographic, either; they encompass a
range of ages, races, socioeconomic classes, nationalities, religious and political beliefs. Although these men all currently reside in Colorado, the majority of them are originally from different parts of the United States. A few immigrated from other countries – Spain, Japan, Pakistan. My thesis work is not an investigation into the minds of abusive, racist, sexist, downtrodden men. It is an exploration rooted in my own curiosities of a newer generation of men whose voices and vulnerabilities are still very much unacknowledged in their daily existence. My access to their private spaces is an anomaly, and allows for a type of revealing that would not occur if I was involved with them in any other capacity. They allow me to look at the most specific indicators of their identities, so long as they are not revealed as individuals. At the core of my search for masculine vulnerability is the desire to access the traits that comprise all meaningful human experience – empathy, compassion, self-awareness, and connection – traits that have become feminized, and therefore devalued and suppressed in our culture. I look through these spaces in hopes of uncovering how these men have come to know themselves in relation to their environments and to others, and ultimately as a means to better understanding my own position in this world.
Bibliography


