Collaborative Work with Sarah-Jane Field 'Self & Others'

Background:
On 2 June 2017, the fellow student Sarah-Jane Field contacted me whether I would be interested in a collaborative project as part of her assignment work for 'Self & Other' (photography course with OCA, level 5). I found this a terrific idea, as myself am wondering about me self-perception and inter-subjectivity. My interest was triggered as part of my level 4 painting course with OCA. Especially when I embarked last year on a parallel project of daily self-portrait that eventually turned into a self-portrait made from smaller paintings each capturing an object or part of my body. A visual expression of my embodied experience of myself.

The idea collaborative project was wide open, no clear goal, working as we walk. For Sarah-Jane the area was around 'super brain, collective meaning, nebulous distinction between self and other.' (SJField, personal communication, 2 June 2017) Her idea was to work with other artist who can draw, sketch, paint the 'inner worlds of up to 6 characters'. Characters that she interviewed only with a survey template.
Those self-expressed features meditated through Sarah-Jane questionnaire were for me the starting point.

Prior reflection:
I was curious and excited but also anxious and nervous on how to approach this project. I exchanged with Sarah-Field some further information, understood a bit better her own background in photography and especially in performance, her strong interest in Robert Wilson's theatre and her ambition to 'use the ambiguity of language to undermine the concept of a stable self.' (she cited here in her brief Holmberg)

17 June: Working approach
Sarah-Jane provided me with a short character feature description in her brief as well as with the complete questionnaire responses. For the first round (I intended to work in steps, in between exchange with her) I looked the short version and worked directly in charcoal in A3 paper pad. Some words that triggered associations or inner pictures that I than roughly sketched down.
⇨ sketches #1 to #4

Images (all charcoal on A3):
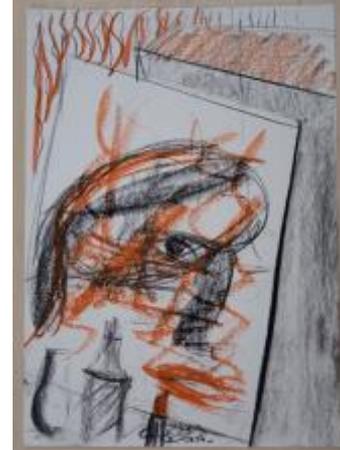
Intermediate reflection:
The first four sketches are rather illustrative inner pictures that I associated loosely with the character features. Saying that I am conscious that the first visuals are already a composite of external words belonging obviously to another person (mediated through Sarah-Jane's questionnaire) and own inner pictures. I can see that partly my inner pictures are already mediated through external factors that I was exposed to in my life (pictures, movies, books etc.) Questioning how to continue? 'Inner worlds of characters' –that was the task. Further questions: impact of remoteness, absence of any images, my pure distant perhaps somehow connectedness with Sarah-Jane and/or the 6 characters? What does relate us? What makes us different?

18 June: Continuing Working:
   ⇨ sketches #5 and #6

18 June: Feedback from Sarah-Jane

> *Hi Stefan, I have managed to look at the drive and am just so pleased with your sketches. There is that **oneiric** quality which I have somehow been looking for I think. I need to think about how I move forward with them and how I incorporote them into the work. Thank you so much. ... I will look more closely at the sketches and come back to you about which numbers they might be. In a sense **I'm not sure that's what matters in this process**. I'm sort of exploring **connectedness** and **deconstructing** the word Other which I am not sure about as used by academics/theorists. It's a word that perpetuates rather than solves perhaps?*
>
> *Thank you, I will be in touch with more thoughts soon.*
> SJField, email 17 June 2017

I can see how some aspects seem to reveal themselves (highlighted above by me):
- the oneiric, connectedness and deconstruction.
I am fascinated by her questioning whether the identification of those six characters and their features are relevant for the continuation of the project. An aspect I was asking also myself after having finished all six sketches, Is it not telling more about me than others? Perhaps just a construction of what how I think that I see? The language, written in the brief as expressed verbally by those other people, as the trigger for new mental images about the world? Triggering a trance-like state, dream like till one doesn't know what is the territory and what is the map? Or as R. Barthes said: the simulacra and alienation of a reality?

22 June: Reading Sarah-Jane's blog

I knew that she was working with other artist to support her in her work. One of them is a good friend Lottie, who used to study also with OCA and with whom I have contact through IG. Sarah-Jane photographed her with one her pictures in front of her head, a mask, disguise, but perhaps also revealing? I found the situation in front of a bright orange wall just fab. Orange is actually my favourite color. I liked the notion by Lottie of 'inner typographies' – like inner topographies, something what is written inside, something to be read?

Sarah-Jane relates often to Wilson and Holmberg and I can see her interest in the oneiric (https://ocasjf.wordpress.com/2017/06/17/shoot-assignment-1/) in context of Wilson:

> '*One should distinguish between the oneiric and the surrealistic in Wilson. The surrealistic creates bizarre images by juxtaposing objects that normally do not travel together. The oneiric, though the body's kinaesthetic responses, actually puts one into a dream-like trance; even though awake, one's mind begins to function as if dreaming.*'
> Holmberg, A, 1996, Directors in Perspective, The Theatre of Robert Wilson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, *p.155*

I can see how she relates it to dream, trance like states. Aspects that I am quite aware of through my professional practice as systemic coach, working with NLP tools and structural constellation work, and as art therapist. As a next step, I could read how she mentions *persona*. Persona is a term coined by the Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung often used in explaining the external face of person to the world, mask like. And persons can have more than one persona, depending on situation e.g. job position, family role. C. G. Jung.

Figure 1 . http://www.collective-evolution.com/2016/01/25/20-profound-quotes-by-carl-jung-that-will-help-you-to-better-understand-yourself/

From that I take away for my own work the aspects of trance, dream, persona, and mask. Aspects that one the one hand are reflecting more internal personal phenomena (trance, dream) and others more external inter-subjective phenomena (persona, mask).
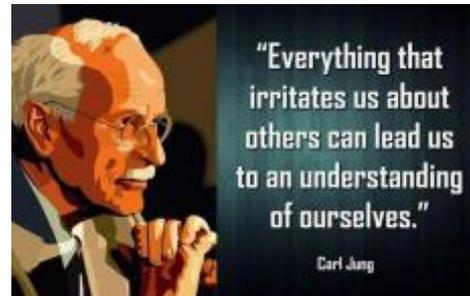
I am wondering how this will relate to my next steps of working. Excited to see how Sarah-Jane will react on my first round of sketches.

Further reflection:

Over the last few days I was more and more thinking about the distant relationship and how my own thoughts are influencing my approach to find 'inner worlds of others'. One the one hand I find if fascinating to see others with curiosity and an open mind. On the other hand, I became aware of how much a 'not knowing' and especially a 'not sensing a physical presence' of the other is restricting me. At times, I feel like an intruder with preconceived thoughts. Questioning on what ground I have the right to 'look into' other's life?

Another approach:

I did work in parallel with other ideas of *absence* and *presenc*e. This is related to my earlier interest of memories and deterioration of building, the uncanny and the un-homely, familiarity and absence (part of my personal project for POP 1 with OCA: http://ocapainting1.stefanschaffeld.com/?cat=15

With a deeper interrogation of media and material without having an external subject matter. Mostly in ink and acrylic, with a tactile, direct approach. Looking at how present of material and absence through taken away of collaged pieces can be considered as metaphors of mental images.

Examples a: Mini series on board (13 x 18 cm)

Examples b: Development across two canvas (50 x 60 cm) –
collage on canvas #1 ->taken off from canvas #1 -> stick reverse on canvas #2

I was wondering how this can relate to the collaborative project.

23 June - Another approach:

Combining my investigation of absence and presence with the collaborative project and the distant relationship. Curious trying to envision what Sarah-Jane might think, and seeing it more as a triangular relationship: Me – SJ – six characters (representing others) = a kind of stage set.
Unfolding of multiple stories (lives), ongoing, in between-ness, and still as Sarah-Jane was expressing it: connected-ness.

I worked over the last days on another combined approach. Still without a specific subject matter, but perhaps more Sarah-Jane in focus, the 'other six' less dominant. How would this go? Starting with glueing and ink covering raw canvas on another stretched canvas, folding, waiting one day, unfolding, peeling off

-> working with the stretched canvas only, keeping the raw inked canvas aside (for the moment).

Continuing to work in layers with charcoal, charcoal powder, and white acrylic.

23 June: Feedback from Sarah-Jane

*Hello, ... Next week I am talking to an actor who will be in some constructed photographs and I am thinking we might use your pictures as the **basis for our location scouting.** A couple of the images strike me as possibilities. I did wonder about **combining photographs with the drawings** - how would you feel about that? I am not sure about my technical skills being able to do your drawings justice and I may end up ruining good drawings and photographs - so I'm slightly conflicted.... Hope your'e well.*

SJField, email 17 June 2017

Thus, a next step possibly to combine. What could combination mean? For me this makes sense, a constructive approach anyhow.
Brainstorming ideas out of my head:
-   Additive or subtractive or transparent (would require digital post processing)
-   Integrating sketches in the shooting – as juxtaposed objects
-   Integrating photographs in sketches – as juxtaposed objects (Would require work on my side to the ship originals to SJ or she prints out highres images – collage)
-   Building a new picture, image from parts of both
-   As installation with originals (wall or spatial 'sculpture')
-   …..

more from SJ:
*The one with the **shadow** is particularly compelling as I take so many photos, as you know, with shadows involved. This is certainly something I can 'recreate as a photo image' if that is the way we go.*

I will speak to the actor on Tuesday and am photographing a dancer who will dance "the man with the cardigan" and "the woman who lives in Saudi Arabia".

I am interested in how you picked up my thoughts that the actual numbers may not matter for now - I am thinking about how we take the empty vessel of a constructed other and fill it with our own self anyway.... and you have very clearly picked up on that.

Two very quick experiments - that aren't anything, except a corruption of your lovely drawings, but the large file of the photo and the small file of the picture led to the drawing marks being stretched out in one experiment! I hopefully will find time to play a bit more but we can discuss if/how we might bring ideas together at the hangout.

Ps - I do love Jung so much. ... I very much like his archetypes and the importance of the inner fantasy world in his ideas.

Figure 2: © LEllis, SJField and SJSchaffeld, 2017

Figure 3; © LEllis, SJField and SJSchaffeld, 2017

02 July: Feedback from Sarah-Jane

*Hope you're well. I am off on a course today and shooting on Tuesday with the next artist, a musician. The following Tuesday I am working with an actor, and that is when I would want to use your images. After thinking about I for some time I think having the **picture in the image** somewhere would be good. I love the Uta Barth images especially this https://www.instagram.com/p/BVsYLTeAVS3/?taken-by=utabarthstudio and thought about it for a while but I don't think it would fit in with the other images for this series, but I may come back to it - laying your pictures over the images in some way. I may play with it anyway and see. I knew her work and had written about it in TAOP.*

I have attached an image that came out of working with a dancer - I think the image is strong but again it may not fit with the series of 6 images that I'm trying to put together. Until they are all shot I won't know, I guess.
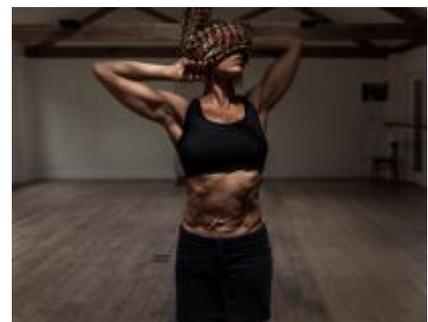
Speak later, SJ - email 02 July 2017

Figure 4: © SJField,, 2017

I will continue and trying to see how I can build on infeed of visuals as well as SJ verbals. I might think along the line of collage but in a layering and destruction approach as I did for my other project on 'Absence and Presence'. I can sense the *presence* of the people involved,

feeling *connected*. The various images I am now exposed to are somehow impacting my earlier inner images (see my sketches from 17/18th June).

12 July: Feedback from Sarah-Jane

> SJ is doing a Blurb online book and she send us a draft version. I was excited to see other images and perspectives. Feeling like getting out of distant isolation and meeting the 'people', the 'others', mediated through the images. I find it was going inside of me, as the visuals are ambiguous, space for meaning and space for more inner pictures. I will go immediately to work.
>
> *.. I will likely present 8 images in sequence rather than lay it out as it is now so that the collaborative end result is the main bulk of the book. I will only have one image per two pages so viewers are not distracted by anything ... I played with a video format but felt that since **written word** was such an **essential part of the process** a book would suit it better. .. These may not be the final images, I've not edited yet. A couple seem rather noisy after I've played around with them so much - I'm seeing what works and/or doesn't at the moment...*
> *I am photographing one more person on Saturday morning and will use that time to ensure I capture two of the 'people' that are not captured out of the 6 final ones I honed in on. (- incidentally, I cancelled the shoot last Tuesday for several reasons and found a different person to work with). Stefan, your sketches will be included in the images I shoot on Saturday... I do not see this as a complete end piece of work but rather a work in progress which aims to explore different approaches. ...*
> *SJ - email 12 July 2017*

12 July: Bringing together and letting it go

I am going to use #34 (the 'monochrome' English lady whose life hit hard on her) and #83 (the Welsh lady in Saudi Arabia feeling homesick) as here I've seen multiple images and pre-composites already from SJ and L. The above photograph by SJ from 07 July works good here (although I don't know whether that reflected on #34)

My approach:
- Acrylic transfer of inkjet prints of photographs and my own initial sketches.
- After drying, taken the background paper off, and see what will left on the surface. Residues of others in my hand, visually present. That what is not going to 'stick' on the surface will be absent.
- Re-drawing with new images, reflection on a more distant conception of the characters

Thus, I embrace a few aspects:
- Connectedness through shared visuals

- Absence and presence in my artwork as reflection on the remote and rather anonymous relationship with those characters
- Destruction of images through my process approach as reflection on the initial verbal characterization of others.

Example of process (appropriated):
with appropriated images by Lottie Ellis and Sarah-Jane Field, 2017. Copyright of those images with the authors

12 July: Final appropriated artworks

with appropriated images by Lottie Ellis and Sarah-Jane Field, 2017. Copyright of those images with the authors

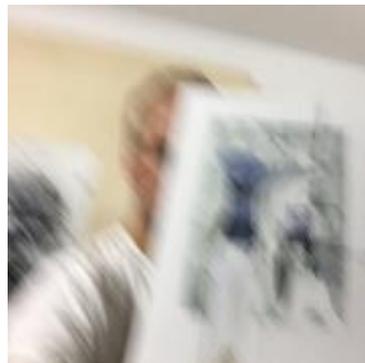*Figure 6: Mixed media on board (40 x x 30 cm) - ©SJSchaffeld, 2017*

Figure 7: Mixed media on board (40 x 30 cm)- - ©SJSchaffeld, 2017

Figure 5: Mixed Media on paper (50 x 35 cm) - - ©SJSchaffeld, 2017

And some photographs taken with iPhone (© SJField and SJSchaffeld)
– appropriating SJ's notion of image as mask

And some self timer SLR shooting (© SJSchaffeld)

15 July: Feedback from Sarah-Jane

*I sense you are **uncertain** about the coloured images you have sent me. Incorporating tiny bits of the photographs works well I think. I will include a quote from Pirandello's 6 Character''s Without An Author - as it is so relevant to this piece of work - he refers to the **masks** we are given by society, and the social implications of the changing relationship with authorship. It's a fantastically astute precursor to Death of An Author.*

*However, one of the things I've been thinking about over the last few days is how the images I have made don't feel very 'me' and I think you are feeling this with your work too? Is this one of the issues of **'collaboration'**? This concept of 'me' which is potentially being undermined by modern technology is very interesting.....*

I've been considering the word collaboration and need to question it. Photographic portraits are and have always been collaborative, the word is a 'buzz' word; it might signify a less authoritarian way of working at times but at other times the word is used, I think, only because it's trendy. An article I posted on my blog states the world would be a better place if people followed artists' who collaborate example.... perhaps this is over simplifying some aspects of collaboration. The Sistine Chapel was painted by an army of painters but only has one name attributed to it; the overall 'director' of the work... but here in this work we have truly collaborated by pouring ideas into the pot, initiated by me, and you have taken up the reigns brilliantly - but have we between us all been able to produce work worth existing in this instance? Well, perhaps not yet, and perhaps it is just a process we are looking at. I am writing a blog post about these issues as I think its integral to the work and will post later. Brecht's ensemble was an earlier aim at collaboration, and many of his ideas have been absorbed by modern theatre practise. But it is hard for our society to let go of big personalities and we cling to locus' of power.

Thank you for your photographs - Cig Harvey plays with this motif of using a painting in place of a face quite a lot of the time I have noticed. http://www.cigharvey.com/you-look-at-me-like-an-emergency/ - hope this links to the correct image. From your sequence the 6th image, third down in the right hand column is most effective. Interesting!

My thoughts:

References provided
- Pirandello and masks: brings me once again to C.G. Jung 'persona'. I can tell from my own personal experiences and crisis situations that I have my misgivings with 'masks'. A different story and not sure I am there yet to explore fully artistically, perhaps at next level with OCA. Or with more exchange with others, like you
- Harvey: paintings as face /placeholder, replacement, connotation, sign etc.?

Uncertainty and Collaborative work: For me personally the whole area of collaborative work in art is pretty knew. My knowing is coming more from my past jobs in companies, where I found it worked best when creativity was unplugged in a team through extending perspectives and building on ideas to let them grow (e.g. packaging and product design). Authorship, producer, director, actor - roles that one need to see or discuss perhaps. Agreements on which part one takes? Working in isolation – and still connected. Once an idea is expressed, it takes its own life. And once I am exploring an idea artistically or visually as we do, it takes off .... And to see how to keep control – or not. At one point, one can question signification of words, or just agree on one element of it, to avoid overly self-consciousness.

Conclusion:

I found the start of this project inspiring to build on ideas from SJ, and see what this will do to my interrogation of the subject matter. It turned out to be more of one response activity. Nevertheless, I couldn't stop continuing working on as I was too curious and excited.

There are a few aspects (external and internal) that I take away from this project:
- An inter-subjective relationship and perhaps inter-dependency and a sense of connected-ness
- A sense of responding to new or updated information, something I appreciated in my further interrogation of the subject matter
- The me as my-self and as artist with its continuation
- Questions on mental images, self-conscious reflections, and development of visual works that are intervened with each other

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Self and other give birth to each other ...[ ]... beyond separation one is always subscribed in the other...
V A Conley, Helene Cisoux - Writing the Feminine, 1984

Reference:

- Field, SJ (2017a) 'Collaborative artists wanted to sketch or draw the inner worlds of 6 characters' [pdf] June 2017
- Field, SJ (2017b) [personal communication, Instagram]. 2 June 2017
- Field, SJ (2017c) [personal communication, email]. 17 June 2017
- Field, SJ (2017d) 'SJFSelf & Other' [online blog]. Available from: https://ocasjf.wordpress.com [accessed 22 June -16 July 2017]
- Field, SJ (2017e) [personal communication, email]. 23 June 2017
- Field, SJ (2017e) [personal communication, email]. 02 July 2017
- Field, SJ (2017f) [personal communication, email]. 12 July 2017
- Field, SJ (2017g) [personal communication, email]. 15 July 2017

Table of images: