

Submission-hSn13v9C (Academic Paper): Edward Jonnie turpie

Title: Print States and Chance.

(1961 words)

This paper seeks to respond to how as print makers we may be open to unexpected events in the process-driven habituation of printmaking crafts, methods and practices. In a digital age of predictive systems of visualization, copying, image transfer and repetition being open to chance is investigated in the context of a singular silkscreen portrait in which chance led to states of the image.

Through the balance, recognition and application of valuable repetitive processes and material chance, this paper will present the learning that thought, intention and the expectancy of what might transpire are interrelated. It will propose that in recognising complex objectives the artist can be open and responsive to what disruption of repetitive processes may present, and in doing so lay differing parameters for future material encounters. The paper is presented in the context of current research into Contemporary Drawn and Printed Portraiture.

Openness by the printmaker to the making materials and the developing print has precedent: Maculature: 'An impression made from an intaglio engraved plate to remove ink from the recessed areas, [using] a sheet of waste-paper or blotting paper'. This technique and use of waste-paper materials were experimented with by Rembrandt and are described in *The Unfinished Print*:

Rembrandt's alteration of meaning through variant printings and through powerful reworkings of the plate is yet more startling in the *Three Crosses*, 1655 ... a significant number of impressions, often with distinctly different wipings, were printed on a variety of supports at each stage. In addition to more common papers, he used very delicate, tan coloured oriental papers, a course stock known as oatmeal, and sometimes vellum. (Parshall, P.W 2001: 53)

Beyond his selections of paper, he went on to a fourth state of the *Three Crosses*:

[it] is an entirely different work forged on the same plate. Yet like a palimpsest, Rembrandt's original scheme is still visible in furtive details that linger beneath the heavy scoring of the copper in this final stage ... The ability to accomplish such extraordinary revisions within a single arena [...] is a benefit peculiar to intaglio printmaking.(ibid 3)

These seventeenth-century material experimentations employed to create and alter meaning for the figurative artist indicate a responsiveness and enthusiasm for the opportunities 'offered up' in the print-making of the image.

In modern day printmaking, photographic processes are used by artists to create and make fine art prints. They may be technically accurate in their digital or electronic systems, however they can be combined with haptic, human means of creation and together be open to chance and surprise prospects. These individualised practices can lead to unique, bespoke artifacts and in my practice, printed portraits.

Contemporary printmaking artist Margaret Ashman describes how she applies digital photographic techniques in making her emotionally charged prints:

'I capture Micro expressions with video stills or digital photography, which are used as sources for my photo etchings (...). I combine photographs with digital layering in adobe photoshop, producing a single digital colour image. When I bitmap my images I use diffusion dither, the most random bitmapping option available ... Sometimes I print the bitmaps on my home A3m printer and enlarge them to A0 size by photocopy: these photocopies have to be oiled to turn them into transparencies for photo etchings' (Dyson, A.2009).

This description of multi-layered, complex processes, managed by the Ashman, point to a range of moments for chance to be noticed, observed and adopted to play a part in the making of the image. These opportune moments interspersed with knowledgeable application of technical and craft processes are material encounters where the artist is exposed to unpredicted, yet fortuitous, creative choices that may enhance their printmaking decisions and create different print states.

Historically, states of prints from the same plate reflect the maker's desire to build and rebuild, try, test and experiment with the making of an individual image. These descriptions tend to refer to traditions of intaglio printmaking, whereas silkscreen printmaking leans towards repeatable prints as the printing procedures do not rely on hand wiping ink off the surface, but on predictable mechanical repetitive squeegee pulls pressing ink through stable screen meshes on to the substrate to create uniform editions. By adopting chance occurrences leads to unique prints that might be termed Varied Editions rather than repeatable, numbered limited editions. The craft of screenprinting editioning is to be respected and writing about the pragmatist philosopher Richard Sennet, Fiona MacCarthy understands that the: 'best craftsmanship relies on a continuing involvement. It can take many years of practice for complex skills of making to become so deeply engrained that they are there, readily available, almost without the craftsmen being conscious of it.' We might replace 'craftsmen' with 'printmakers' where skills are undoubtably required to be learned and applied to achieve repeatable printed images. Having learned and applied skills, then there may time to be open to chance.

Modern silkscreen printmaking can utilise drafting film to make hand drawn stencils. Films such as true grain and mark resist enable tonal and textural prints to be produced from hand-made marks to deliver free form gestural interpretations, more akin to etching and lithography. With research and practice a serigraphic mark making toolkit can be collected and applied skillfully and repeatedly in preparation for the making of serigraphic prints. However, within the parameters of the serigraphic process unpredictable chance occurrences can occur that surprise the printmaker. One such event took place in the making of a serigraphic printed portrait of artist Yuchen Yang. The portrait was made based on a drawn interpretation of the subject on mark resist drafting film, before exposing on to a 165 mesh screen. Beyond figurative mimetic realism, additional marks were added by brushing a vine black ink mixed in gum arabic on the drafting film. This created a beading effect echoing the subject's artistic practice. Satisfied with the proofed print, it was possible to edition a duotone portrait. However, an unconscious, chance occurrence took place during the preparation.



Fig.1: E J Turpie, *Yuchen Yang*. 2018, A2 Drawn Duotone Silk Screen Print on Canaletto paper.

Chance leads to dots of absence

When preparing to screen print, a first test pull on newsprint or tissue paper is made. This is a method to assess the integrity of the image before printing an artist's proof and an edition on heavy, high quality paper. The printed image on this test is usually thin as it is the first pull and the ink has not built up on the screen. The thin semi-transparent tissue paper is not intended as a finished final print, however the confluence of the two materials creates a delicate object and image relationship. The tissue proof revealed a matrix of empty dots that correlated with the screen bed's vacuum system. As the tissue paper is flimsy, the strong vacuum airflow through the holes in the screen bed pulled the tissue into them. The small distance of approximately

1mm between tissue and screen meant the ink did not reach the tissue and left it blank. An absence of ink, and therefore absence in the image, creates an unplanned patterned 'dot matrix' effect. This chance visual effect was enticing. It was not intended nor anticipated. The following exploration was an opportunity to extend the chance material encounter in the making of a new portrait image.



Fig.2: E J Turpie, *Yuchen Yang*. Detail. 2018. A2 Drawn Silk Screen Print and Vacuum dot on tissue paper.

The embedded dots of absence reveal the process of mechanical reproduction undertaken to make the work. They further articulate the conditions of making the print on a particular day with atmospheric and environmental circumstances, on a specific screen bed, viscosity of ink and

squeegee pressure. Such variables came together to create patterns of dots of absence worthy of noting for future applications.

My research has shown that the chance vacuum dot matrix can be replicated on tissue paper. However, working with light-weight papers brings a more delicate and careful 'feel' to the printmaking process. The capability of tissue paper to be manipulated in tactile ways is at odds with the norm of making fine art editioned prints on sturdier paper. Quality heavyweight paper is handled with extreme care throughout the print process. From the paper store to the print bed, print racks to plan chest and the framer's table, the paper is painstakingly kept flat. Maintaining the uniform quality demanded of the editioned prints, bereft of creases, dents, blemishes, tears or unintended marks, is part of an essential dialogue the maker has with his/her materials. Tissue paper is fragile and inconsistent from the onset. It doesn't land on the print bed or rack, but drifts with air flows. Once printed, it is 'glided' to the bench with care, still crooked and crumpled with drying ink tensions. Making it flat to show the portrait image at its best brings a new satisfaction beyond the customary heavyweight paper landing on the bench, which has its own material satisfactions.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, the material chance encounters in printmaking that have been explored have led to the drawn and printed image as a unique artifact, rather than the original intention to produce an editioned portrait. Being open to the unexpected properties of materials, unforeseen methods and chance encounters during the making, enables the artist to be active and responsive to printmaking processes. Unforeseen visual opportunities can be noticed, recognised and evaluated. They may offer enhancements to the printed image the artist had not predicted, nor anticipated. In meeting them by chance, the artist can accept, or reject as they pursue their task of interpretation. Being vulnerable to the making, in the printmaking has made manifest multiple encounters with the materiality of the silkscreen serigraphic print. This rewarding explorative experience is a reminder to the printmaker to be open and vulnerable to the process of printmaking, as it unfolds before them.

Postscript. The printed portrait described was made to celebrate the artist and was approved by her before she returned to Guanjou in 2018. Participant consent in this research is documented through formal signed ethical acceptance. In the months since completion and gifting of the portrait, artist and subject maintained contact through instagram. However, in 2020 coronavirus took hold in China. As a diversion from her experience of being interned in hi-rise tower blocks I offered to make a second portrait to highlight her and other people who were ‘locked down’ and as a counter to the negative mass media coverage of the ‘China virus’. Through electronically sharing a selection of photographic images of herself a portrait was drawn and silkscreen printed on cartridge paper.



Fig.3: E J Turpie, Portrait printed on tissue, South bank smooth and cartridge papers. 2020

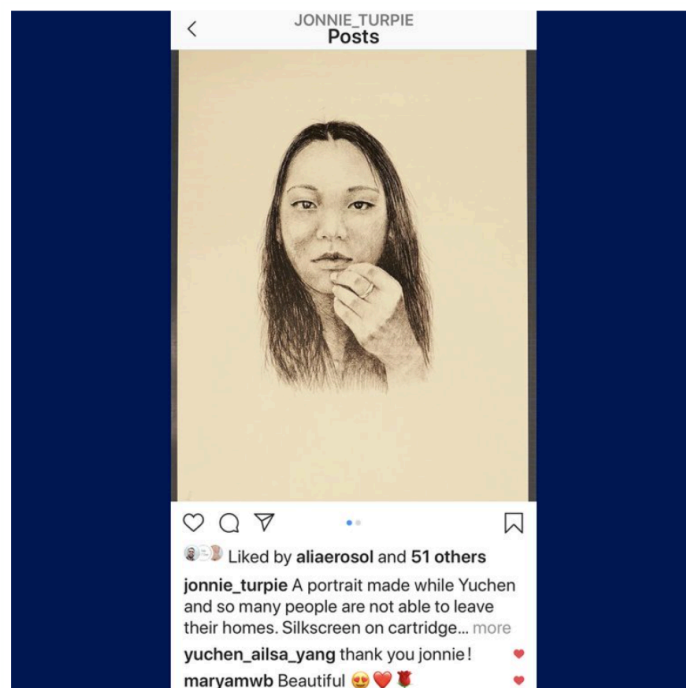


Fig.4: Instagram sharing post

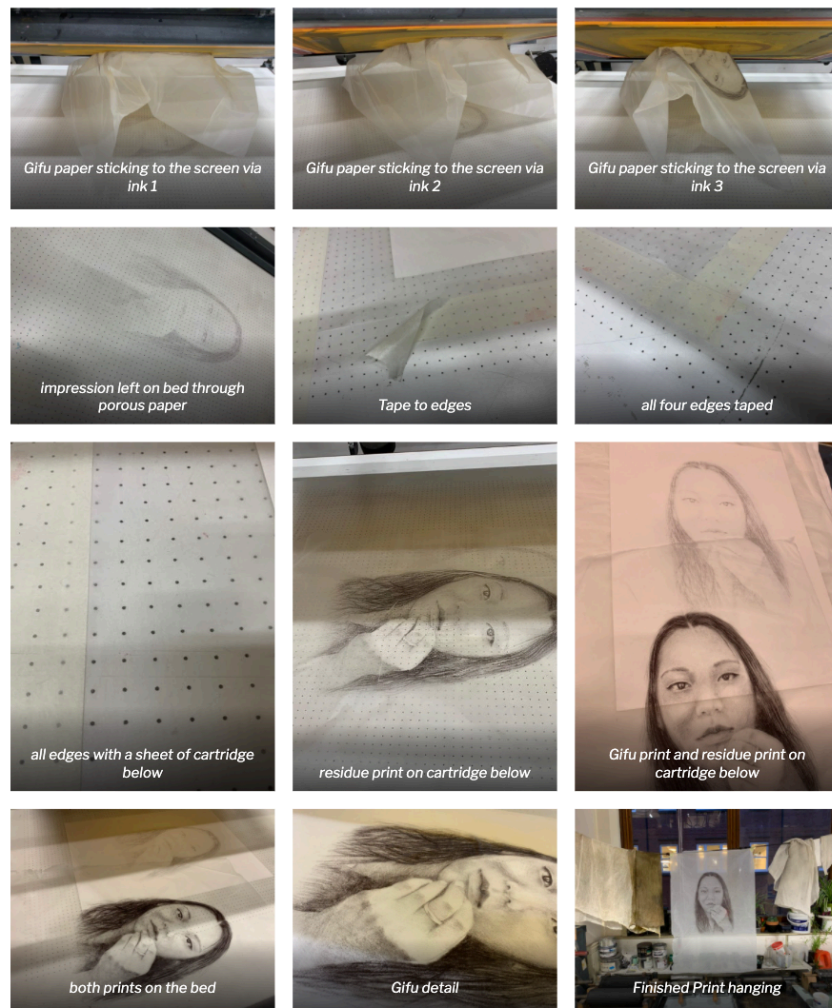


Fig.5: E J Turpie, *Yuchen Yang*. New portrait on Gifu 9gsm paper. 2020

Before editioning and with the awareness of the original print experimentation on tissue paper a new substrate was selected: a very fine Japanese Gifu paper. At 9gsm the delicate, but strong paper was not held securely by the vacuum and the ink acted as a glue adhering it to the silkscreen. To counter this the paper was taped on all four edges, printed and the screen successfully lifted away from the printed image on the fragile paper. However, on removing the tape the delicate paper tore inconsistently along the edges. The printed image on the translucent paper had an atmosphere of isolation, which the torn edges enhanced. The chance substrate tearing had delivered a unique serigraphic artifact redolent of the subject's situation and reflective of the motivation to embark on its making. It's flimsy translucency was hung in a deserted gallery space to move weightlessly in the airflows.



Fig.6: E J Turpie. *Yuchen Yang*. Moseley School of Art. Video screen still 2020.

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IMPACT11 Academic Paper Proposal

Title: Print States and Chance.

Abstract:

This paper seeks to respond to how as print makers we may be open and vulnerable to unexpected events within making, in the process-driven habituation of printmaking methods and practices.

In a digital age of predictive systems of visualization, copying, image transfer and repetition being open and vulnerable to chance is investigated. By demonstrating that responding to repetitive techniques of drawing and printmaking, acceptance and adoption of unintended, but fortuitous material opportunities may offer up rewarding creative encounters. Critical to the discourse presented will be the consideration of historic and contemporary approaches to print that reveal, through print making processes that printmakers can be responsive to material and aesthetic opportunities ‘thrown up’ during their methods and practices. The adoption of chance occurrences tends toward unique individual prints that might be termed ‘VE’: Varied Editions rather than repeatable, numbered limited editions. Historically, states of prints from the same plate reflect the maker’s desire to build and rebuild, try, test and experiment with mark making within the making of an individual image.

“The term state is neutral to the question of completeness since it refers only to alterations in the plate without evaluating these changes in any relation to aesthetic finish.”(1)

Adoption of chance may lead to new states of printed images. Through the balance, recognition and application of valuable repetitive processes and material chance, this paper will present the learning that thought, intention and the expectancy of what might transpire are interrelated. It will propose that in recognising complex objectives the artist can be open and responsive to what the repetitive processes of making may present, during the acts of print creation, and in doing so lay new parameters for future encounters. The paper will be presented in the context of current research into Contemporary Drawn and Printed Portraiture.

- (1) Parshall, P.W. Sell, S. and Brodie, J. 2001. *The unfinished print*. National Gallery of Art Washington.

Edward 'jonnie' Turpie Biography 2019.

Turpie, having established a successful creative industries career returned to education in 2017 as a Doctoral Research Student at Birmingham School of Art. His career included establishing an independent production company producing television programmes and innovative digital content. During his journey towards PhD completion he has achieved a PG Certificate in Research Practice in 2018, his first formal qualification since achieving an MA Printmaking from the RCA in 1979. His PhD Research subject is Contemporary Portraiture – Smart phone Photography, Drawing and Printmaking.

The research question interrogates the relationship that exists between smartphone portraiture and analogue based drawn approaches to mechanical printmaking. He explores the subtle digital and analogue techniques of image making and the complex relationship between the observer and the observed.

Recent, selected exhibitions include a solo show *High Sheriff Portraits* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (2017). Group outputs: Diverso Encuentros, IMPACT 10, Santander, 2018, Printmakers Council V&A mini prints (2017), SALON, BMAG 2016; WM Open, Waterhall 2015. Pulpa Print; 20x20 Hot Bed Press; RBSA print, photography and Portraits 2016. In 2018 Turpie was Co-curator of *You and I are discontinuous beings*, Group Drawing exhibition and Book Launch as part of the Midlands Universities Partnership.

Contact details.

Name Edward 'jonnie' turpie

Contact details: Edward.turpie@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Research site: printsanew.jonnieturpie.com

Birmingham School of Art. Birmingham City University