

individual was functioning as an idea'.

Once you've accepted that you cannot work without a 'theory' of some kind, then you have to ask the question, 'Am I happy just working with what I've inherited, or do I want to look critically at what I've inherited?' So the people whose work used theory were really trying to reorganize the basis from which they worked. But there is always a basis.

**Salaman** There is always a basis but becoming conscious of that basis in a sense is quite a desublimatory activity, and it's so crucial how that process takes place, so that you don't end up with shipwrecked people who can't work because the theory has negated them.

**Burgin** At the end of the second year I'd have students come into my office and they'd say, 'Don't get me wrong, it's not that I don't like the theory classes. I find them really interesting, but I can't take a picture any more. Every time I raise the camera to my eye I think, is this politically OK? Is this ...', etc., etc. The advice I always gave them was: 'Shoot first, ask questions later.' These are questions you ask later, and you answer theoretically perhaps. Go with the moment of sublimation, the moment of desire. The first rule of psychoanalysis and the couch is 'say the first thing that comes into your mind'. It sounds easy, but it's not. There are so many checks and balances on what we're able to say [...]

Victor Burgin, 'Messages for Western Union', Interview with Naomi Salaman', in Naomi Salaman and Ronnie Simpson [ed.], *Postcards on Photography: Photorealism and the Reproduction* [Cambridge, England: Cambridge Darkroom, 1998] 91-99.

## Gilda WILLIAMS

### Identity Twins: The Work of Wendy McMurdo [1998]

A *Doppelgänger* is a mythical monster of German folklore who randomly chooses an innocent person and pursues them in their shadow, observing their habits, appearances, expressions and idiosyncrasies. As time passes the *Doppelgänger* starts to look like his selected victim, behave like them, and eventually becomes and even replaces that person, without anyone noticing. The word itself is made of two, derived from the German *doppel* (double) + *gänger* (a modification of *gehen*, 'to go'). The *Doppelgänger* enters the lingua franca of psychoanalysis thanks to Freud's much-quoted essay on the uncanny (*unheimlich*), in which he defines uncanny experiences as resulting when 'something which is familiar and old-established in the mind ... becomes alienated from it only through the process of repression'. Rooted, therefore, in the dark recesses of our own fears and anxieties, the uncanny unfolds through repetition and coincidence as it invokes the sense of fatefulness, of something inescapable, of chance becoming destiny. Freud identifies three principal sources of the uncanny – and these are all at the heart of Wendy McMurdo's digitally-manipulated photographs of ordinary-looking subjects combined with 'doppelgänger' twin images of themselves. The three

experiences which determine the uncanny are 1) when we are faced with a being whom we cannot be sure is inanimate or alive, mechanized or living; 2) the fear of losing sight, i.e., of not being able to trust our eyes for information and for recognizing the familiar; and 3) the fear of confronting one's own double, the *Doppelgänger*.

McMurdo's photographs, with their somewhat hallucinatory feel, follow in a rich twentieth century tradition of visual and literary works which have impersonated and contextualized such instances of the uncanny. The frightening apparition of multiple selves is a recurring theme since the early days of cinema, when it was discovered that the screen could be split and otherwise manipulated, allowing the actor to 'meet himself' through the miracle of post-production. In Henrik Galeen's 1926 film *The Student of Prague*, the young man in question sells his mirror image to a warlock, and then is cursed with an evil twin who destroys his life by committing a series of crimes. He eventually is forced into suicide, killing his criminal double and, thus, himself: his 'innocent' side as well as the 'guilty'. In a chapter of Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*, a tycoon hires countless look-alikes to take his place, to ward off kidnappers, to mask his love affairs, to confuse his enemies. He eventually loses himself, caged in a kaleidoscopic tangle of self-effigies, killed by multiple murderers and mistresses.

The psychological symbolism of these two works is easily read: these are literal portrayals of such themes as self-inflicted punishment, repression, denial of the unsavoury or uncontrollable sides of one's personality, schizophrenia, and the non-recognition of a desired self-image in one's real actions. Facing oneself within the hidden confines of a guilty conscience is unpleasant enough; having actually to sit down and converse with its embodiment, observing the ticks, narcissism and other unflattering habits of one's physical person is positively unbearable. Although this fear lies at the centre of Wendy McMurdo's double (triple, quadruple, and further multiplied) portraits, hers are not sinister images. In contrast to Galeen's or Calvino's *Doppelgängers*, which present menacing figures who embody a sort of death warning, in McMurdo's self-confrontations the encounter is neither violent nor unexpected. Like Alighiero Boetti's collage *Twins* (1968), in which the artist levitates quite cheerfully, hand in hand with himself in a garden, in McMurdo's works we seem to witness a kind of serene, if momentous, meeting. Her subjects are posed to perform a kind of relaxed inevitability. Though we are unsure whether these images are real or not, i.e., in Freudian terms, whether the people photographed are mechanized, digitally manufactured beings or living creatures, we are not frightened by this bewildering – and unresolved – impossibility. The psychosis associated with the uncanny, here, seems virtually cured.

Usually McMurdo chooses as her subjects the very young, often small children. This is a strategic choice which accentuates the unfamiliarity with one's physical self: a self which as children seems to grow 'monstrously' and relentlessly less recognizable each day. For children, so many events verge on the unfamiliar, resulting in

childhood's recourse to a rich and vivid imagination which can flourish, becoming stronger and more confident even than the everyday. (Witness the invention of many children, of an 'invisible friend', an imaginary companion who, like a double, follows you everywhere.) In some of McMurdo's work, such as *Helen, Backstage at the Merlin Theatre (The Glance)* (1996), the double appears literally in the instant of the initial encounter, when we are faced for the first time with the reality of one's self: my eyes are too big, my legs are crooked, I can't do it on my own will of its own. This is a kind of portrait of the first experience of physical awareness as children, when we actually begin to really observe for the first time the hand nature of the world around us, literally facing the bodily reality which will always be there, according to Freud's conviction that 'anatomy is destiny' which shapes our lives. A hesitancy and slightly fearful uncertainty is signalled in the right hand figure's playful, sideways glance, as if wanting to be friendly but daring not to come too close, like our first tentative reckoning with self. It is a portrait of bodily awareness and proprioception. Other portraits, like the same girl such as *Helen, Sheffield* 1996 (1996), follow chronologically, as if depicting events subsequent to the first encounter. Now little Helen is 'photographing' herself, playing comfortably with her recently introduced self, although with obvious struggles for domination in this playground game of 'who's on top'. In a sense, learning to live with oneself is a task we discover in childhood and never quite master. McMurdo's portraits mark an early period in our lives when we realize that this coexistence would be easy [...]

Gilda Williams, 'Identity Twins. The Work of Wendy McMurdo', in Wendy McMurdo [Salamanca, Spain: Ediciones Univ. de Salamanca, 1998] 33-43.

## John HILLIARD

### Interview with Neil Mulholland [2001]

**Neil Mulholland** In the early 1970s, you produced a series of works which were, in many ways, a harbinger of the politics of representation, using first-order photographic images and captioning to analyse and deconstruct the positions from which we experience material reality. In your photo-based works were seen simultaneously by different viewers to include their own (hitherto repressed) emotions in their response, while reflecting on the conditions and consequences of their varying responses. For me, there remains an 'emphatic' and human dimension (e.g., the use of the term 'elementary' as the opposite, 'conditioning') in these works which distance them from the 'photo-conceptual' pieces made in the 1970s, such as Victor Burgin at the time. This seems especially prevalent in your current work. Did you and do you see yourself as an artist who is primarily concerned with exposing the conditions of production hidden in the mechanisms of visual art's means of seduction? To what extent do you see your works as autonomous from their concerns?



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## WILLIAMS

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experiences which determine the uncanny are 1) when we are faced with a being whom we cannot be sure is inanimate or alive, mechanized or living; 2) the fear of losing sight, i.e., of not being able to trust our eyes for information and for recognizing the familiar; and 3) the fear of confronting one's own double, the *Doppelgänger*.

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Gilda Williams, 'Identity Twins. The Work of Wendy Murdo', *Wendy Murdo* [Salamanca, Spain: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1998] 33-43.

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