The Value of Self-Reflexivity for Learning: A Study of Self-Reflexive Practice in Photography Criticism

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Abstract

This study is an exploration of the learning value of self-reflexivity within practices of interpretation, undertaken in the context of photography criticism.

Reflexivity, understood in this study as the practice of making the researcher's presence explicit within a research-based interpretation, is an established part of research methodology in a number of disciplines, but is rarely employed in writing about photography and is seldom discussed in the discipline's theoretical literature. The study addresses this apparent 'gap' by exploring self-reflexivity's potential to produce metacognitive and other learning gains, and personal growth, both for researchers/practitioners of photography criticism and for readers/audiences of criticism.

The study has found that self-reflexivity based on critical self-reflection and disclosure can reveal the pervasive entanglement of thinking and feeling in critical interpretation, and the links between thinking/feeling and the researcher/practitioner's life history. These links, which indicate that criticality can have an affective and biographical basis, are not generally recognised explicitly in photography writing, and the findings support the case for a new, 'postcritical' form of criticism – one interested in subjectivity and the operations of feeling – that is beginning to emerge within the discipline and cognate fields.

More broadly, the study has developed an expanded conception of self-reflection as a mechanism for producing learning and growth when used within a self-reflexive interpretive framework. The study has found that by revealing links between thinking, feeling and life history, self-reflection can generate transformed, enriched and extended forms of understanding about photographs, ourselves and the world, and forms of personal growth, in such a way that suggests it can lead to a 'new' or largely unrecognised threshold concept, understood as the most powerful type of learning concept, within practices of criticism. The capacity of self-reflection to lead to alteration and enrichment of interpretation in fields such as visual culture seems to be underexplored in practical education research, and the study thus makes a significant contribution to reflective practice studies as well as to threshold concepts research, with direct implications for how critical studies curricula within arts-based higher education are designed and how the subject might be taught and learned.

The study was undertaken as a self-reflexive, practice-led research inquiry, first by the researcher (a practising photography critic and lecturer) working independently, and later

with a group of eight academic colleagues acting as research participants. To produce its findings, the study has pioneered an innovative nine-step protocol for engaging in self-reflexive interpretation. Practical guidelines and protocols for undertaking reflexive research seem to be rare in any field and are thought to be unprecedented in photography criticism and related disciplines. The study's self-reflexive analytic protocol therefore represents a substantial contribution to interpretive research methodology, as well as an effective practical learning tool that is ready to use in formal education settings and beyond. The protocol is presented here, however, as the first iteration of a methodological tool that is likely to continue to evolve with further use.

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I am enormously grateful to the eight research participants, all busy academic colleagues, who freely gave their time, emotional energy, personal stories and astute critical insights to the project, and contributed so crucially to whatever success it might be thought to have achieved.

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Chapter One. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study is an exploration of the learning value of a particular interpretive practice – self-reflexivity, based on critical self-reflection and disclosure – within the context of photography criticism. Self-reflexivity is examined in terms of its value for producing learning and growth: its capacity to generate transformed, enriched and extended forms of understanding about photographs and photography, ourselves and the world. The study investigates the learning impact of the practice both on researchers/practitioners of photography criticism, and on audiences of criticism.

In a number of academic disciplines, notably in the social sciences, reflexivity (including self-reflexivity) has formed an established part of mainstream research practice for some decades (Lumsden 2019). As defined by writers such as Finlay (2002), Walsh (2003), Pillow (2003) and Dean (2017), reflexivity serves to acknowledge the presence and entanglement of the researcher within their research, and its primary function is to provide an account of the process by which the research interpretation was constructed. Its role is both metacognitive for the researcher, and explanatory for the reader. In both respects, reflexivity serves to increase levels of understanding. The foundational claim and starting point of this study, however, is that reflexivity (including self-reflexivity) is rarely employed in critical writing about photography or the wider visual culture field, and is rarely discussed in the discipline's theoretical literature (Section 2.3 A). The study aims, in part, to address this apparent 'gap' in both practice and literature, by exploring the metacognitive and explanatory value of self-reflexivity as an interpretive practice in photography criticism.

The study means to do more, however, than just fill this 'reflexivity gap'. It seeks, additionally, to expand knowledge about the learning value of self-reflexivity based on critical self-reflection, by inquiring into a range of ideas relating to self-reflection, learning, growth and the influence of life history and emotions on critical thinking (Sections 2.3 B and 2.4), and examining them together for their potential to generate learning in the context of photography criticism.

The study addresses one broad research question, which will be examined from a number of angles. The question is:

- What is the value of self-reflexivity within critical interpretation for producing learning and growth?

This introductory chapter provides a framing for the project as a whole. Section 1.2 explains the study's disciplinary context, its basis in my own practice, and the genesis and development of the research idea. The aims, scope and focus of the study, and the theoretical framework that underpins it, are discussed in Section 1.3; and a self-reflexive positioning statement is provided in Section 1.4. The study's original contribution to knowledge is previewed in Section 1.5. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined in Section 1.6.

1.2 Context and Origin

This study of self-reflexivity in photography criticism has grown out of my own professional practice as a photography critic and senior lecturer in critical studies in arts-based UK higher education. Formerly an art photographer – and prior to that, a journalist and magazine editor – I have written critically about photography for over 15 years (for example, Denison 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2018, 2021) and taught students studying visual culture disciplines throughout the period.

Terms such as 'critic', 'criticism', 'critical studies' and 'visual culture' are used in different ways by different writers, so it is important to clarify how the terms will be used in this study. By 'criticism' I refer to the academic practice of writing interpretively and evaluatively about cultural artefacts such as photographs – the practice of *making sense* of them as communicative and affective visual texts. Following Belsey (2016: 1), I take the business of criticism to be that of providing answers to the question: 'what do you think of it [this photograph, this artwork]?' Photography criticism is one of a number of cognate disciplines (such as art criticism, film criticism, literary criticism) which make sense of cultural artefacts in their respective fields in related ways. 'Visual culture' refers, here, following Rampley (2005), to the broad family of artefacts and practices whose main mode

of apprehension is visual; a field which includes photography, alongside such practices as art, graphic design, advertising, fashion and film. A 'critic' is, straightforwardly, someone who practises criticism, and 'critical studies' is the academic subject concerned with teaching and learning practices of criticism as well as furthering understanding of the field.

The practice of criticism is therefore central to the academic subject of critical studies; it is the main object that is studied. At the same time, criticism is necessarily entwined with the objects of criticism (photographs, artworks, and other cultural forms). It is through the practice of criticism that the *meaning* and *value* of the objects of criticism can be articulated; and one of the principal ways in which the 'sense' we make of the objects of criticism can grow is when practices of criticism evolve.

The field to which this study makes a contribution thus has a dual quality, integrating the professional/academic practice of writing photography criticism and the educational practice of teaching students ways and means of practising criticism themselves. Like many who teach in arts-based higher education in the UK, I am a practitioner-lecturer, teaching students about forms of practice in a way that draws substantially from my own professional experience as well as from my wider knowledge of the theory and practice of criticism. The innovative model of self-reflexive criticism developed within this study consequently has two intertwined potential real-world uses: as a novel professional/academic method for practising criticism capable of generating enriched forms of understanding and growth, and a new form of critical practice with high learning potency for critical studies lecturers to teach.

This research project did not begin with an intention to extend and improve the practice of criticism by exploring the value of self-reflexivity within it – although that has turned out to be one of its two main aims (Section 1.3). The project originated, rather, in my desire to refine my own professional understanding of criticism, as a practice in which I am engaged and the academic subject that I teach. My original intention had been to examine 'threshold concepts' in photography criticism as defined by Meyer and Land (2003) – the most powerful learning concepts in a discipline which offer, once grasped, 'leaps of understanding' about how the discipline can be understood. The project evolved, however, soon after my studies began as part of the EdD programme in the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences at BCU. There I encountered a number of ideas with which I was unfamiliar which derive from fields outside visual culture – including reflexivity/self-reflexivity. It was the shock of that encounter between different disciplinary fields that produced an epiphanic insight for me about the existence of a 'reflexivity gap' in photography criticism referred to in Section 1.1.

The study therefore has an interdisciplinary character, in which an idea established in a number of disciplines is explored in the context of another where it seems to be largely unrecognised. As I pursued the research into self-reflexivity, I saw that the practice could be conceived and investigated as a powerful learning mechanism; and eventually began to recognise that it might itself possibly give access to a ‘new’ threshold concept in photography criticism (Section 2.4 C). In time, then, the project came back full circle to where it began, but now with a more potent sense of purpose and clarity of focus.

1.3 Aims, Scope and Focus

The study has two broad aims. First, it aims to make a significant contribution to reflective practice and threshold concepts research, in a such a way as to lead to enhanced learning practices in education settings and beyond. It draws together a range of ideas about self-reflexivity, self-reflection, tacit knowledge, self-realisation, emotional response, background experience and critical interpretation that are rarely considered together explicitly in the education or research methodology literature. In exploring them in the context of photography criticism, the study hopes to clarify and shed new light on the complex and potentially transformative learning value of critical self-reflection within a self-reflexive interpretive framework, as a tool for life-long learning.

Second, the study aims to contribute to extending and improving photography criticism, as a practice undertaken within education as well as in academic/professional settings. It does so by exploring, perhaps for the first time in a systematic way, self-reflexivity’s capacity to produce transformed and enriched understanding of photographs, photography, ourselves and the world. In helping elucidate self-reflexivity’s potential in these ways, the study hopes to contribute to the evolution of the discipline in line with a ‘postcritical’ approach to critical practice, interested in subjectivity and emotion, that is beginning to emerge within the field.

Both aims are served by uncovering the power of self-reflection to generate advances in understanding and learning when used as part of self-reflexive interpretation. This thesis is presented for an EdD and, following writers such as Dewey (1910, 1916), the study takes a broad view of education as the academic field and cultural practice concerned with learning

and growth. For Dewey, education and growth are synonymous, a unitary developmental process representing the work of a lifetime (1916: 49ff). The purpose of formal education is ‘to insure the continuance of education by organizing the powers that insure growth’ (op cit: 51); and the principal means to do so is through cultivating habits of ‘critical examination and inquiry’ (1910: 18) including the capacity to self-reflect on ‘unconscious assumptions’ (op cit: 75). Learning and growth are, therefore, for Dewey, self-actualised life-long processes driven by critical reflection and self-reflection, that can be undertaken as effectively outside institutions as within them, provided the learner has sufficient inculcated habits of reflective criticality.

Accordingly, this study focuses not so much on the mechanics of classroom teaching, but on the ways in which researchers/practitioners can experience self-actualised forms of life-long learning through self-reflexive engagement with their materials, inside or outside institutions; and the ways in which readers/audiences can experience learning through engagement with self-reflexive criticism, similarly inside or outside institutions. The terms ‘researchers’ and ‘readers/audiences’, as understood by this study, refer to adult learners working at all levels within education settings (including academics, postgraduate researchers, undergraduates, and learners in adult education) as well as those outside education who engage critically with photography (including critics, curators, gallery-goers and the general public). All are potentially learners, who might learn more (as this study contends) through self-reflexive engagement with the images they encounter. The researchers involved in this study – the study’s participants and I – are all academics and/or practising critics, and the study’s findings apply specifically to those who took part; and yet they are suggestive for a much wider potential community of researchers, readers, learners and citizens who engage with photography and have a will to learn.

The practical contribution of the research to education, learning and criticism lies in its providing a ready-to-use nine-step protocol for researchers, learners and practitioners to employ while undertaking self-reflexive acts of interpretation (such as writing critical reviews, essays, theses and other scholarly texts), a rationale for doing so, and a body of evidence for the complex and powerful forms of learning and enrichment that can be gained as a result. Although the study does not focus on pedagogy, its implications for how self-reflexive interpretive practices might be nurtured within classroom settings are discussed in Section 6.5, providing pointers towards further work that might be carried out by education researchers to build on this study in the future.

The study has been undertaken as an experiential form of research, and examines participants' accounts of their perceptual experiences of learning while undertaking self-reflexive, practice-led research in photography criticism. Following writers such as Piaget (1963), Boud (1995) and Illeris (2007), the study understands learning as a fundamentally constructivist process of 'internal mental acquisition' (Illeris op cit: 22), a felt experience which can be reflected on and assessed by the subject who experiences it (Section 3.2 A). The study's data consist, therefore, of what participants write and say about their experiences of learning, which are then interpreted to produce synthesised findings about the impact of self-reflexivity on the transformation or enrichment of their understanding, as will be discussed further in Section 3.3 B.

The theoretical framework underpinning the study has a number of strands. The deployment and exploration of self-reflexivity assumes an interpretivist epistemology, in which sense-making is taken to be historically, culturally and perspectivally situated, as will be discussed in Section 2.2. The use and examination of self-reflection on past life experiences, values and beliefs as a pathway to transformation and growth assumes a critical realist ontology of subjectivity that understands the human subject as an agent with continuity across time (also Section 2.2). The investigation of self-reflection as a practice that can lead to reconstructions of how we think assumes a constructivist and transformative model of learning (Piaget 1963, Section 2.3 B; Mezirow 1991a, Section 2.4 A); while the study's conception of learning as a life-long, self-actualised process of growth derives not only from Piaget but also from Dewey (1910, 1916; see above), Bakhtin (1981) and the existentialist trend in the philosophy of education (eg, Freire 1970, White 2006, Pring 2015) (Sections 2.4 A and D). Finally, the study's approach to photography criticism can be associated with an emerging postcritical model which seeks to enrich the dominant 'cultural' critical paradigm with a recognition of the significance and value of subjectivity, biographical narrative and emotion within critical interpretation (Sections 2.3 A and B). The several strands of this framework will be revisited repeatedly as they are threaded through the thesis in the chapters that follow.

1.4 Self-Reflexive Positioning

As this is a study of self-reflexivity, and one which I have attempted to carry out in a self-reflexive manner (Sections 3.2 A and 3.3 B), it seems appropriate, in the interests of 'full disclosure' (Leavy 2009: 20; Section 2.4 E), to include a short autobiographical statement about the position I have taken towards the topic and its basis in my own lived experience. This will be done in as concise a manner as possible, as recommended by writers such as Pels (2000) and Finlay (2002) (Section 2.2), to give readers a sense of 'who is speaking' within this text, but without overloading it with personal detail. What follows is a sketch of my attitude towards life-long learning and growth, the emotional properties of photographs, and the social value of tolerance and mutual understanding.

My conception of self-reflexivity as a potential aid to life-long learning, rather than a practice to be considered only in formal education settings, follows from my own experience of life-long learning, and how I believe it has repeatedly brought enrichment to my life. I am now in my 50s. From the time I left university, I have tried to live according to a kind of existentialist 'project' (Sartre 1946, Cox 2011): to pursue my intellectual and creative interests, rather than build a career in a more conventional sense, and to create material works (writing, photographs) that can be placed in the world, to be experienced (and perhaps be seen as having some value) by others. I have switched professional direction several times, in pursuit of new interests: from broadsheet journalism to writing about archaeology, to making photographs, writing about photographs and teaching critical practice and theory. Each shift has brought the need to master a new body of knowledge. I have always had a book, or several books, open at hand. My curiosity was certainly fostered by formal education, where strong foundations were laid, but most of what I have learned has, I believe, been self-actualised. My career shifts have not always, perhaps, been the wisest from a financial point of view; but they have undoubtedly brought psychic enrichment and personal growth. A similar path of life-long learning is exactly what I would wish for others, and seek to nurture in my own students.

My desire to explore self-reflexivity as a key to unlocking a new, improved form of writing about photography, in line with a postcritical orientation (Section 2.3 B), derives from the *love* I feel often for photographs, and which first drew me to photographs and serious picture-making, aged about 30, while I was still working professionally as a journalist. The photographs that move me most strongly, I find mesmerising, intriguing, both

provocative and simultaneously calming; offering a place to dream myself into, regardless of style or subject matter. When I made photographs for exhibition myself, during my 30s and 40s, which I felt 'worked' as photographs, the emotional force, for me, was multiplied. Coming later to criticism from this background, I have always felt that the dominant mainstream approach of deconstructing and critiquing photographs as cultural-political-ideological texts (Section 2.3 A), although illuminating in many ways, was nonetheless missing much of the value of what photographs *are*, and what they can *do*: neglecting the immense affective force they can exert on a viewer.

As I have reflected during this project on the potential social value of self-reflexivity, through its impact on readers and audiences, I have been most drawn to comments in the literature (Section 2.4 E), and to elements in the study's data (Section 5.3 G), that suggest it can produce emotional connections between people, mutual understanding, and tolerance of opposing positions. Politically I am a centrist, and I have faith that, in most situations, people of goodwill should be able to reach agreement, or at least come to accept each other's points of view without rancour. I also trust that most people do act, for the most part, with good intentions. The polarisation of contemporary western culture (Malik 2019), and the vilification of people with views that differ from our own, particularly on social media, distresses me greatly. In the most divisive political issues of recent years – such as the UK Brexit debate of 2016 – I have generally seen value in the arguments of both sides. I try to avoid conflict in my personal life. Part of the impetus for exploring reflexivity, for me, was to see if it might be capable of acting as a force for good in the world; a way for people to see each other more clearly, and in a more sympathetic light.

These personal factors have undoubtedly influenced my decision to undertake this project, my shaping of the research design, and what I perceived in the data. At the risk of undermining the 'authority effect' of my own writing (Miller 1991: 7), I offer these personal observations to avoid replicating the concealments found in other non-reflexive academic and critical writing (Section 2.3 A), and to emphasise at the outset that this thesis is an interpretivist account that is, inevitably, coloured by the perspective of its author. By disclosing something of my perspective, my hope is that readers will be able to perceive the nature (and limitations) of my argument with greater clarity.

1.5 Contribution to Knowledge (Preview)

The project's original contribution to knowledge will be fully discussed in Section 6.3. However, to provide some signposts for the reader, it can be previewed here. The study's contribution draws from the various ways in which it finds answers to the research question, and takes three main forms.

A. First, it relates to findings about the pervasive entanglement of thinking, feeling and life history in critical interpretation, as revealed by the self-reflexive process. These links are not generally recognised in photography criticism, and the findings support the case for a new, postcritical form of criticism – one interested in subjectivity and the operations of feeling – that is beginning to emerge within the discipline and cognate fields.

B. Second, it concerns the development of an expanded conception of self-reflection as a mechanism for generating learning and growth, when used within a self-reflexive interpretive framework. The study has found that, in revealing links between thinking, feeling and life history, self-reflection can generate transformed and enriched understandings of research materials, and personal growth, in a way that seems to lead to a 'new' or under-recognised threshold concept within practices of criticism.

C. Third, it involves the development of an innovative practical method (or protocol) for engaging in self-reflexive research, pioneered in this project and found to be effective for generating multiple forms of learning gain.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the Literature Review in Chapter Two places the study in its research context, and sets the agenda for the chapters that follow. The ground that will be covered includes: the general rationale for self-reflexivity, and the relationship between self-reflexivity and self-reflection within research practice; evidence for the current

‘reflexivity gap’ in photography criticism; scholarly interest in the relationship between thinking, feeling and life history; and various models for conceptualising connections between critical reflection, self-reflexivity and learning, including transformative learning, self-reflection and tacit knowledge, threshold concepts, the attainment of personal growth, and the learning value of self-reflexivity for audiences.

Chapter Three discusses the study’s Methodology and Research Design. It presents the rationale for engaging in practice-led research, both on my own and in collaboration with participants. It introduces the study’s self-reflexive analytic protocol; and discusses the methods employed and decisions taken at both the pilot stage and the subsequent main stage of the project. The chapter covers research ethics; and it closes with an examination of the study’s approach to using reflexive thematic analysis to make sense of the data.

Chapter Four covers the pilot stage of the project, Research Stage One, in which I engaged in self-reflexive criticism of four photographs working on my own. The chapter presents the dataset from this stage of the research, discusses it thematically and draws interim conclusions about the learning value of self-reflexivity in critical interpretation. The self-reflexive protocol is examined for its effectiveness in generating learning gain.

Chapter Five examines the main stage of the study, Research Stage Two, in which participants and I undertook self-reflexive criticism of one further photograph, before engaging in interaction and dialogue. The dataset from this stage is presented, discussed thematically, and a further set of interim conclusions is drawn about self-reflexivity’s learning potential and the effectiveness of the protocol. The chapter covers the impact of self-reflexivity on audiences as well as on practitioners/researchers.

Chapter Six presents the study’s overall conclusions, discussed in terms of how they have addressed the research question, met the project’s aims and produced an original contribution to knowledge. The study’s strengths and limitations are examined; and the chapter ends with a consideration of the study’s implications for practice, research and education in the future.

Chapter Two. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aims of this study are to contribute to education research and practice, by exploring the potential of critical self-reflection to produce learning and growth as part of a self-reflexive interpretive methodology in photography criticism; and in doing so, to help extend and improve the practice of criticism, as discussed in Section 1.3. What, then, is the exploration based on? What in the literature justifies it, and suggests it is worth undertaking?

There are three broad areas of literature which feed into this. First, there is qualitative research methodology literature, which discusses the well-established concept of reflexivity as an approach to meaning-making which recognises the presence of the researcher within their research and provides clarity about the perspective and limitations of any given interpretation. This study's understanding of self-reflexivity – a term used in different ways across research practice – and of the relationship between self-reflexivity and self-reflection will be clarified. This material is discussed in Section 2.2.

Second, and in counterbalance to the first, there is the literature of photography and visual culture criticism, in which reflexivity (including self-reflexivity) appears to be rarely deployed in practice or discussed in theory. In this field, self-reflexivity's potential as a tool of interpretive nuancing seems under-explored: a 'gap' which the study seeks to address. The photography literature also indicates a re-emerging interest in emotional responses after years of scholarly neglect, as part of a wider movement towards an emotionally-aware 'postcritical' form of critical practice, which the under-used metacognitive processes of self-reflexivity seem well suited to serve. The photography literature, including this study's claim of a 'reflexivity gap' in the field, is discussed in Section 2.3. The concept of a postcritical approach to critical practice will be elucidated.

Third, there is literature concerned directly or indirectly with learning (drawn from education research and learning theory, research methodology studies, cultural theory, social science and autoethnography) which suggests that critical self-reflection, when used as part of a self-reflexive interpretive practice, can potentially do more than just account for the basis

of our claims, but can also generate additional forms of learning and growth. The literature indicates that self-reflection's potential learning value can be divided into five themes: (1) transformative learning; (2) tacit knowledge; (3) threshold concepts; (4) self-realisation; and (5) the learning value for readers or audiences. The education literature will be discussed in Section 2.4.

The literature review as a whole serves to indicate the fields of academic research to which this study hopes to make a contribution. Within education studies, it aims to contribute to reflective practice and threshold concepts research, by indicating ways in which critical self-reflection can produce transformative learning gains and life-long opportunities for growth within a self-reflexive interpretive practice. More broadly, it contributes to qualitative research methodology by introducing an effective practical method for engaging in self-reflexive interpretation (discussed in detail in Section 3.2 C); and to critical theory and practice within visual culture, by revealing and modelling the interpretive transformations and enrichment that can be gained through engaging in a self-reflexive, postcritical form of photography criticism.

2.2 Reflexivity and Reflection in Research Practice

Reflexivity has formed part of qualitative research methodology in the social sciences since the 1970s and has long been accepted as an essential part of the research process (Finlay 2002, Walsh 2003, Pillow 2003). The literature on reflexivity is vast. Indeed, as Pillow noted in 2003, reflexivity is invoked in 'almost every qualitative research book or article' (2003: 176) and it remains ubiquitous in social science research (Lumsden 2019). Reflexivity emerged out of the 'crisis of representation' in the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s (Pillow 2003, Lumsden 2019), when researchers began to argue that objectivity is unattainable in interpretation, and that all accounts are constructed, influenced by the researcher's prior knowledge, expectations, social positioning and values, and by the context in which the research is undertaken (Lincoln and Guba 2016). For writers such as Finlay (2002), Pillow (2003), Pink (2013), Dean (2017) and others, research interpretations are inevitably entangled with the perspective, actions and context of the researcher. Following from this 'interpretivist' epistemological paradigm, reflexivity serves as a form of

metacognition, a 'thoughtful, conscious self-awareness … [of] how we actively construct our knowledge' (Finlay 2002: 532). A reflexive interpretation is one in which these influences are brought to the surface in the research report. As Dean writes, reflexivity has been taken to be 'a way for researchers to account for the means by which they arrive at a particular "reading" of data' (2017: 111).

Understood as the process by which the researcher's presence is made visible in their interpretation, reflexivity requires both self-examination and explicit disclosure. Self-examination produces a nuanced understanding of our research materials as they appear from our particular perspective; and explicit disclosure serves to 'legitimise and validate' an interpretation by positioning it overtly in its context of origin (Pillow 2003: 176). For these reasons reflexivity is widely regarded as 'a theoretical, and even moral, imperative' in interpretivist research (Lynch 2000: 45); an approach that ensures both nuanced, improved understanding and honest disclosure of the limitations and partiality of one's meaning claims.

In addition to its role in legitimising interpretive research, reflexivity has also come to be seen as a means by which a multiplicity of voices can be heard in the research literature – including those of writers from marginalised social positions whose viewpoints have often struggled to find expression within the Western academy. For this reason, over recent decades many scholars have advocated taking a personal, autobiographically-grounded approach to making sense of the world from the critical perspectives of feminism (eg, Cixous 1981, Pollock 1988, Miller 1991, Thornham 1999), queer theory (eg, Sedgwick 1990, Bornstein 1994, Koestenbaum 2013), postcolonial studies (eg, Wa Thiong'o 1981, Achebe 1988) and intersectionality (eg, hooks 1992, O'Grady 2003). As a result of writers taking a self-disclosing, reflexive approach, dominant trends within academic sense-making have often been challenged, complicated and enriched by a transparently and illuminatingly diverse range of critical points of view.

The term 'reflexivity', however, is used in different ways in the literature. Within interpretive disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, the term is sometimes employed for a linked but somewhat different purpose to those outlined above. For some scholars, a reflexive approach is one that cultivates self-awareness in order to manage or limit subjective, perspectival and contextual influences. For Bourdieu, reflexivity is a device for 'objectifying the subject of objectification' (2000: 10; Deer 2014), a tool for controlling researchers' tendencies to interpret data in terms of their own preconceptions. Felski, also, writing in the context of literary studies in the US, observes that 'a culture of critical self-reflexivity … reigns in present-day humanities departments' (2015: 134); but its goal is not to

highlight researchers' diverse perspectives but, echoing Bourdieu, to 'objectify one's own thought … to puncture the illusion of any spontaneous or immediate understanding' (2015: 135). Malpas and Wake argue, similarly, in the introduction to their textbook on critical theory, that reflexive criticality is a tool of self-knowledge and self-control, serving to 'question the legitimacy of common sense' including our own implicit beliefs (2006: viii). Reflexivity, in this sense, is employed to recognise and limit 'bias' and set our thinking in a wider cultural context. From the interpretivist viewpoint adopted by this study, however, such a depersonalising approach represents, as Pink writes, 'only a token and cosmetic engagement with reflexivity that wrongly supposes subjectivity could (or should) be avoided or eradicated' (2013: 36). As Bochner and Ellis write, from the perspective of autoethnography, the researcher, 'a flesh and blood person who is alive, active and feeling' (2016: 57), is inevitably part of their data, and is a presence to be identified and brought to the surface rather than hidden or controlled. This study follows these writers in taking a similar view.

Alongside reflexivity, 'self-reflection' is another key term used in this study. Like reflexivity, the concept of reflection is understood in different ways in the literature, as discussed in Marshall's (2019) systematic review. In one strand, reflection describes ruminative mental processing of complex information, undertaken in order to make sense of it (Jay and Johnson 2002; Moon 2004, 2006). In another strand, seen frequently in research in practical disciplines, self-reflection (reflection on oneself) is concerned chiefly with improving professional performance, through critical examination of past and present actions, decisions and assumptions (Schön 1983, Kinsella 2009, Johns 2013, Brookfield 2017, Ali 2022). In a third strand, self-reflection focuses inwardly on presuppositions and other underpinnings of our thinking, with a view to understanding – and, if appropriate, changing – how we interpret ourselves and the world (Dewey 1910, Mezirow 1991a, Rogers 2001). These strands are not mutually exclusive and often overlap in the literature. However, in this study, self-reflection is primarily understood in terms of the third conception. Self-reflection, understood this way, is an integral component of self-reflexive interpretive practice, and is a precondition for it. While reflexivity is understood as an *approach* to sense-making that recognises the entanglement of the thinker and the thought, self-reflection is the *thinking process* that produces self-awareness – of ourselves and our relation to the world – which enables us to write ourselves reflexively into our accounts of our research materials.

Within reflexive practices of interpretation, reflection can be carried out in relation to a range of meaning-making mechanisms, including the researcher's personal values, beliefs

and interests; the relationship between the researcher and participants; the methodology, theoretical basis and practical arrangements guiding the research; the expectations of the discipline; and the broader social and cultural context, all of which can have an impact on the interpretation (Finlay 2002, Walsh 2003, Dean 2017). This study focuses on the first category, self-reflection on personal values, beliefs and interests (producing 'self-reflexivity'), because of its potential for shedding light on the emotional aspects of sense-making emerging as a new interest in photography criticism, to be discussed in Section 2.3, and its centrality to the forms of learning and growth that will be discussed in Section 2.4 – transformative learning (Mezirow 1991a), mobilisation of tacit knowledge (Polanyi 2009), self-realisation (Bakhtin 1981), and the attainment of a 'threshold concept' in criticism (Meyer and Land 2003). Moreover, for Pels, self-reflexivity penetrates further towards the core of meaning-making than all other modes of reflexive practice, engaging with the 'inner ring' or most fundamental set of influences underlying how we make sense. In doing so, self-reflexivity 'reimports' into critical consciousness the 'much-neglected ... psychobiography of knowledge' (2000: 21).

Self-reflexivity, however, is contested in the literature, with debate focusing on three main areas of contention. The first relates to function and aesthetics, and concerns the belief that self-reflexivity can lead to an unbalanced emphasis on the researcher and neglect of the research object. Lynch, whose observation that reflexivity is widely seen as 'a theoretical, and even moral, imperative' (2000: 45) was noted above, writes that in practice reflexivity can often appear pretentious, tedious and silly (op cit: 47). The risk, however, is recognised by scholars advocating reflexivity. Finlay argues that provided the researcher maintains 'primary focus' on the research materials, using self-referencing only where elucidation is required, the metacognitive and explanatory benefits are retained while bypassing the risk of narcissism (2002: 542). Pels proposes a pragmatic self-reflexive methodology of 'one step up', in which the researcher chooses to disclose one element of self-reference only to 'display the narrative's hermeneutic point of departure' while avoiding the risk of 'reflexive skyscrapers reaching into the clouds' (2000: 4). This study pays close attention to such self-disciplining tactics in its research design, discussed in Chapter Three.

The second area of contention relates to epistemology, and concerns the perceived problem of how much we can 'know' about ourselves. Cutcliffe (2003), drawing from psychoanalytic conceptions of the unconscious associated with Freud (1979) and others, argues that the self is not fully transparent to the self and that self-reflexivity is therefore untrustworthy (see also Gemignani 2017). The objection presupposes that self-reflexivity requires access to the unconscious to be useful. However, in most self-reflexive studies,

including this one, self-reflexivity concerns itself with *conscious* actions, motivations, beliefs, values, feelings or memories. For psychoanalysis, what we 'know' consciously about ourselves is only a superficial understanding. However, in terms of constructivist learning theory, what we know and value consciously, or think we know and value, is not regarded as an insignificant form of knowledge but forms the basis of all further developments in understanding (Piaget 1963, Bruner 1960, Mezirow 1991a). It follows, from a learning point of view, that it is valuable to interrogate what we think we know and value to make better sense of our interpretations of new experiences.

Advocates of self-reflexivity recognise that self-examination does not provide 'knowledge' in a positivist sense, and that the data of our memories and self-reflections are not perceived directly. Our perception of ourselves is mediated by our meaning schemes; and whatever we 'see' in ourselves is influenced by our preconceptions and blind spots. Our accounts are therefore limited, partial and open to revision (Pillow 2003, Borgdorff 2011, Lumsden 2019). However, this does not render them without value as a basis for developing further understanding. They stand or fall as any interpretations do: in terms of their coherence, plausibility and correspondence to the data of our present and remembered experiences as we currently perceive them (Bruner 1996).

Self-reflexive accounts may be difficult, or impossible, for a third-party reader to verify independently. The trustworthiness of self-reflexive research thus acquires an additional nuance: trusting the report involves trusting the researcher. Self-reflexive research can only function within a community of trust, and its unverifiability places an expectation of rigorous honesty on the researcher (Gray and Malins 2004, Walsh 2003, Griffiths 2011). Subjective forms of research tell stories but they must not 'make things up', as Bochner and Ellis insist (2016: 244). Following these principles, my own self-reflexive accounts in this study were produced in a spirit of full disclosure, and I trusted that my participants' accounts were generated in the same way, as will be discussed further in Sections 3.2 D and 3.3 B.

The third area of contention relates to ontology and conceptions of subjectivity and the self. A humanistic conception of the subject as an agent with continuity across time is a prerequisite for self-reflection (Bruner 1986, Archer 2000). If the 'I' who experienced 'x' *then* is the same 'I' who is thinking about my experience of 'x' *now*, a continuous individual subject is required. This position, however, has been challenged by the postmodern view associated chiefly with Foucault (1970, 1979) and Lacan (1979) that subjectivity is fluid and discontinuous, constituted by shifting patterns of discourse, and that the continuous human subject is a delusion. Reflexive researchers adopting this view (eg, Short et al 2013,

Gemignani 2017) argue that reflexivity can legitimately engage with discourses and contexts but not with a personal 'inner world' of commitments, intentions and memory.

One of the major achievements of postmodern theory has been to overturn the Romantic notion of the autonomous individual as an entirely free, self-determining source of thought and action. It is widely accepted across disciplines, including photography and visual culture, that individuals are historically and culturally situated, and our thinking – including our thinking about who 'we' are – is influenced by, and constructed out of, a repertoire of ideas presented to us through the culture in which we live (Burgin 1982, Tagg 1988, Sturken and Cartwright 2001). Every text, according to Barthes (1977c), is a 'tissue of quotations'; and in accordance with Derrida's maxim, 'there is nothing that lies outside of text' (2016 [1974]: 177), the self is a text like any other. The crisis of representation, referred to above, emerged from these same theoretical roots.

Nonetheless, for many scholars of reflexivity, an acceptance of our historical and cultural situatedness does not preclude a belief in continuous human agency. Aull Davies, for example, adopts a critical realist position, taking the view that human subjects are neither fully independent nor passively determined by society but exist in 'an iterative and naturally reflexive feedback relationship' with it (2008: 19). Drawing from Mead's (1934) distinction between active subjectivity ('I') and the constructed self ('me'), she argues that the self is constructed through language but exists in a constant process of emerging through an 'ongoing inner conversation' driven by an active 'I' (op cit: 25). Chang takes a similar view. The self, she writes, is a hybrid of 'saturated self' (the cultural 'me') and 'protean self' (the active 'I') which is constantly adjusting to cultural conditions (2016: 24). Archer writes that the continuous sense of self, unique to each individual, is 'ontologically inviolable', grounded securely in neurobiological evidence of our 'durable powers of recognition, our lasting and distinctive eidetic memories and the indelibility of our performative skills' (2000: 3). For Bruner, the 'common sense' view of the self as continuous agent is fundamental to institutionalised systems of law, morality and citizenship, underpins cognitive psychology and constructivist epistemology, and should not be jettisoned:

> We cannot, even given our most imaginative efforts, construct a concept of self that does not impute some causal influence of prior mental states on later ones … We are obliged to experience ourselves as invariant across circumstances and continuous across time … And we see others in the same way (1996: 15–16).

This study follows these scholars in adopting a similar position.

2.3 Reflexivity, Thinking, Feeling, and Photography Criticism

The rationale for engaging in self-reflexive research, as a practice of examining and disclosing the basis of our meaning claims, is well grounded in the literature, as outlined above. Self-reflexivity seems to be rarely employed in photography criticism, however, and is seldom discussed in the discipline's theoretical literature. This study seeks to address this shortage of research and 'gap' in practice, and explores whether the metacognitive and explanatory benefits of self-reflexivity claimed in other fields can be experienced in photography criticism too. The basis for the study's claim of a shortage of self-reflexivity in this field will be set out in Section 2.3 A.

Moreover, the research investigates whether self-reflexivity can shed light on emotional responses as well as meaning claims. A new interest in emotional responses is re-emerging in photography studies after years of neglect (Brown and Phu 2014), as part of a wider 'postcritical' movement within critical practice (Felski 2015), but research on the subject remains undeveloped. Part of this study's original contribution lies in its exploration of self-reflexivity as an approach capable of illuminating links between thinking, feeling and the researcher's life history. The literature that suggests such links are plausible, and that the research potentially matters within photography studies, is discussed in Section 2.3 B.

A. Self-reflexivity in photography criticism

Before discussing the shortage of self-reflexivity in photography criticism, it is important to establish why we might expect it to be present. The justification for reflexivity as a 'theoretical and even moral imperative' (Lynch 2000: 45) in interpretive research was given in Section 2.2. Is photography criticism interpretive? In one respect the meanings of photographs are not matters of interpretation but can be established positively as matters of fact. In semiotic terminology, a photograph has an 'indexical' quality as a sign because of its mechanical nature: there is a direct causal link between the object appearing in a photograph

(the signifier) and the object in real life (both signified and referent). The signified/referent causes the signifier in much the same way as, with a footprint, a foot causes the print (Scott 1999). It is in this indexical sense that Barthes refers to a photograph as a 'message without a code' (Barthes 1977a, 1977b), an object whose 'power of authentication' is its defining characteristic (Barthes 2000 [1982]: 89). The photograph's indexical status as evidence is entrenched in structures of state administration (passport photographs), criminal justice (stills from CCTV), journalism (news photographs) and other cultural practices; and as Jussim and Lindquist-Cock note, for all its interpretive uncertainty, a photograph – fraudulent images aside – can always be read for factual information (1985: 157). In this denotational sense a photograph refers to a reality outside itself, in terms of which descriptive statements can be either right or wrong.

However, in terms of its connotational meanings and affective force, a critical account of a photograph is, within mainstream practice, firmly accepted to be an interpretation. Meanings are not taken to be fixed and singular, capable of disclosure as objective truths. Contemporary critical theory, drawing from the same range of 20th century movements that led to the crisis of representation in social sciences, has long understood meanings to be multiple and unstable, dependent on the viewer's knowledge, expectations and value perspective and the contexts in which the work is seen (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, Carter and Geczy 2006, Wells 2009). An image may be coded by image-makers with an intended meaning and an implicit ideological/value position (Barthes 1977b), but a viewer/critic is expected to engage actively with its intended messaging as a critical 'reader' (Barthes 1977c, Hall 1993). The mainstream practice of photography criticism consists, essentially, in researching an image's context of production, decoding its implicit ideological/value position, and providing a critical response, from the critic's standpoint, in terms of the context in which the work is seen and the discourses that the image puts into play (Tagg 1988, Solomon-Godeau 1991, Sturken and Cartwright 2001). It has thus long been understood that critics produce interpretations in terms of their own situated and value-laden critical perspective.

Responding from one's own perspective, however, is not the same as being self-reflexive, which requires the additional steps of self-examination and explicit disclosure of the assumptions and values that underlie our position, as outlined in Section 2.2. Self-reflexivity in this sense plays only a small part in writing about photography. A negative claim of this sort is hard to demonstrate succinctly. My understanding of the paucity of self-reflexivity in criticism comes largely from my own immersion in the field. As a critic, I am

aware that self-reflexivity is neither requested nor expected by editors, and it has played as small a role in my own writing as in the writing of others. However, if the shortage cannot be 'proven' fully, it can be indicated by representative sampling as follows.

First, photographic theory texts. Three widely-used texts, published over a span of 20 years, are Clarke (1997), Wells (2009), and Bate (2016). All three address the question of how we can and should make sense of photography. None mentions the term 'reflexivity'; nor do any of the authors disclose themselves self-reflexively in their interpretations. Second, visual culture theory texts. Three widely-used texts are: Evans and Hall (1999), Sturken and Cartwright (2001), and Mirzoeff (2016). None mentions reflexivity in relation to interpretation; nor do any of the authors disclose themselves self-reflexively. The term 'reflexivity' is found, among these texts, only in Sturken and Cartwright, but it is used with a different meaning, referring not to critical practice but to a form of *creative* practice in which the medium is used to comment on itself (see, for example, their glossary of terms, op cit: 364). Indeed, this restrictive use of reflexivity to denote only a mode of self-conscious creative practice is commonplace across photography literature (eg, Jussim 1989, Solomon-Godeau 1991, Malcolm 1997).

Third, journal articles. Searches carried out on 31 January 2019 for articles with keywords 'photography' or 'criticism' and 'reflexivity' in the title produced the following results. Using the Art Full Text database: no results. Using the JSTOR database: no results for 'photography and reflexivity', and seven for 'criticism and reflexivity' but none of these related to visual culture. A search using the same terms with the Summon search engine on 26 November 2019 produced one result for 'criticism and reflexivity', but the article did not relate to visual culture. These searches cannot be taken as definitive demonstrations of a void, but they appear indicative of a severe shortage.

Literature that addresses reflexivity and learning in photography or art criticism is equally hard to find. A search, for example, with the Summon search engine on 25 November 2021 for articles with 'reflexivity', 'education' or 'learning', and 'art criticism' or 'critical' in the title produced no results relating to visual culture; while a search on the terms 'reflexivity', 'education' or 'learning', and 'art' produced a number of texts on learning in the context of art as a creative practice, but none relating to critical practice.

Discussion of reflexivity and learning in art criticism is not entirely absent from the literature. Ryan (2014), a paper discovered by chance in a general search for articles on reflexivity and self-reflection in qualitative research, advocates self-reflective engagement with art for the development of critical self-questioning and transformative self-awareness:

> It is in the reflective awareness of self in relation to this abstracted human activity [art practice] that we begin the inner dialogue of clarifying our prominent satisfactions or dissatisfactions with our own life. We can notice in ourselves similar desires or characteristics or fears or attitudes and start to weigh up whether these are worth hanging on to or need to be changed or examined (op cit: 13).

Ryan's emphasis is less on self-reflexive interpretation of art than transformative personal growth, but it resonates with this study, as will be discussed further in Section 2.4 A. Ryan's paper shows that this study's interest in the potential learning gains to be made from self-reflexive critical engagement with art is not without precedent.

Self-reflexive writing seems therefore to be rare in photography criticism, but there are nonetheless exceptions. The best-known example is perhaps Barthes (1982), a celebrated text in which photography theory is developed on the basis of a narrative of personal loss. A few other examples exist where writers have taken an autobiographical approach to writing about photography (eg, Hill 2005, Chandler 2007, Campt 2012). Self-reflexivity figures in the specialist field of photo-based autoethnography (eg, Spence 1986, Kuhn 2002); and photographs are inevitably discussed from a personal perspective in illustrated autobiographies. However, in critical writing about photography *per se*, self-reflexivity seems in short supply.

The rarity of reflexivity in visual culture writing is noted by Rose in *Visual Methodologies* (2016), a widely-used textbook. Rose emphasises the importance of reflexivity for a 'critical visual methodology' but comments that, outside social science practices such as photo elicitation, it is uncommon in writing about photography (op cit: 104, 143, 181, 226). Elsewhere, Rose claims that critics tend to keep themselves 'invisible', preferring a 'distanced analytical stand' to the recognition that they are 'essentially entangled in what they are studying' (2011: 547). Rose thus describes what I have observed myself: in spite of understanding in theory that meaning is perspective-dependent, photography writers in practice tend to adopt a stance of critical detachment which, from an interpretivist perspective, is unwarranted and illusory.

In detached, non-reflexive criticism, it is normally impossible to know what is missing – how an interpretation might have become more comprehensible, in terms of its perspective and limitations, if self-reflexivity had been included. However, in the case of one well-known (but representative) piece of non-reflexive photography writing, what is missing has been posthumously revealed. Sontag (1979), in her critique of Diane Arbus's street portraiture, deprecates the work as a voyeuristic collection of 'assorted monsters and

borderline cases – most of them ugly; wearing grotesque or unflattering clothing ...' (op cit: 32), claiming that: 'Arbus's work does not invite viewers to identify with the pariahs and miserable looking people she photographed …' (ibid). There is no self-reflexive disclosure which might help us understand why Sontag viewed the work this way. However, following Sontag's death, Parsons (2009) discusses a passage in Sontag's diaries that had recently come to light, in which she had written: 'physical beauty is enormously, almost morbidly, important to me'. Parsons writes: 'Sontag felt revulsion in the face of Arbus's subjects and she responded emotionally, *if not transparently*, by projecting her own anxieties onto Arbus' (op cit: 294, emphasis added). A self-reflexive, transparent account might have made Sontag's values and assumptions clear, and allowed readers to comprehend her interpretation accordingly.

It is beyond the remit of this study to establish why self-reflexivity is so rarely employed in photography criticism. However, a number of possible explanations can be suggested. Rose points to the long-standing influence of two conceptual frameworks thought by some to be incompatible with self-reflexivity: psychoanalysis, and the postmodern conception of the self as constituted by discourse (2016: 180, 216), two lines of attack discussed in Section 2.2. A third reason may be a distaste for self-focused writing, also discussed in Section 2.2, which is generally seen by professional writers as naive and uninformative. Williams, for example, in her guide to writing about art, describes 'virgin art-writing' as over-personal and anecdotal, using the artwork merely as a prompt for descriptions of personal feelings and reminiscence: 'The novice instantly forgets about the art, and lets memory take him … somewhere else …' (2014: 44).

A fourth possible reason, linked to the third, may be the desire among photography writers for their work to be taken seriously in an intellectual environment in which research based on personal narratives still 'has a hard time being accepted as legitimate inside the academy' (Brookfield 2017: 69). Even in ethnography, the discipline in which reflexivity first emerged (Pillow 2003, Zienkowski 2017), self-reflexivity has often been suppressed in favour of writing from a detached and realist perspective (Bochner and Ellis 2016: 167). In literary criticism, according to Felski, a 'detached, dispassionate and sceptical demeanour' has become an 'institutionally mandated attitude' (2015: 47); one that 'screens out any flicker of emotion, tamps down idiosyncratic impulses, and steers clear of the first-person voice' (op cit: 48). Echoing Rose, Felski notes that literary critics 'relentlessly' query objectivity in terms of content, but 'objectivity crops up again … in the writer's own self-effacement and willed impersonality' (ibid).

Early feminist research suffered similar pressures. Despite recognising the importance of ‘the witnessing “I” of subjective experience’, most academic women writers ‘wrote like everyone else’ in a critically detached manner in accordance with accepted academic norms (Miller 1991: 14). Reflexivity risks undermining ‘the “authority effect” in critical writing’, Miller observes, potentially operating as a form of academic self-harm (op cit: 7). Meanwhile, even where reflexivity is accepted by academic publications, Dean comments on the practical difficulty of finding sufficient space for reflection within the allotted word limits of journal articles, and notes that some ‘high-profile’ publications seem ‘reluctant’ to allow authors to try to do so (2017: 145). Reflections such as these on the pressures limiting self-reflexivity in other fields serve as a context that may partly explain the rarity of the practice in photography criticism.

B. Interpretation, emotional response and life history

Reflexivity is generally used to give an account of how we think, as discussed in Section 2.2. This study, however, is interested in exploring its power to give an account of both how we think and how we *feel* about photography. The study draws from research suggesting that thinking and feeling are entangled, as will be discussed below.

Photography’s affective properties have long been recognised. As early as the 1850s writers such as Eastlake (1857) and Holmes (1859) reflected on the medium’s habit of recording tiny, haunting details that other forms of picture making would normally miss. The Pictorialist art movement at the turn of the 20th century was concerned above all with representing ‘inner feelings’ and stimulating the viewer’s imagination and emotions (Jussim and Lindquist-Cock 1985). Barthes (1982) emphasises photography’s force as a melancholy record of past reality, one that can ‘prick’ or ‘wound’ us by bringing the past to mind while keeping it simultaneously out of reach. Adams (1996) writes of the ‘beauty’ of photography found in pictorial form which can produce an effect of reassurance and consolation. My own interest in photography was first captured, and has since been sustained, by my emotional response to photographs that move me, as discussed in Section 1.4, and I am sure my experience is far from uncommon.

Nonetheless, personal emotional responses were largely marginalised from mainstream criticism following the ‘cultural turn’ of the 1980s, in which interpretation in terms of socio-cultural context was typically favoured, as outlined in Section 2.3 A; an

approach that remains dominant (Bate 2016, Burbridge and Pollen 2018). For pioneers of the cultural approach, feelings were discredited by association with the uncritical notion of 'the ineffable' and a failure to take account of context (Burgin 1982: 1). Within cultural studies, feelings came to be regarded as 'located within the body', unaffected by ideology and beyond the reach of meaning (Turner 1996: 110). The deprecation of feeling has not been confined to photography criticism. Lumsden comments that across social sciences, feelings have largely been ignored, seen as incompatible with academic practice and – like self-reflexivity – liable to undermine the authority of the researcher if expressed (2019: 84). In literary criticism, any talk of 'loving literature', Felski writes, 'seems jejune to most English professors' (2020: 30). Even within self-reflexive research in social science, emotion has generally been underplayed (Holmes 2010).

Accordingly, in photography, most critics have kept their feelings out of print. A telling illustration of this self-censorship was seen in a recent review by Good of Don McCullin's retrospective at Tate Britain in 2019, in which the critic's efforts at suppressing her feelings momentarily faltered. Good writes:

> Like some others who have reviewed this exhibition, I'm compelled, partially at least, *to set aside critical detachment* and talk about my emotional response, which was actually a physical response: by the end I felt exhausted and sick (2019: 62; emphasis added).

Good's remark is couched as an apology, as if recognising that her admission represents a falling away from the high standards of detachment expected in orthodox criticism.

However, a new interest in the emotional experience of culture has begun to emerge in recent years in a number of fields including music, material culture and literature (Frith 1996, Turkle 2007, Miller 2008, Wilson 2014, Felski 2015, 2020) in a trend described as the 'affective turn' in the humanities (Phu and Steer 2009). As Belsey remarks, for example, in terms of literature: 'a major task that now faces criticism is to account for the romance of reading' (2016: 143). In *Feeling Photography* (2014), a pioneering survey of recent work by scholars interested in emotional response in photography, editors Brown and Phu write of their aim to recuperate feelings as a legitimate topic after years of neglect (2014: 1ff). Smith observes, in the same volume, that meanings in photography are mediated through feelings, noting that 'feeling intervenes in the relationship between photographic signifier and signified' (Smith 2014: 31; see also Olin 2012). Nonetheless, the topic remains under-researched. Little work has been done to elucidate how and why feelings arise in relation to

photography, or to account for *differences* in feeling experienced by different viewers. Explaining feeling is sometimes assumed to be beyond the reach of research, even by writers who recognise feeling's potency (Barthes 2000 [1982]: 51, Smith 2014: 30).

Felski's recent work (2015, 2020) in literary theory, however, provides an analytic approach to feelings that resonates with the aims of this study. Felski uses the term 'postcritical' to describe an emerging orientation that seeks to move beyond the detached, sceptical tendencies of contemporary critical culture, as outlined in Section 2.3 A. Postcritical writing, she explains, recognises how powerfully literary texts can affect readers and change their perceptions of themselves and the world (2015: 177); and it seeks to explore how those affects and changes occur. In postcritical writing, thinking and feeling are understood as intertwined: 'To query the doxa of detachment is not to elevate feeling over thought but to reflect on their intertwining' (2020: 11). Postcritical writing regards differences of response as a consequence of each reader's uniquely different, embodied life history:

> Even if we are all products of the cultural blender, each mixture of influences, vocabularies, memories, orientations and temperament possesses a distinct and unmistakable flavour … And we bring these differences to the event of reading (2015: 172).

Although not using the term self-reflexivity – a term used with a slightly different sense in literary criticism, as discussed in Section 2.2 – Felski nonetheless advocates a form of practice that resembles the self-reflexive approach investigated by this study: one that involves 'folding the critic's persona – commitments, sympathies and identifications – into the works and frameworks of the humanities' (2020: 123). This can best be done, Felski writes, by a practice that 'slows down judgement' (2020: ix) by engaging in close 'listening' to texts and ourselves (2020: 153), and by repeat encounters with texts and artworks (2020: 60); all formulations that resonate strongly with this study's methodology, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

This study has been designed to contribute to this postcritical field by exploring whether a self-reflexive methodology can uncover the connections that Felski describes between emotional responses, interpretation, life history and worldview in photography criticism; and, further, to examine the effect of reflecting on these links for generating new and enriched forms of understanding, as will be discussed in Section 2.4.

Links between meaning, emotion, worldview and life history have been recognised in other fields, and it seems reasonable to expect them in photography criticism too. Bourdieu,

in his concept of 'habitus', has argued that upbringing, social positioning and life experiences produce lasting dispositions that influence how we act and think (1984, 1993; Reay 2004, Wacquant 2016). Sayer, building on Bourdieu, emphasises our capacity to *reconstruct* our socially-influenced worldview by taking a self-critical approach to our dispositions by means of 'internal conversations' (2005: 29), which can lead us to diverge from the dominant views and interests of our social group (op cit: 7). For several writers, emotions form an integral part of this web of connections between thinking, life history and worldview. Archer writes that emotion is the 'fuel' that drives our self-reflective internal conversations (2000: 194). Söderqvist argues, similarly, that thinking is shaped by emotions and aspirations grounded in embodied life history. 'The construction of knowledge claims is ultimately made by individuals having unique existential life projects, unique bodies and unique emotional experiences' (1991: 151).

Moreover, scholars associated with affect theory (Deleuze and Guattari 2013 [1987], Gregg and Seigworth 2010) have argued that our responses are influenced by the complex affective context of the moment – the 'viewing moment', in photography criticism – consisting of an ever-changing assemblage of subtle, fleeting factors. Deleuze and Guattari (op cit: 304ff) refer to this as the 'haecceity' of the experiential moment. In photography criticism, this haecceity might be created, for example, by such factors as mood, health, desires, anxieties, preoccupations and the ambient conditions (such as weather, time of day, whether one is alone or in company, and so forth) at the moment of viewing the photograph. Just as emotional responses are generally downplayed in mainstream criticism, fleeting, affective contextual influences such as these are also rarely brought into play.

In terms of learning theory, too, knowledge and belief have been linked to past experiences and our responses to those experiences. In Piaget's (1963) constructivist model, knowledge is ordered in the brain in the form of dynamic mental structures or 'schemata' relating to different cognitive or experiential fields. New experiences are perceived and given meaning in terms of our existing schemata: we make sense of the world, in other words, in relation to what we already understand or believe. If the new experience fits our expectations, it is 'assimilated' into the appropriate schema. If it does not fit and is not rejected, it can cause a shift in the structure of the schema to enable 'accommodation' of the new experience. And yet, as Illeris (2007) writes, emotions and memory are pivotal to this constructivist learning process. Impulses from any sense-experience – such as viewing a photograph – reach the working memory via the emotional centres of the brain and long-term memory. Sense-making is therefore influenced not only by what we already know and believe, but also

by emotions experienced at the moment of the encounter and by memories and associations prompted by the event (op cit: 134). Within transformative learning theory, also, emotions are increasingly recognised as a motor for changes in thinking (Taylor 2009), as will be discussed in Section 2.4 A.

Emotions thus influence our thinking and drive learning. In addition, they are themselves cognitive and evaluative, forming part of the rational thinking process, according to Sayer (2005). 'Emotions are *about* something, particularly things which are important to our well-being and which we value,' he writes. Like other forms of thinking, they are 'influenced by past experiences', and serve as commentaries on the present. 'By taking them seriously we might be able to appreciate hitherto unnoticed things and assess what they tell us is happening to us' (op cit: 37). Brookfield argues, similarly, that emotions are involved in our attachment to one idea and rejection of another, and paying attention to them can provide clues to what our assumptions are (2012: 135). Kleinman, too, writes that emotions reflect our ideologies and values, and represent legitimate data in field research (1991: 186).

In line with these writers, this study has set out to explore, through self-reflexivity, emotional responses to photographs and their links to life history, worldview and the emotional context of the viewing encounter as a means to improve metacognitive understanding of both thinking and feeling responses to photography. In addition, the study has sought to explore whether self-reflection, within a self-reflexive framework, can produce additional forms of learning, enabling critics and researchers make *better* sense of their research materials and themselves. The literature pointing to the connections between self-reflection and learning will be discussed in the following section.

2.4 Reflexivity, Self-Reflection and Learning

Beyond the ability of self-reflection to account for thinking and feeling responses within a self-reflexive interpretive framework, literature suggests that it may also be capable of *adding to* our understanding of photography and ourselves, enlarging our consciousness and perception, and altering or transforming what we think: in other words, helping us learn and grow. Self-reflection's learning potential in this field can be divided into five themes: (1) transformative learning; (2) tacit knowledge; (3) threshold concepts; (4) self-realisation; and

(5) the learning effect for readers and audiences. The literature relating to these themes will be discussed in turn below, and this study's potential contribution to education studies in terms of reflective practice and threshold concepts research will be made clear.

A. Critical self-reflection and learning

The contribution of critical self-reflection to learning has long been recognised. For Dewey, writing more than a century ago, the 'main office of education' is the cultivation of deep-seated habits of critical thinking and reflection (1910: 17). Criticality is 'not a gift of nature', he declares, but rather, we are prone to holding 'inadequate and erroneous beliefs' (ibid) and to be sure of our judgements even in the face of contrary evidence (1916: 189). Critical discrimination, by contrast, requires sustained reflection on the 'presuppositions' that underlie our beliefs. 'Some such rhythm of the unconscious and the conscious is involved in all fruitful thinking,' he writes (1910: 75). Implicit in Dewey's account of critical self-reflection is the idea that it can lead to altered and improved ways of thinking about the world.

Reflection on presuppositions plays a central role in what is arguably the best known corpus of theory dealing with the impact of self-reflection on how we think, that of 'transformative' learning pioneered by Mezirow (1991a, 1991b, 2009). Mezirow's framework builds explicitly on Piaget's (1963) constructivist learning model, discussed in Section 2.3 B. Mezirow takes a largely negative view of assimilation, which he regards as potentially deceptive and oppressive. Avoiding accommodations, we habitually apply our schemata or 'meaning schemes' to assimilate new experiences 'in order to avoid anxiety, creating a zone of blocked attention and self-deception' (1991a: 5). Transformative learning occurs, however, when we use 'premise reflection' to perform a 'fault-finding review of presuppositions' to 'see through our habitual ways of interpreting experience' (1991a: 102).

Premise reflection can be conducted either alone or in dialogue (Mezirow 1991a: 65, Taylor 2009: 9), and transformations initiated by premise reflection can either occur quickly or can take time to come into effect, sometimes involving a degree of emotional struggle (Mezirow 1991a: 171). All these variations can be seen in my experiences of premise reflection in this study, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

As transformative learning theory has evolved, the scope of critical reflection has become more 'holistic', including reflection on emotions and memory. According to Taylor, emotions, memory and cognition are increasingly recognised as interdependent, and

transformations are more likely to occur with emotionally-freighted materials through a 'see-feel-change' sequence (Taylor 2009: 10). Accordingly, in this study, critical self-reflection is directed at presuppositions (values/beliefs), memory, and emotions, in order to explore its capacity to lead to changes and improvements in thinking as part of self-reflexive criticism, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. In another development of interest, Taylor writes that the practice of writing critical reflections down has also emerged as an accelerator of transformative learning as it 'externalises' our reflections, creating 'artefacts of mind' which can be critically assessed with a measure of distance (Taylor op cit: 9). In line with this observation, this study has adopted a note-taking method that enables reflections on reflections, which will also be discussed in Chapter Three.

For Mezirow, the purpose of transformative learning is emancipatory for the individual in terms of their position within society and relationships to other people. Drawing from Freire's (1970) concept of 'conscientisation' or consciousness-raising (Mezirow 1991a: xvi), he regards premise reflection as a mechanism that enables individuals to recognise the bonds that restrain them, as a first step towards taking life-changing action. Many writers following Mezirow's path have adopted the same emancipatory rationale (eg, Hart 1991, Carter 2002, Butterwick and Lawrence 2009, Eschenbacher 2020).

The life-changing nature of transformations reported, or aspired to, within transformative learning theory might seem to set the bar very high for its success as a research process, and limit its applicability to regular acts of academic interpretation in fields such as visual culture. However, several writers have argued, in theory, for the learning value of critical self-reflection within interpretive disciplines, adopting a more pragmatic level of expectation. According to Walsh (2003), for example, critical self-reflection encourages 'stop and think': it can help prevent researchers rushing to judgement, and uncritically adopting interpretations which may be fashionable, or which they think readers, sponsors or colleagues expect to hear. For Noddings (2016), critical self-reflection is the marker of what she calls 'strong' critical thinking, by which we challenge not only other people's assumptions but also our own. Such critical self-examination might lead either to minor corrective shifts or substantial revisions. As May and Perry note, we might notice that our assumptions include errors, omissions or contradictions (2017: 3). Our interpretations might be drawing from values from which we wish, on reflection, to distance ourselves. We might notice that our thinking is affected by cognitive bias (Ehrlinger, Readinger and Kim 2016) or that our values are blinding us to aspects of the data which we would prefer not to recognise.

An example of the usefulness of 'stop and think' for uncovering this type of inadvertent weakness can be seen in Marshall et al's (1998) account of their study of Asian women's childbirth experiences in London, in which they recognised, on reflection, that they had been suppressing aspects of their participants' reports which they believed 'reproduced prejudicial viewpoints' which they '[did] not want to hear' (1998: 128); but they later realised that suppressing such data would be counterproductive, leading to changes in the report. The capacity to 'reconstruct' understandings in this way through critical self-reflection has been described as fundamental to learning (Pring 2015: 32, Noddings 2016: 87, Lincoln and Guba 2016: 49).

In educational research, however, explorations of critical reflection as a pathway to rethinking or transforming research interpretations seem hard to find. The literature of reflective practice has been extensively surveyed, including every issue of the specialist journal *Reflective Practice* published over the past ten years (2013–2022, comprising 60 issues). The literature discusses various aspects of the effect of reflection on learning, including consolidating learning (eg, Biscomb et al 2020), supporting wellbeing during learning (eg, Greenhill et al 2015; Lapum et al 2015; Farrell 2022), developing professional skills (eg, Ossa Parra et al 2015, Ali 2022, Yong Tay 2022) and other matters. Studies that point to critical reflection leading to changes of thinking are in a minority and tend to reference transformative learning. In Anand et al's (2020) review of the previous ten years of transformative learning research, the great majority of cited papers describe changes in learners' worldview in relation to the social context of practice, concerning matters such as researcher privilege and empathy with 'others of difference' – in effect, unconscious bias correction – in practical disciplines such as healthcare, community learning or business (eg, Bamber and Hankin 2011, Prout et al 2014, Troop and O'Riordan 2017, Brooks et al 2018).

Despite extensive searching, I have been unable to locate education studies in which critical self-reflection is investigated for its capacity to initiate 'stop and think' *interpretive* shifts in relation to research materials, in the way seen in Marshall et al's (1998) report, or as explored by this study. This apparent shortage is supported by Blair and Deacon's (2015) claim that critical reflection is 'rife' in some practical disciplines but absent in many academic fields (op cit: 419); and that their reflective biology study represented, as far as they knew, the *first* application of reflective practice to fieldwork in the life sciences (op cit: 431). To return to visual culture, the shortage of transformative reflection studies should perhaps not surprise, as it seems related to the paucity of reflexivity in the field discussed in

Section 2.3 A. Moreover, it clearly points to a space in the research literature which this study seems well suited to fill.

B. Tacit knowledge

In addition to the idea that critical reflection on assumptions can lead to a change or clarification of our thinking, several writers have suggested that self-reflection can lead to the 'uncovering' of what we already know at a subconscious level but don't consciously recognise that we know – our tacit knowledge – and that this process can lead to new insights, often epiphanic, into our research materials and ourselves.

Tacit knowledge, as identified by Polanyi, is the hidden knowledge that supports and drives our consciously-held understandings; a force that 'shapes and integrates' our experiences of the world (2009: 6) and enables us to construct new forms of knowledge. Polanyi's conception of tacit knowledge substantially parallels Piaget's (1963) idea of mental schemata, in that both concepts refer to the mechanisms which channel and inflect mental activity and enable us to make sense of new experiences. Tacit knowledge might thus be regarded as consisting of those parts of our schemata that cannot be readily brought to mind. For Polanyi, tacit knowledge covers a range of types of knowing, from the perceptual (recognising phenomena) and practical (how-to knowledge) to frameworks of ideas and values that we have 'interiorised' – that is, that we have accepted and no longer question, and which underpin our moral and intellectual judgements and beliefs (op cit: 17).

Several scholars have argued that tacit knowledge can be converted into explicit knowledge, in both academic and other settings, by critical self-reflection and dialogue. Steier, for example, writes that the overall purpose of a reflexive methodology is to expand our understanding by 'unconcealing our own tacit world' (Steier 1991: 7); while for Schön, reflection serves to highlight the 'tacit frames' guiding practice in order to open up new possibilities for intelligent action (1983: 311; cf Gray and Malins 2004, Vaughan 2009, Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, Farnese et al 2019).

The claim that reflection can make tacit knowledge explicit and lead to changed interpretations can be corroborated by case studies from the social sciences. Kleinman (1991), researching an alternative health centre in the US, reports gaining a sudden rush of insight into the motivations of staff following reflection on her own emotions and values. Initially hostile to the centre for ethical backsliding, Kleinman recognised she was guilty of similar

compromises in her own research practice, as a result of tensions between 1960s political ideals and the need to secure professional legitimacy in a changed 1980s environment. In an example relating to visual culture, Rose (2011: 551) writes that after interviewing several mothers about their family-photography practices, she 'suddenly realised' that one topic had rarely been discussed – how children felt about being photographed – and recognised that she herself, as a mother, was complicit in this 'shared uninterest', suggesting that the 'real subject' was not the children but the mothers and how they felt about taking, discussing and handling the pictures (see, also, Rose 2010: 55).

In education research, studies have noted that reflection can give access to tacit knowledge in relation to practical teaching knowledge (eg, Ravanal Moreno et al 2021); but despite searching the literature, as discussed in Section 2.4 A, I have found no education studies exploring the relationship between self-reflection, tacit knowledge and changes of interpretation in fields such as visual culture. This, again, indicates the research space that this study is ready to occupy.

Several writers have suggested that tacit knowledge can be especially potent when research is carried out by an 'insider' in the field being studied, such as Rose in the example above, or practitioners using practice-led research to investigate their own practice (as in this study). Gray and Malins argue that in practice-led research, the insider has special access to tacit knowledge which they are better placed than anyone to explore and render explicit by means of critical reflection (2004: 22). This study's rationale for adopting a practice-led research methodology, as a way to access tacit knowledge and for other reasons, will be addressed in Chapter Three.

C. Self-reflexivity as a threshold concept

Over and above its potential to produce shifts of understanding and new insights through premise reflection or accessing tacit knowledge, the literature provides grounds for suspecting that self-reflexivity may offer a key to unlocking a larger-scale transformation in our understanding of photography and ourselves. That is, self-reflexivity may act as, or provide access to, a 'threshold concept' in photography criticism, as defined by Meyer and Land (2003). I will first outline what is meant by a threshold concept and then discuss why self-reflexivity might qualify as one in photography criticism.

The notion of threshold concepts emerged from a UK-based study investigating high-quality higher education learning environments (Meyer and Land 2003), and has since spawned a vast research literature from scholars in multiple disciplines across the world (see, for example, the research archive at www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/~mflanaga/thresholds.html). Threshold concepts were identified as concepts that have the capacity, once grasped, to open up new and expanded forms of understanding of a topic or discipline that were previously inaccessible; 'portals' through which the researcher steps to see a topic or disciplinary landscape in an enriched way. Threshold concepts have been seen as the most valuable learning concepts because of their ability to deliver substantial 'leaps' in understanding. It is generally assumed that all disciplines have threshold concepts, but the work of identifying them continues (Meyer and Land 2006; Land, Rattray and Vivian 2014; Land, Meyer and Flanagan 2016; Chambers, Aldous and Bryant 2021).

Despite the burgeoning of research on threshold concepts, their definition has remained largely constant. As Meyer and Land (2003) described them, threshold concepts are: (1) transformative, in that they lead to shifts in perception of a subject or, in some instances, of ourselves and our worldview, and can thus be related to Mezirow's (1991a) model of transformative learning; (2) 'probably irreversible', such is the striking nature of the expanded vision they produce; (3) integrative, in that they reveal undetected connections between other concepts already grasped; (4) often troublesome to acquire, because they initially appear counter-intuitive, and force us to change previously accepted beliefs; and (5) sometimes, but not always, bounded, or linked to a particular discipline. Their transformative capacity is generally taken as their primary characteristic, while the other qualities serve to describe or modify the transformations that occur (Gogan 2017).

As Moffat and McKim have argued, the majority of threshold concept research has taken place in science disciplines, with a 'paucity of research' in the humanities where fewer threshold concepts have been identified (2014: 38). Those that have often relate to the mainstream 'cultural' approach to interpretation outlined in Section 2.3 A, in which researchers develop their own critical readings of texts/artworks where meaning is not fixed. Concepts associated with this approach – such as reading art as text, recognising ideology within text, and intertextuality – have been claimed to be thresholds in art criticism (Moffat and McKim 2014), art history (Wuetherick and Loeffler 2014), English literature (Wisker, Cameron and Antoniou 2008), and communication studies (Crafton 2014).

Self-reflexivity itself has been cited as a threshold concept in a number of papers, on the grounds that it involves critical reflection on habituated ways of thinking (Grivell and

Scanlon 2012), on ‘moral conduct’ within practice (Hibbert and Cunliffe 2015), and on expectations of work experience in a professional environment (Hanson 2018). In these papers, however, ‘self-reflexivity’ appears to be used as a synonym for self-reflection, and refers to improving practice and performance rather than interpretation.

There are reasons, however, to suspect that self-reflexivity as an *interpretive* methodology may give access to a threshold concept in photography criticism, albeit one that is not yet widely acknowledged within the discipline. It may do so, not only through self-critical fault-finding and accessing tacit knowledge discussed in Sections 2.4 A and B, but more importantly through its primary function of uncovering the personal basis of thinking and feeling discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3. As noted in Section 2.3 A, the idea that meaning is dependent on context and perspective is well understood in photography criticism, but the way in which our perspective is inflected by our unique pattern of life experiences is generally overlooked. If such personal influences were recognised, a substantial shift in how visual culture is understood could potentially follow. Every meaning claim would require and invite personal nuancing. The concept of a personal basis of meaning, implicit within self-reflexivity, would thus make space for an expanded range and enriched texture of meaning claims that could be regarded as justifiable. Self-reflexivity’s revelation of the personal basis of meaning may therefore be *transformative* for visual culture researchers.

Self-reflexivity is also potentially *integrative*, in that it takes the established concept of perspectival meaning to its logical conclusion. Critics are accustomed to thinking of interpretation as coming from an ideological or socio-cultural viewpoint. Self-reflexivity, however, recognises that although we may be influenced by our social positionality and the ideas of our time, we rarely speak simply ‘as’ members of a social category or interest group, but always in a way that is inflected by our uniquely personal concerns, commitments and beliefs developed across a unique life history. As Miller, a pioneer of the personal approach to interpretation, has pointed out, the notion of ‘speaking as’ is only a half-step away from ‘speaking for’, the fallacy that gave rise to the crisis of representation (1991: 20). We may be members of a group, in other words, but our individual perspective requires additional nuancing. Moffat and McKim appear to support this position. Although not using the term ‘reflexivity’, they argue that ‘subjective interpretation’ should be regarded as a high-level threshold concept within art criticism: a ‘meta-threshold’ integrating a range of other threshold concepts including ‘the role and function of perspective, point of view and voice in the critical appreciation and analysis of texts and other media’ (2014: 38).

Moreover, self-reflexivity is also likely to be *troublesome*, because it requires levels of self-examination and disclosure which may be experienced as difficult (May and Perry 2017, Lumsden 2019) and contrary to the norms of critical practice (Section 2.3 A), and also because it limits the generalisability of meaning claims and therefore potentially undermines the researcher's status as an expert (Miller 1991: 7). In all these respects, it can be argued that self-reflexivity potentially leads to a high-level threshold concept in criticism, and it is one of the purposes of this study to examine whether it may plausibly be seen in that light.

Threshold concepts have sometimes been presented in the literature as if they were facts, even laws; universally recognised and indisputable high-level but perplexing principles that give rise to advanced forms of understanding within an academic field. Meyer and Land's original 2003 paper, for example, presented the physics concept of a temperature gradient within heat transfer, and the mathematical concept of a complex number, as threshold concepts which learners are obliged to accept if they are to reach higher levels of understanding within these fields. More recently, threshold concepts have typically been framed in a more cautious, negotiable and open-ended way, for example as hard-to-grasp concepts that might emerge through discussions between teachers and students within a discipline (eg, Land, Rattray and Vivian 2014); but the assumption seems to persist that particular sets of threshold concepts exist inherently 'in' disciplines (eg, Land, Meyer and Flanagan 2016: xii), and there lie dormant until they are 'discovered'. Interpretive disciplines such as photography criticism, however, are unsuited to the idea of inherent 'laws' of understanding waiting to be disclosed (Section 2.2), and this may be one of the reasons why fewer threshold concepts have been identified in the humanities than in natural sciences, and why less investigative work has been carried out (Moffat and McKim 2014, above).

The epistemological status of threshold concepts within interpretive disciplines seems to have been rarely addressed explicitly in the literature. However, threshold concepts that have been proposed, as discussed above, appear to have the status of guiding principles for interpretation, presented as troublesome theoretical concepts by means of which, it is claimed, transformative and enriched forms of understanding can be attained. In light of constructivist learning theory (Piaget 1963, Section 2.3 B), the content and character of such cognitive enrichments will necessarily differ in each individual learning event – contingent on the learner, the context, and the particular phenomenon encountered – but the constant factor (the threshold concept) seems to be a particular guiding principle that is claimed as effective for generating such diverse gains, for different learners in multiple situations. Threshold concepts in the humanities may therefore, it seems, be freely proposed by their advocates in

the literature (as I do in this thesis); but those that become *recognised* as threshold concepts are likely to be those about which a consensus evolves within a discipline as to their capacity to generate significant learning advances for many (or most) people in different contexts. To give an example of a 'recognised' threshold concept, Meyer and Land's (2003) identification of *signification* as a threshold concept within cultural criticism – the counter-intuitive idea that language (including visual language) does not provide an unmediated description of reality but a value-saturated representation of it – is, indeed, a critical concept that has been widely accepted as fundamental to advanced understanding within visual culture (eg, Sturken and Cartwright 2001). This study seeks, then, to explore whether self-reflexivity might qualify as a highly generative cognitive mechanism in critical interpretation of a similar kind.

The study thus hopes to contribute to threshold concepts research as well as to reflective practice research. Scholars have typically identified what they take to be threshold concepts by means of experiences associated with their key characteristics: through transformations, such as 'lightbulb' moments (eg, Wisker, Cameron and Antoniou 2008); troublesomeness, manifested by 'bottlenecks' in learning which are later cleared (eg, Wuetherick and Loeffler 2014); or integration, in that the learner becomes able to articulate connections between other concepts in a refreshed way (Land, Meyer and Baillie 2010). These or similar heuristics provide a set of precedents for how the data from this study will be addressed.

D. Reflexivity and self-realisation

The arguments above suggest that a self-reflexive approach based on self-reflection can potentially produce enriched understandings about two things: our research materials and ourselves. They suggest, more precisely, that insights into our materials may arise from gaining a clearer understanding of ourselves, our habits of thinking and feeling, and our tacit universe of knowledge, belief, values, interests and commitments that has evolved over the course of a life. Implicit in these arguments is a view of the self that is not a fixed entity but one we can shape through active adjustment or extension. For example, where scrutiny of our habitual thinking involves recognition of a 'zone of blocked attention and self-deception' (Mezirow 1991a: 5), a form of worldview-adjustment might be expected to follow. Where accessing tacit knowledge enables us to make sudden, unexpected connections between present experiences and deeply-held structures of values and belief, new patterns of value-

enriched meaning might be formed which could render our perceptions of the world more integrated and comprehensible.

At a level beyond learning about our research materials or discipline, then, self-reflexivity appears able to bring about the larger learning goal of personal growth. Personal growth has been claimed by many scholars to be the ultimate goal of education. For Dewey, education serves 'to insure the continuance of education by organizing the powers that insure growth' (1916: 51); and growth manifests itself as 'enrichment' of meaning (op cit: 76): in effect, the improvement of our *experience* of living. The point is expanded by White (2006), for whom education and learning exist to promote 'human flourishing', a concept that includes pleasure and loving attachment to the world as well as personal autonomy.

Dewey's insight that learning should be a process that supports and enhances existence prefigures Piaget's evolutionary learning model in which assimilations and accommodations occur in order that we 'better fit' our conceptions of the world to our experiences (Piaget 1963, Illeris 2007). Von Glasersfeld notes that, in Piaget's scheme, to know is not to possess 'true representations' of reality but rather to find the means of living more satisfactorily, 'to possess ways and means of acting and thinking that allow one to attain the goals one happens to have chosen' (1991: 16).

As Von Glasersfeld's observation implies, the growth fostered by learning extends beyond functional adaptation to environments, towards a larger existential goal of self-realisation. Several other scholars have taken a similar line. For Freire, explicitly drawing from existentialist philosophers Sartre and De Beauvoir, growth is defined in terms of our existential need for 'humanization', the process of becoming fully human; and education serves this need. '[E]ducation affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*' (2017: 57). Similarly for Oakeshott, education is the process which *produces* humanity, for to be human is to be enabled to engage in intelligent action, as a form of 'self-enactment' (2001: 63). Pring echoes these points. 'Worthwhile' learning is that which leads to the 'development of someone as a person' (2015: 24). Markers of personal growth, for Pring, include self-knowledge, the capacity to think clearly and feel keenly, and the motivation to follow uplifting ideals. Writing in existential terms, Pring argues that these and similar attainments enable the student or researcher 'to be authentic as opposed to taking on board passing fashions', a task which is often daunting but is 'part of the seriousness of living'. This gradual defining of identity, Pring writes, is 'central to the task of education' (op cit: 29–30).

A number of scholars have suggested that critical self-reflection may have an important part to play in this life-long existential process of self-realisation. For Bakhtin

(1981), self-reflection is the means by which we can develop our individual voice and therefore our status as fully-realised human agents. Foreshadowing the work of contemporary scholars such as Archer (2000) and Sayer (2005) discussed in Section 2.3 B, Bakhtin draws attention to our ongoing 'internal monologues … that last a whole life' through which we engage critically with the received ideas of our culture and our own preconceptions (1981: 345). The aim of the internal monologue, for Bakhtin, is to wrestle with 'external' discourses circulating in a culture in order to construct an 'internally persuasive discourse', which constitutes the individual's authentic voice, in a world of multiple viewpoints and value systems that Bakhtin terms 'heteroglossia' (op cit: 294). Archer provides a resonant contemporary echo, writing that our unceasing, self-reflective 'inner conversation' is the process by which we can attain 'self-awareness', 'concrete singularity' and 'personal identity' as a way of attaining our 'ultimate goals' (2000: 10–11). It could be argued that we do not always, in practice, engage in *critical* self-reflection; but rather, as Dewey suggested (1916: 189), internal conversations may often be self-affirming, rehearsing unthinkingly the dominant discourses of the time. Bakhtin and Archer, it seems, are describing an ideal, a potentiality, for those prepared to pursue their self-reflective internal conversations with a self-critical spirit.

In a number of respects, Bakhtin's work – written in the 1930s – also anticipates the constructivism of Piaget and Mezirow. In Bakhtin, we apply our internally persuasive discourses to the act of making sense of new experiences, with the effect that our internal discourse is often changed as a result (op cit: 346–47). As in transformative learning, our wrestling with external and internal discourses can be experienced as struggle (op cit: 346). Ultimately, however, the process of constructing our internally persuasive discourse is the path by which we attain full humanity: 'An independent, responsible and active discourse is *the* fundamental indicator of an ethical, legal and political human being' (op cit: 350).

For Bakhtin, self-reflection focuses on the subject's *present* circumstances. In the concept of 'biographical learning', deployed and discussed primarily within adult education contexts, learning arises through self-reflexive critical reflection on *past* life experiences as a way of 'redesign[ing] … the contours of our life' as a route to future growth (Alheit 2009: 125; see also Witherell and Noddings 1991). Moreover, Kenyon and Lowell's (1997) concept of 'restorying our lives', a process by which we learn life-changing lessons through critical reflection on our autobiographies, provides a parallel in the field of therapy (or self-therapy).

Links between self-reflection on present/past life experiences and existential growth have thus frequently been made in the literature, in ways that are highly resonant for this

study. Studies of self-reflection within education have indicated some of the forms that such growth can take. Fook (2015), for example, reports that in evaluations of critical reflection groups she organised in the context of social work education, she found that reflection can lead to greater collegiality and motivation, increased interest in social work practice, and a feeling of being 'liberated' (2015: 450). Dore (2019), in a self-reflexive study, recounts that, following critical reflection on his own previous academic work, he experienced 'personal growth … in the sense of becoming a researcher better able to locate themselves' within their research (2019: 668). Growth, for Dore, took the metacognitive form of 'a greater level of self-awareness' (op cit: 675) and feeling more 'alert to the ways I might shape the way I view, construct and obtain knowledge' (ibid).

Studies that have examined the impact of reflection on growth in the context of self-reflexive *interpretation*, however, are harder to find. This present study aims to provide evidence for growth arising from interpretive self-reflection, as a way of contributing to this intriguing research area.

The capacity to think for ourselves and construct an authentic personhood might seem a goal of unquestionable value at any time. Illeris, however, stresses the 'increasingly urgent' need for self-reflexivity within practices of learning, in view of the multiple forms of uncertainty in contemporary market-capitalist societies:

> [A]n increasingly urgent content field for learning would seem to be learning about ourselves, getting to know oneself, understanding one's own reactions, inclinations, preferences, strong and weak sides, etc, as a prerequisite for making meaningful decisions, and thus, to a certain degree, participating in managing one's own life course. Reflexivity … becomes [a] learning challenge of key significance in this connection (2007: 74).

In view of the rarity of self-reflexive practices within photography criticism, as discussed in Section 2.3 A, this study's exploration of self-reflexivity/self-reflection as a route to growth can perhaps be seen as a timely – and perhaps even, following Illeris, an urgently necessary – contribution to knowledge in the field.

Fook (2015) and Dore (2019), discussed above, point to some of the ways we might recognise evidence of growth in a practical research context. Pring's definition of growth as self-knowledge, the capacity to think clearly, feel keenly and be motivated, alongside Dewey's concept of 'enrichment' and White's of 'human flourishing', all hint at other signs that might be looked for. Taken together, these seem to include: unexpected clarifications

about ourselves and greater metacognitive self-awareness; a sense of new connections being made between present and past experiences; an intensification of feeling, motivation and engagement; and the sense of an expansion of possibilities. The ways in which this study's data qualify as signs of these or similar types of growth will be presented and discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

E. Reflexivity and readers

Self-reflexivity is, then, potentially a powerful aid to learning and growth for those engaged in research and critical writing about photography. But what of readers or audiences? When critics write, they generally write for a readership. Good critical writing presents an interpretation for readers that is plausible and illuminating (Barrett 2000); one that enables readers to appreciate and understand the artwork better than if they had not read the criticism (Grant 2013). Critical writing, therefore, aims at a form of learning for readers. This is the case for all critical writing, in a way that parallels academic writing in any field. But what of self-reflexive writing? Literature suggests that the self-reflexive element of reflexive academic writing may *in itself* produce forms of learning for readers that may not be available through non-reflexive forms of writing.

There is no specific body of literature on the learning benefits of self-reflexivity for readers but a number of claims about the topic can be found across qualitative research methodology texts, learning theory, cultural theory and the literature of self-reflexive disciplines such as autoethnography. The claims can broadly be grouped into three categories: those that deal with transparency, audience engagement and empathy. The three categories are linked.

Transparency is generally given as the central, driving rationale for taking a reflexive approach in research practice (Finlay 2002, Pillow 2003, Pink 2013, Dean 2017), as discussed in Section 2.2. Given the non-objectivity of interpretation, reflexivity enables researchers to detect and declare the grounds for their reading of the data. As Leavy notes, self-reflexivity aims at 'full disclosure' (2009: 20). It follows from this that, for readers, reflexivity should be able to deliver clarity about any given interpretation, enabling them to see 'who is speaking' within the text and detect some of the reasons why a particular interpretation has been reached.

Beyond explanatory clarity, several scholars have claimed that self-reflexivity can increase engagement for audiences, an experience that is both cognitive and emotional and which can lead to an expansion of understanding. This heightened engagement can be caused by a number of factors. Barrett points to the novelty and unexpectedness of self-reflexive research that taps into the variety of motivations and interests that researchers may have (2010a: 6). Kjørup also describes the ability of subjective research to surprise, fascinate and inspire because of its personal and narrative qualities. Good reflexive research, he writes, is 'research that gives us interesting, eye-opening, inspiring, enlightening, fascinating, edifying, uplifting contributions to knowledge and insights that are also well-founded, justified, persuasive' (2011: 42).

The engaging appeal of self-reflexive writing may be magnified where there is 'resonance'; that is, when a reader experiences emotional connection between the content of the research, the researcher, and their own life and worldview. For some writers, resonance is the primary aim of self-reflexive research. The overall aim of autoethnography, write Bochner and Ellis, is to resonate with readers: 'to inspire dialogue [with] readers, who enter from the perspective of their own lives' (2016: 108). In contrast to detached, impersonal research, self-reflexive research can create resonance by giving accounts of the world that are 'imperfect, but *human and believable'* (op cit: 71, emphasis added). Leavy describes these experiences of resonance as '"me-too" moments' (2009: 38): epiphanic moments in which the reader makes sense of the world with a new clarity by connecting the research directly to their own life, interests and concerns.

The idea that self-reflexivity can produce understanding through creating emotional connections between researcher and audience links self-reflexive research with what has long been claimed about the experience of art itself. The modernist critic Roger Fry wrote that part of the aesthetic experience of art was 'the consciousness of a peculiar relation of sympathy' with the artist, a 'special tie', by which the artist 'reveal[s] us to ourselves in revealing himself' (1961: 33). Much of the critical theory of the 20th century has downplayed the significance of the artist in our understanding of art, from New Criticism's rejection of intentionality (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954) to the claims of structuralism/poststructuralism that art texts speak less with an individual voice than with the voices (and discourses) of culture (Barthes 1977c). However, outside the academy a belief in the potent connection between artist/author and reader has persevered. Speaking on BBC Radio 4 in 2016, the poet Jackie Kay described the experience of reading poetry in the following terms:

> When we have really difficult things happen to us, we are literally lost for words, often, and we look for somebody else to have the words to put in for us; and as soon as we hear those words we recognise them; and they hold up a mirror to our experience and we say – "that's it, that's it exactly" – and we feel a kind of gratitude. And we feel, beyond that, a sense that a writer knows us, we feel known by a poem because it expresses exactly how we feel; and sometimes how we feel is complex and difficult, and sometimes even in a short poem that complexity can come across really strongly (Kay 2016).

The experience of recognising ourselves through poetry that Kay articulates is exactly the 'me-too' moment that scholars have claimed self-reflexive research is able to generate. The implication is that self-reflexive research exists in a crossover zone between traditional research and art, combining elements of both, and that it has the capacity to generate an order of revelatory response in readers – through that sense of a 'special tie' with the author – that may not be so readily available with traditional forms of research writing.

Some writers have suggested that the capacity of self-reflexive research to illuminate our worlds and ourselves extends beyond the 'me-too' moment. It may also be found when audiences detect differences between themselves and the researcher. For Leggo, self-reflexive writing enables us to achieve self-awareness, as readers, by helping us position ourselves in relation to others. It creates a 'world of echolocation' in which we 'find our bearings like bats, by means of knowing each other' (2008: 91). Brookfield argues, similarly, that when we engage in reflexive dialogue with fellow researchers, they serve as 'critically reflective mirrors', helping us to define ourselves in relation to our colleagues, and to identify flaws in our thinking which we may not have been able to see on our own (2009: 133).

The dual capacity of self-reflexivity to forge emotional connections and enable audiences to recognise others distinct from themselves opens up the third category of learning benefit for audiences: that of empathy, and the potential bridging of differences between people with differing worldviews. If there is no single 'right' way of interpreting the world, under the interpretivist paradigm discussed in Section 2.2, multiple different positions can be recognised as equally plausible and worthy of consideration (Steier 1991, Von Glasersfeld 1991, Bruner 1996). For Bruner, it is reflexivity that brings tolerance within communities, as it enables alternative positions to come clearly into view and thus provides 'a way to achieve mutual understanding even when negotiation fails to bring consensus' (1996: 148). Dewey made a similar point over 100 years ago:

> If ... two persons find themselves at cross purposes, it is necessary to dig up and compare the presuppositions, the implied context, on the basis of which each is speaking. … In this way, the root of the misunderstanding is removed (1910: 75).

Hertz, in a review of reflexive social studies in the 1990s, suggests that the theory can be corroborated by practice. Several authors had been ‘interested in telling their audiences about how they became sympathetic to those whose views they did not share’ (1997: viii). To return to Bochner and Ellis’s phrase, a self-reflexive account is ‘imperfect but human and believable’ and is one that can elicit ‘sympathy’ (2016: 70). A self-reflexive account, in short, is one that potentially enables us to see our interlocutor as a fully-rounded human being like ourselves. If we disagree with their position, we may be able to see it as grounded in a life history of experiences that differs from our own but is nonetheless legitimate simply for being human and held with integrity.

The links between self-reflexivity and empathy or mutual understanding appear repeatedly in the literature. According to Taylor, the form of dialogue employed in transformative learning theory is ‘not so much analytical, point-counterpoint dialogue, but dialogue emphasising relational and trustful communication’ (2009: 9). For Noddings, the moral purpose of ‘strong’ or self-reflective critical thinking is to move us from ‘egocentric or sociocentric positions’ towards ‘connect[ing] with others in a way that would make the world demonstrably better – less violent, less cruel’ (2016: 99). These points about the empathetic effects of self-reflexivity recall Dewey’s (1916) view of the role of education in a liberal democracy: that it should not only foster individual growth but also serve the social end of helping create a tolerant and harmonious society.

The literature discussed above, consisting largely of theoretical sources and general field reviews, thus suggests that the learning value of self-reflexivity for readers and audiences potentially includes explanatory clarity, heightened engagement by means of illuminating detail, moments of ‘me-too’ resonance, a development of self-knowledge, and the growth of empathy. This study provides an opportunity to explore the impact of self-reflexivity on audiences in a practical research setting. The ways in which the study’s data echo, nuance and extend the ideas found in the theoretical literature will be presented and discussed in Chapter Five.

To summarise this chapter as a whole, the literature from such diverse fields as education and learning theory, qualitative research methodology, visual culture and

photography studies, sociology, autoethnography and cultural studies seems to provide strong grounds for suspecting that self-reflexivity has the capacity to produce substantial metacognitive and learning gains for researchers/practitioners and audiences in photography criticism, a discipline in which self-reflexivity is currently under-used and under-investigated. To my knowledge, this spectrum of literature has not been brought together explicitly in this way before. The areas of research to which this study is set to make a contribution have been highlighted throughout. The methodology and methods that the study has used to explore self-reflexivity in photography criticism will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Three. Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This study is essentially about methodology. It is an exploration of a particular methodological approach to interpretation – self-reflexivity, based on self-reflection and disclosure – investigated in the context of photography criticism, and the value of this approach for producing metacognitive understanding and other forms of learning and growth. The reasons for believing that self-reflexivity might have learning value in practices of interpretation have been extensively discussed in Chapter Two.

To address and illuminate the research question, the study chose to explore self-reflexivity in photography criticism *in practice*. In this practice-led research study, I and a group of eight participants, all academics and/or photography critics, engaged individually in self-reflexive photography criticism, supplemented by forms of interaction; and we reflected, individually and in dialogue, on the impact of self-reflexive practice on our understanding and learning. A self-reflexive analytic protocol was devised to ensure rigour, focus and consistency in the generation of data, and was used throughout the process.

The research developed across two stages. In Stage One, which served as a pilot, I explored self-reflexive criticism of four photographs on my own. In Stage Two, the participants and I explored self-reflexive criticism of one photograph individually, then discussed our experiences at a 'circle of voices' event, followed by semi-structured interviews.

The study's data were thus generated self-reflexively by research participants and me using a practice-led research methodology, working individually and in dialogue, and were subsequently analysed by me through a self-reflexive critical prism. The rationale for engaging in practice-led research, details of the self-reflexive analytic protocol, and the methods used to implement the study are discussed in Section 3.2 below. Data analysis methods are discussed in Section 3.3.

3.2 Data Gathering

A. Practice-led research

The rationale for engaging in practice-led research in this study rests on three main principles: its appropriateness for research into practice, its consistency with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning the study, and its suitability for research into learning and metacognition. These three strands will be discussed in turn below.

First, its appropriateness for research into practice. Practice-led research is an emerging research methodology (Smith and Dean 2009), but a broad level of agreement exists about what kind of subject matter it is suitable for. As Stewart explains, practice-led research is inherently adapted to research *about practice*, and is typically concerned with 'processes for theorising practice' (2010: 124). As Borgdorff puts it, practice-led research examines processes in order to change and improve practice: its goal is to make a 'substantial, preferably cutting-edge contribution to the development of … practice' (2011: 49); aiming to 'shift the frontiers of the discipline … by developing cutting-edge practices, products and insights' (2011: 54). Its academic value derives from the extent to which it can 'contribute … to 'what we "know" and "understand" [about practice]' (ibid). Borgdorff's conception of the aims of practice-led research exactly matches this study's aims, as discussed in Section 1.3. Mottram supports the point, arguing that research which 'ask[s] questions about the nature of the discipline' is best conducted through practice in the discipline (2009: 248).

For Gray and Malins (2004: 2), practice-led research leads to learning about practice because it is an exploratory process conducive to experiential forms of learning (Kolb 2015), involving an iterative cycle of experimentation leading to experience, reflection on experience, and theorisation, followed by further experimentation and a continuation of the cycle. According to Borgdorff, this experiential process can produce different forms of knowledge about practice, such as 'acquaintance' knowledge, knowledge 'that', and 'how-to' knowledge (2011: 55). This study contributes to all these forms of knowledge in relation to photography criticism: introducing practitioners of criticism to self-reflexivity ('acquaintance' knowledge), investigating what its value to metacognition and learning might be (knowledge 'that'), and exploring how self-reflexive research might be carried out as a practical research process ('how to' knowledge).

Practice-led research can also lead to new insights into practice by taking advantage of the experienced practitioner's knowledge of practice. Kjørup argues that it is 'natural' for practitioners to research the processes of their own practice because they have 'privileged access' to how they carry out work in the field (2011: 25). Similarly, Gray and Malins (2004: 22) write that practitioners have tacit 'insider knowledge' about practice which they are better placed than anyone to explore and render explicit (Section 2.4 B). In this study, by researching practice through practice, I, as an experienced critic, am able to recognise any changes or enrichment in understanding brought about by incorporating self-reflexivity into my own critical process. In a similar way, all participants have been able to take advantage of *their* established knowledge of either criticism or self-reflexive research to help them identify the learning gains to be had from engaging in self-reflexive interpretation of photographs.

As a further pragmatic point, it seemed appropriate to employ practice-led research in a study of self-reflexive photography criticism because of the paucity of existing research and practice in this field, as discussed in Section 2.3 A. With a shortage of prior work to examine, my participants and I had little choice but to experiment with generating self-reflexive criticism for ourselves and reflect on the experience of doing so.

The second reason for using practice-led research is its consistency with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning the study, as outlined in Section 1.3 and discussed in Section 2.2. This study is grounded on the assumption that reflexivity is epistemologically necessary in interpretivist research; and it follows that in this interpretive study of the learning value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism, it is necessary to employ a reflexive approach that recognises the subjectivity of meaning-making. As Griffiths has argued, practice-led research is typically reflexive research in which the researcher-practitioner examines their own subjective meaning-making on the basis of experimentation and reflection (2011: 180ff) – exactly the process employed in this study, as will be discussed in Sections 3.2 D–E. Eisner claims, further, that practice-led research is an *exemplary* form of reflexive, interpretivist research, one that is exploratory, tentative, and constantly in pursuit of further understanding (2008: 26).

The subjective nature of practice-led research, however, means that – as with any self-reflexive research – a high level of transparency and rigour are required to ensure academic credibility and the usefulness of the research to other researchers. The matter was discussed generally in relation to self-reflexive research in Section 2.2. In terms specifically of practice-led research, Gray and Malins (2004) emphasise the importance of having a clear research question, a justification for the research in terms of context and literature, and a

rigorous approach to data gathering and analysis. In this study, a clear research question and an extensive justification were given in Chapters One and Two. The reflexive analytic protocol devised to ensure rigour, focus and consistency in data gathering will be discussed in Section 3.2 B, while the study's analytical approach will be discussed in Section 3.3.

The third reason for using practice-led 'subjective' research is its suitability for research into learning, which this study takes to be a constructivist process, as outlined in Section 1.3. In Piaget's (1963) constructivist model, understanding grows as a person adapts their mental constructs to new experiences, through a self-directed process of 'active groping' as new experiences are encountered (1963: 397). Practice-led research, an experiential action–reflection–theorisation process as described by Gray and Malins (2004), is one that seems capable of both enacting and illuminating the constructivist learning cycle. Critical self-reflection, which lies at the heart of practice-led research, can both drive assimilation and accommodation processes and so produce learning, as discussed in Section 2.4 A; and it can also inwardly 'perceive' the learning that ensues. As Illeris explains, constructivist learning is a process of 'internal mental acquisition' (2007: 22) that is experienced personally, a *felt* experience. It is not one that is felt or seen transparently and without mediation, as discussed in Section 2.2, but one that nonetheless qualifies as sense-data which can be detected, interpreted and assessed by the subject who experiences.

Practice-led appraisal of the subjective, perceptual, felt experience of learning could therefore be said to represent a form of 'self-assessment' of learning. As Boud has written, self-assessment (like premise reflection) is a potentially transformative process leading to learning growth (1995: 5); and is the assessment approach most consistent with constructivist learning (ibid). Self-assessment is widely regarded as an effective learning mechanism. As Panadero, Jonsson and Botella (2017) argue in their recent meta-analytic review of studies of self-assessment, self-assessment enhances self-efficacy, gives learners 'empowerment' over their own learning and is a 'necessity for productive learning' (2017: 95).

For all of these reasons, a self-reflexive and self-reflective practice-led research methodology seemed suitable for this study's examination of the learning value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism, carried out to build up a complex model of self-reflexivity as a learning mechanism in interpretive research, and to extend and improve the practice of photography criticism.

B. Working with participants

Research participants were introduced at Stage Two for two reasons: to enrich and diversify the data, and to examine the learning effects of self-reflexive criticism on an audience.

First, enrichment and diversification of the data. The study began in Stage One as an individual practice-led research project, as will be discussed in Section 3.2 D. For all the appropriateness of practice-led research for addressing the research question, as discussed above, in reflecting on the Stage One pilot I recognised that any project that examines one researcher's experiences alone is inevitably limited, its resonance for others potentially constrained by questions over the possible eccentricity of the researcher's experiences and responses. Denzin and Lincoln recommend that practice-led research can be strengthened through 'triangulation', such as by generating multiple perspectives from diverse participants, to ensure 'rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth' (2011: 5). Making a similar point, Koro-Ljungberg proposes the term 'triangulaxivity' for the methodology of corroboration of data through multiple reflexive perspectives (2016: 38). Accordingly, this study adopted a 'triangulaxive' approach in Stage Two in order to triangulate, enrich and inflect the data. The methods employed to do so will be discussed in Section 3.2 E.

Second, the learning effects on audiences. To explore the matter, the study needed an audience; and I chose to construct one in Stage Two by asking participants to present their self-reflexive interpretations to each other at a 'circle of voices' event. A 'circle of voices' discussion is one in which participants' interpretations are shared within a circle, listened to attentively, reflected upon and discussed (Lincoln and Guba 2016, Brookfield 2009). The 'circle' method was employed for two reasons. It not only enabled the study to examine the impact of self-reflexivity on an audience; but also gave participants an opportunity to experience further learning gains through sharing and dialogue. For Taylor, the emotional experience of sharing self-reflexive responses within an empathetic community of listeners can itself trigger transformative learning (2009: 10); while Brookfield stresses the potential of a circle to provide critical challenge, as participants help each other recognise blind spots that may have escaped their attention (2009: 133). Further details about the circle follow in Section 3.2 E.

C. The self-reflexive analytic protocol

A self-reflexive analytic protocol, detailing the steps that participants and I should go through in carrying out self-reflexive criticism, was devised at the outset and retained throughout the research. The protocol served a number of purposes: to help ensure rigour and consistency in gathering data; to provide a before-and-after framework to allow learning gains from self-reflexivity to be detected and assessed; to focus participants' attention on the photograph rather than themselves to minimise the risk of solipsism (Section 2.2); and to direct participants' attention towards particular 'sites' of reflexivity that seemed useful for revealing the bases of their thinking and feeling. All these matters will be discussed below.

The protocol is an experimental tool, owing to the absence (as far as I am aware) of any precedents for methodical self-reflexive research in photography criticism, as discussed in Section 2.4 A. Even in disciplines where reflexivity is established, such as ethnography and sociology, practical guidelines and protocols for reflexive research appear to be rare. Pillow, writing in 2003, some three decades after the introduction of reflexivity into social science research, noted that few guidelines existed for how to conduct reflexivity in practice (2003: 177). Her claim is repeated and updated by Dean, who writes that although reflexivity is 'a widely highlighted issue in research practice' (2017: 1) and 'overwhelmingly accepted' in theory (op cit: 2), many researchers still 'struggle' over how to incorporate it, and 'structured guidance' on how to do it is rarely provided (op cit: 3). Lumsden argues, similarly, that although social scientists tend to agree on the importance of reflexivity, no agreement exists on how to practise it, the steps to be followed, or which experiences should be reflected on (2019: 15). The protocol devised here represents, therefore, an innovative attempt at designing a rigorous analytic process for engaging in self-reflexive interpretation in order to generate gains in metacognition and learning. The number and order of steps, and the self-reflexive sites selected for examination, do not necessarily comprise the 'best' or only way that self-reflexive criticism might be carried out. Future researchers will undoubtedly wish to modify the protocol in some respects. Nonetheless, as this is an exploratory study of a largely untested practice in photography criticism, some decisions had to be made. The rationale for including the different steps is given below.

The nine steps of the protocol, along with the thinking prompts used in the research at Stage Two, can be summarised as follows:

1. Basic facts and context

What are the basic facts about the photograph (who, what, where, when) and its context of production?

2. Intended meaning
What do you take to be the photographer's intention, or intended meaning? (This might be deduced from context or visual rhetoric.)

3. Initial critical interpretation
Before you start to think reflexively, what are your initial thoughts about this picture, its connotations, its implicit values? Do you find yourself 'with' it or 'against' it?

4. Emotional response
What is your emotional, visceral reaction to the photograph? How does it affect you?

5. Reflexive analysis I: memory and life experience
What events or experiences from your past, either distant or recent, help explain your critical and emotional response to the photograph?

6. Reflexive analysis II: values and beliefs
Which of your personal attitudes, values and beliefs help explain your critical and emotional response to the photograph?

7. Reflexive analysis III: circumstances of viewing
As you write these reflections, what are your general circumstances right now? How are you feeling, and how might that be influencing your response?

8. General reflections
Looking back, which reflexive factors are most significant in influencing your response? Has reflexive analysis prompted you to rethink any of your prior assumptions?

9. Reflexive re-interpretation
Following reflexive self-analysis, do you see the photograph any differently?

The nine steps were used consistently throughout the research. Two minor adjustments, however, were made at Stage Two, when participants entered the study. First, the basic facts and context of the image (Step 1) were supplied by me, to ensure equivalence of background knowledge across the group. Second, Steps 8 and 9 had been combined in a single step at Stage One, but were separated in Stage Two. In reflecting on the pilot, it seemed potentially useful to separate out Step 9 in Stage Two in order to focus participants' attention more explicitly on the possibility of interpretive change.

The first three steps correspond to a 'standard' process of critical interpretation in photography, as outlined in Section 2.3 A. Step 1 provides an essential factual basis for analysis, ensuring that the critic understands, as far as possible, what an image *is*, in terms of its origin and function, and what it is *of*, among other matters, before any interpretation begins. Step 2 recognises that most images are intentional objects, made with an explicit or implicit intention by an image-maker. At this stage the critic reads the 'rhetoric' of the image, how it seeks to address us persuasively, by means of visual language and connotations, from a particular ideological point of view (Barthes 1977b; Burgin 1982; Bull 2010). Step 3 provides a critical response to the image's rhetoric, its implicit values/ideology, and its resonance within the discourses of contemporary culture, from the critic's perspective but without explicit self-reflexivity. At this stage the critic's response can take one of three forms. It can be a 'preferred' reading, which accepts and admires the image's rhetorical position and aesthetic effect; an 'oppositional' reading which wholly rejects the image's rhetoric; or a 'negotiated' reading which lies somewhere between the two extremes (Hall 1993). Mainstream critical writing typically stops at this point.

Starting with a standard critical reading in this way provides a control against which the impact of subsequent critical self-reflection on learning can be gauged. At the end of the process, Steps 8 and 9 call for reflection and rethinking. Thus a before-and-after measure is built into the research design. Other writers have commented on the need for a before-and-after framework for teasing out any shifts of understanding that may occur following self-reflection. Mezirow, for example, writes that to assess transformative learning, learners should be asked to respond to the same dilemma at the start and end of a learning programme, and to include explanations for their responses in each case (1991a: 220). This study adopts a similar before-and-after approach.

The first three steps were also designed to help prevent an overly subjective response, which has been highlighted as a potential danger of self-reflexive research (Section 2.2). By requiring participants to focus closely on the image and respond critically to it before

engaging in self-reflection, the protocol averts the risk, identified by Williams (2014: 44), of participants using the image simply as a prompt to write about their own feelings and memories. Participants are guided, in subsequent self-reflexive steps (Steps 4–7), to reflect on the personal reasons for their initial responses; returning again to the image, and a possible re-interpretation, at the end (Steps 8–9). The protocol thus helps ensure that self-reflexivity is used in this study as it is *meant* to be used in interpretive research: to provide an explanatory account, as Dean has written, of 'the means by which [researchers] arrive at a particular "reading" of data' (2017: 111), as discussed in Section 2.2.

Moving on to the self-reflexive steps: Step 4 draws attention to the researcher's emotional response to the image. As discussed in Section 2.3 B, emotional responses are generally downplayed in photography criticism (Brown and Phu 2014), and this step therefore prompts the researcher to engage with the photograph in what is likely to be an unaccustomed way. This step was included to test claims in the literature that emotion and thinking are entangled (Archer 2000, Smith 2014, Felski 2015), and that by paying attention to emotion we can uncover the assumptions, grounded in life history and worldview, that underpin our interpretations (Kleinman 1991, Sayer 2005, Brookfield 2012). The focus on emotional response at this point was intended to generate a set of leads or pathways that might provide access to underlying influences on thinking/feeling within memory, values/beliefs, and the context of the viewing moment in the self-reflexive steps that follow (Steps 5–7). The protocol thus provides a means to make sense of emotional responses, or potentially of thinking/feeling responses, in terms of the viewer's background, worldview and current circumstances, as well as providing researchers with an opportunity to reflect on emotions, the factors that underpin them, and their links to meaning-making, as a potential mechanism for learning and growth.

The next two steps address worldview and its grounding in personal experience. The uncovering of a researcher's worldview or perspective lies at the heart of any self-reflexive project, as discussed in Section 2.2, and the protocol draws attention separately to memories (Step 5) and values/beliefs (Step 6) to explore the distinction between what we think we believe in and care about (values/beliefs) and memories/past experiences that may lie at the root of how we think and feel but may not have been consciously processed. As discussed in Section 2.3 B, connections between thinking, worldview and life experiences have been made by a number of writers (eg, Piaget 1963, Bourdieu 1984, Pels 2000, Sayer 2005). In view of this study's interest in self-reflexivity as a mechanism for generating learning and growth, the protocol addresses memory/experience and values/beliefs not only to uncover

influences underlying our thinking/feeling responses, but to provide an opportunity for reconstruction or enrichment of those responses through critical self-reflection. Steps 5 and 6 serve, therefore, to foster transformative change, as discussed in Section 2.4 A; to release tacit knowledge, as discussed in Section 2.4 B; and to help generate an enriched conception of ourselves as a form of growth, as discussed in Section 2.4 D.

Step 7 focuses on the emotional context of the viewing moment. Context is a commonplace of mainstream critical practice within visual culture. Contexts as varied as historical, technological, social and cultural are reviewed as a matter of course (Berger 1972, Sturken and Cartwright 2001, Burbridge and Pollen 2018). However, as discussed in Section 2.3 B, the emotional or psychic context at the moment of the viewing encounter is rarely considered in mainstream criticism. Writers associated with affect theory (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, Gregg and Seigworth 2010) have suggested that such factors as mood, health, desires, anxieties, preoccupations and ambient conditions can influence how we respond to whatever we encounter. Step 7 was included to shed light on the nature and extent of such subtle, transient influences on our interpretation of photographs. As with previous steps, Step 7 provides a means both to add to our metacognitive understanding of our thinking and feeling and to reflect on these influences as an opportunity to develop our thinking and grow.

Step 8 asks for general reflections, as a prompt for researchers to assess the overall value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism. Finally, Step 9 calls for any re-interpretation of the image that might have been brought about by the reflexive process. This step was included as part of the before-and-after framework, as discussed above, to gather and synthesise information about whether critical self-reflection has the capacity to bring about reconstructions of previous thinking (Walsh 2003, Noddings 2016), additional insights (Steier 1991, Rose 2011) or other forms of growth, as discussed in Section 2.4.

D. Research design (Stage One): individual self-reflexive research

The rationale for undertaking practice-led research has been given above. Details of the methods employed in the two stages of the study are discussed in this section and the next.

Stage One was a pilot study of self-reflexive analysis which I carried out on my own. I self-reflexively examined four photographs (Figures 1–4) over a six-week period, using the protocol discussed above. To produce as rich data as possible, I selected images that represented a variety in terms of the content/genre of the image, my emotional predisposition

towards them, and my level of prior knowledge about them. Variation could best be managed by my controlling the selection process, rather than relying on random generation. In selecting images that were both resonant and not resonant, known and not known, I sought to ensure, as far as possible, that the research was not predesigned to produce only favourable results; and that the images reflected, to some extent, the range of work that a critic/researcher is likely to encounter in real-world critical practice.

My observations and reflections were recorded in an elaborated version of the 'double-entry' reflective journal method described by Moon (2006), designed to allow reflections over time. In this study, I used a *multiple*-entry spreadsheet, in which the images were examined against the protocol's criteria (in the columns) and re-examined over time (in the rows). The intention was to adopt a slow form of research, which allowed time for 'stop and think', for the retrieval of tacit knowledge, and any rethinking of responses that might follow. Images were examined up to four times: I returned to them until I felt my reflections were exhausted. As Taylor noted in relation to transformative learning (2009: 9), the practice of writing reflections down externalises them, making them prompts for further reflection and rethinking. To ensure trustworthiness of the data, I made every effort to follow Griffiths' stipulation to record my reflections with 'thoroughness, honesty and humility' (2011: 183).

The research process was cyclical rather than linear. As I engaged self-reflexively with images, and reflected on my reflections, I continually returned to the literature to contextualise and help make sense of what I was finding. Thus the research processes of literature review, data gathering and data analysis were never entirely separated, but co-existed in a constant, exploratory, back-and-forth feedback relationship with one another as the research evolved.

E. Research design (Stage Two): self-reflexive research with participants

1. Overview

Stage Two represented an elaboration of the project and consisted of three phases, as follows:

In Phase 1, a group of research participants and I undertook self-reflexive analysis of one further photograph (Figure 5) using a Reflexive Interpretation Template incorporating the steps of the protocol as discussed above. The template can be seen at Appendix IV. The image was chosen jointly, as will be discussed below. This phase of the research repeated the

process used in Stage One but with a wider group of participants. Participants were given approximately two months to complete the template and return it to me.

In Phase 2, about a month after completion of the template, the participants and I engaged in a 'circle of voices' event to present our self-reflexive interpretations to the group, followed by discussion. The event was recorded. The principles used to run the event will be outlined below.

In Phase 3, within two weeks following the circle of voices, the participants took part in semi-structured interviews with me, to explore their reactions to both the written exercise and the event. The interviews were recorded. I also undertook a self-interview covering the same ground as the interviews with participants.

2. Recruitment of participants

Participants were recruited who were 'expert witnesses': critics and academics who engage professionally in practices of interpretation. The decision to recruit experts followed from the aims of the study (Section 1.3). In order to test the learning value of a new self-reflexive and self-reflective interpretive methodology in photography criticism using practice-led methods (Section 3.2 A), and so to push out the boundaries of the discipline, it was necessary to work with participants with expertise in mainstream interpretive methods, to enable them to notice and assess any differences between the new methodology and current practice.

Participants were also selected for diversity across a number of characteristics, including age, gender, class, ethnicity and disciplinary perspective. It was desirable to have a diverse group, both to maximise the richness of data, and to produce suitable conditions for assessing resonance, empathy and bridge-building, identified as potential learning pathways for audiences in Section 2.4 E. To this end, all candidates who expressed an interest in taking part were asked to complete a Diversity Questionnaire, and the final group was arranged with the questionnaire in mind. The questionnaire is included at Appendix V.

To produce rich data and prompt productive interactions I sought participants from two sources. I attended an international autoethnography conference to attract participants with experience of self-reflexive practice as well as an interest in visual culture; and I wrote directly to a number of academics and writers with expertise in photography criticism, targeting those who I thought might produce a diverse group. Anonymised details of the participants who took part will be given in Chapter Five.

The number of participants was set at eight, in addition to myself. Brookfield (2009) suggests that numbers in a circle of voices should be limited to five or six for workability. I decided to recruit slightly more, to gain the benefit of more perspectives but also as a form of risk mitigation, in case any participants chose or were forced to withdraw from the research during the process. In the event, none did.

3. Image selection

Only one image was interpreted at this stage of the research. Given the number of phases in the process, it was felt that participants were being asked for a substantial enough level of commitment, even with just one image. Sufficient data to answer the research question would be produced through depth rather than breadth.

Selection was a collective process. I produced a shortlist of six images, which participants were asked to rank in order of preference in terms of resonance, with the overall highest-ranking image chosen. I followed this method to ensure a level of buy-in from the group, so that the research might proceed as a shared enterprise in which everyone had an interest. Selection in terms of resonance, while ensuring commitment, carried the risk of predesigning this stage of the study to produce favourable results. However, the image was ranked first by only four members of the group (Alison, Catherine, Jan, Marion), second by one (Gerry), third by three (Tom, Sofia, me), and fourth by one (David). In the event, productive learning experiences were reported both by those who initially found the image resonant, and by those who did not. Initial resonance seems not to be a prerequisite for learning, therefore, although it may have affected the character of some participants' responses, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

The shortlist was produced with the aim of offering a range of options across several stylistic axes within photography, including portrait/non-portrait, staged/documentary, narrative/non-narrative and dark/light mood. In order to produce a shortlist serving these purposes, it was important for me to select the list – as in Stage One (Section 3.2 D) – rather than rely on random generation. However, to open up possibilities, rather than choosing from images I already knew, I sifted photobooks, collections and back-issues of magazines to find suitable images. In the end, four of the images in the shortlist were unknown to me, including the image that was finally selected. The image can be seen in Section 5.1 C.

4. Principles of running the circle event

The circle of voices was run broadly as advised by Lincoln and Guba (2016). The aim was to foster close, attentive listening and an atmosphere of 'relational and trustful communication', which Taylor (2009: 9) has claimed is necessary for transformative interaction.

I acted as participating chair. Each participant (including me) was given five minutes to present their self-reflexive interpretations, which had been produced using the Reflexive Interpretation Template incorporating the nine steps of the protocol (Appendix IV). Participants were able to speak uninterrupted, while others listened and took notes. Participants spoke in a hierarchically-neutral order, based on alphabetical order by surname. Each presentation was followed by a brief space for any participant to ask clarification questions (not commentary), limited to two questions to keep the event moving. Once everyone had spoken, participants were invited to reflect on what they had heard, in particular on how their interpretation might have changed, or not changed, and why. As moderator, I guided the discussion towards the revelation of new insights, allowing the conversation to develop relatively freely while ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to offer secondary reflections.

I participated fully, rather than act as a 'detached' researcher and chair, for three reasons: first, my self-reflexive rationale precludes the option of detachment; I was necessarily involved, and to pretend otherwise would have been an illusion. Second, the primary purpose of including participants was to triangulate, enrich and inflect my own responses, as discussed in 3.2 B, and it was therefore necessary that I took part in the same exercise as the participants. Third, in terms of ethical practice and operational effectiveness, my participation helped produce trust within the group by establishing a reciprocal relationship between researcher and participants; I was not asking participants to do anything I was not prepared to do myself. One participant (Jan) commented appreciatively on this during the follow-up interview.

The discussion was scheduled for two hours, and in the event over-ran by 20 minutes. It was run on Microsoft Teams because the research took place during Covid-19 lockdown conditions in the UK in 2021. It was a requirement of both national and university guidelines to conduct all meetings remotely at that time. However, meeting on Teams turned out to have methodological value. The prospect appeared to make recruitment easier as participation became less onerous (participants did not need to travel to take part), and it gave the study access to participants across a wider geographical range than might otherwise have been

possible. Moreover, audio-visual recording of the meeting was technically easier than if the meeting had been face-to-face, by using the recording function within the Teams programme.

5. Principles of running the interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, asking open-ended questions linked to the study's research question to allow responses to develop freely. The aim was to allow the exploration in depth of participants' reflections on the experiences of undertaking self-reflexive criticism and being an audience for self-reflexive criticism. In addition to interviewing participants, I undertook a self-interview to ensure consistency and completeness. The interviews, like the circle event, took place on Teams for the reasons outlined above.

F. Ethical considerations

As an exploration of self-reflexivity, the study required participants to disclose personal information relating to their emotions, memories, life experiences and values/beliefs. The primary ethical challenge of the project was to design conditions in which participants felt comfortable about doing so. The three main issues were consent, data protection and trust.

In terms of consent, participants had agreed to take part on the basis of full information, and were free to choose which personal information they wished to share. They were entitled to withdraw at any time, and have their contribution deleted from the findings. In the event, none did. One participant (Sofia) experienced emotional blockage in completing the reflexive template, as will be discussed below. She was reminded that she could withdraw, but she chose to proceed with the circle event and subsequent interview.

In relation to data protection, all personal data were gathered and processed in compliance with national guidelines. Raw data were stored securely on OneDrive, and seen only by me. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants' identities have been concealed in this thesis – and will be in any subsequent publications – by providing them with pseudonyms and disguising their places of work and job titles.

In terms of trust, the research was designed to ensure that all participants (including me) were placed on an equal footing as far as possible, as all were engaged in the same self-reflexive tasks. The image to be studied was selected jointly, as discussed in Section 3.2 E.3, to ensure the involvement of all participants in the research design. The circle event was

planned as a forum for 'relational and trustful communication' (Taylor 2009: 9), as discussed in Section 3.2 E.4, with guidelines circulated in advance to ensure discussion was non-judgemental, respectful, confidential and open. Everyone was assured an equal voice and hearing. Any potential disparities in power relations arising from my role as researcher and discussion moderator were mitigated by my participating fully in self-reflexive disclosure and treating all participants with equal respect and encouragement. Crucially, in relation to fostering conditions of trust and parity, participants were all academic colleagues and peers, as appropriate for a practice-led study, as discussed in Section 3.2 A. In their dual roles as critical interpreters and audiences of interpretation, participants were engaged in activities that were close to their everyday professional experience. Each brought their own expertise to the meeting. To an extent, a circle discussion resembles a well-managed academic seminar; and in this sense, it could perhaps be argued that academic peers are, from an ethical as well as a functional point of view, the 'ideal' candidates for such an event.

One potential jeopardy arising from self-reflection is emotional disturbance caused by recall of traumatic memory. The study prepared for the possibility through the arrangements discussed above: participants chose what to disclose, communication in the circle was trustful and non-judgemental, and participants were entitled to withdraw. In the event, the image chosen for analysis was related to trauma, and prompted traumatic associations for a number of participants, as will be discussed in Chapter Five: transgenerational trauma for two, and personal trauma for three. For one participant (Sofia), personal trauma produced such a negative reaction to the image that it prevented engagement with the initial written response; but she chose to remain in the study, as outlined above. Another participant (Alison) described disclosure as emotionally difficult in her written response and at the event, but she narrated her story willingly and was listened to with attention and respect. If there had been any significant distress at the event, which continuation might have exacerbated, that part of the discussion would have been brought to a close.

Another potential jeopardy of self-reflexive disclosure is the risk of attracting disapproval or ridicule from one's audience (Bochner and Ellis 2016, Lumsden 2019). The study prepared for this eventuality, as for traumatic disturbance, by establishing a forum of communication at the circle that was trustful, attentive and non-judgemental. Participants were able to speak without interruption. If a participant had been disruptive, and it was not possible to calm the situation by moderation, he or she might have been asked to leave. Disapproval, however, is only one possible outcome; and the study was interested in exploring the opposite potential response to self-reflexivity: that it can encourage empathy

and bridge-building, as discussed in Section 2.4 E. In the event, the circle produced a great deal of empathy and no overt disapproval, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

The study also sought as much diversity as possible within a small sample size to ensure richness of data. Using the Diversity Questionnaire as a tool in the selection process, participants were recruited who varied in terms of age, gender, ethnic/regional background, class identification and disciplinary interests, as discussed in Section 3.2 E.2.

The project was approved by the academic ethics committee of the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences at BCU.

3.3 Data Analysis

A. Overview of the data

The data produced by this study consisted, at Stage One, of my written self-reflexive responses and reflections on Figures 1–4, as discussed in Section 3.2 D; and at Stage Two, of all participants' written self-reflexive responses and reflections on Figure 5; a transcript of the circle discussion; and transcripts of the interviews, as discussed in Section 3.2 E. The data as a whole, therefore, was perceptual and experiential. It comprised my own and participants' accounts (written and verbal) of our experiences of self-reflexivity in relation to a photograph or photographs, and our attempts at making sense of those experiences (individually and in dialogue).

The study sought to explore the value of self-reflexivity for learning. In order to turn the study's experiential data into evidence addressing the research question, in a way consistent with the study's theoretical underpinning, a number of decisions were made about how the data should be conceived and processed. These will be discussed in the following section.

B. Principles of analysis

In this study, analysis was not a single event that occurred *after* all the data had been gathered – just as the data were not gathered after all the literature had been read. In this self-reflexive project, the research consisted of a constant back-and-forth relationship between literature, data gathering and analysis, as outlined in Section 3.2 D. As I gathered data, my ongoing self-reflexive analysis of my own and participants' reflections informed further data gathering and led to renewed explorations of literature. This iterative, self-reflexive, analytic and exploratory cycle persisted throughout the study, right to the end.

When I came to undertake 'formal' analysis of the data in preparation for writing this thesis, I largely followed the method of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022). The analysis consisted of looking for themes or patterns within both datasets (Stages One and Two), and for especially resonant instances of data, that seemed relevant and helpful for illuminating the research question. I had already begun to recognise several of these themes at earlier stages of the research, as indicated above. Themes were constructed out of related sub-themes; and individual extracts were 'coded' in relation to either one sub-theme or several, as appropriate. A full list of the themes and sub-themes can be found in Appendix I. The same six-part thematic structure (Themes 1–6) was produced for both datasets, in order to draw out continuities and discontinuities. An additional theme (Theme 7), concerning learning experienced by readers/audiences of self-reflexive criticism, was generated from Stage Two only, as there was no audience at Stage One.

In Braun and Clarke's terms, I have taken a largely 'theory-driven' approach to analysis (2006: 87), in that my attention was guided by my research question and by a number of ideas about self-reflexivity and learning that had begun to form for me at earlier stages of the work, as a result of the iterative reading-practice-reflection process that I had been undertaking from the start. However, formal analysis allowed me to take a fresh and holistic look at the data. I took the process slowly and reflectively, devoting some seven months to it, giving enough time to allow the data to 'speak', and penetrate through the working presuppositions and informal interim conclusions that had been circulating in my head as I gathered the data. It was at this stage that all the key findings clarified in a coherent way. Several surprised me. This transformative analytic process led, in turn, to further research in the literature to contextualise what I was seeing; and this, in due course, influenced the structure of the Literature Review. Thus, Themes 1–5 (concerning learning

experienced by researchers/practitioners) and Theme 7 (concerning learning experienced by audiences) relate directly to the sequence of sections presented in Chapter Two, as highlighted in Appendix I. Theme 6 gathers miscellaneous patterns of response that contributed in a general way to understanding the value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism.

Data analysis in this study was therefore a highly exploratory and ruminative exercise. I reflected on the data for evidence of different ways in which self-reflexivity might produce learning, with different learning effects, in relation to different photographs, different participants, different 'sites' of self-reflexivity, different types of biographical content within each site, different phases of the research, as well as other factors. I have looked, in short, for nuance and variation. I have attempted to recognise contradictory data and absences of data; and to remain open-minded, curious, unknowing, and receptive to being surprised. Nuance, variation and patterns of similarity and difference are drawn out in the presentation and discussion of data in Chapters Four and Five with the aid of plentiful quotation.

The analysis is explicitly presented as my *interpretation* of the data, framed by my perspective (Section 1.4) and influenced by the active decisions I have taken throughout the research process. The interpretivist principle (Sections 1.3 and 2.2) has guided my approach to issues of quantity, as to all other matters. Themes and sub-themes were not evaluated on the basis of numerical comparison: for example, three instances of sub-theme *x* were not necessarily regarded as three times more significant than one instance of sub-theme *y*. There were several reasons for this. Experiential accounts are inherently imprecise and ambiguous. When an extract was recorded as an instance of a sub-theme, subjective judgement was always required to assess its value as an example of that sub-theme. Moreover, absolute numbers of extracts mapped to a particular sub-theme in a given participant's account might be determined by factors of little relevance to the research question, such as, for example, the relative length of a written account or interview or the relative effusiveness of the participant. For these reasons, resonance (subjectively judged) always carried more weight than absolute numbers. Nonetheless, numbers and distributions were still regarded as capable of interpretation in qualitative terms, as a way of drawing attention to broad patterns within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 85). To help illuminate these broad patterns, the thematic analyses are presented in a series of tables in Appendix II (Stage One) and Appendix III (Stage Two) in which extracts have been mapped to theme/sub-theme and the points in the research process at which the extracts were generated, presented in both granular format (each photograph in turn, or each participant in turn) and synthesised.

In making sense of the data, I have taken participants' and my accounts of our experiences largely at face value. In Braun and Clarke's terms, I have adopted a 'semantic' (rather than 'latent') orientation towards meaning (2006: 86). Self-reflexivity depends on a critical realist ontology of subjectivity (Sections 1.3 and 2.2) in which the self has continuity across time, and personal experiences, including emotions, past life events, and learning, are realities to which we have privileged access; even if, in terms of interpretivist epistemology, we can only 'perceive' them in a way that is mediated by our meaning schemes (Piaget 1963, Mezirow 1991a). Because personal accounts of experiences cannot usually be verified independently, self-reflexive research can only function within a community of trust (Section 2.2): practitioner-researchers and participants have to be scrupulous, honest and open, and interpreters have to trust their reports unless there seem to be good reasons not to (Griffiths 2011, Bochner and Ellis 2016). In short, self-reflexive research requires a 'hermeneutics of faith' (or trust) rather than a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Ricoeur 1970). Accordingly, I have trusted participants' responses and reflections and my own as credible attempts, however partial and constrained, at making sense of our experiences. At the same time, my analysis has operated as a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith 2019): an exercise in making sense of participants' and my own exercises in sense making. Accounts, although trusted, are not merely presented but *interpreted*; implicit meanings, as I see them, are drawn out. By including copious quotation in both my presentation and discussion of data, the grounds on which I have based my interpretations are made visible in the writing.

To provide a sense of the character, variety and richness of the data, I have presented my responses/reflections on each photograph separately at Stage One, and each participant's responses/reflections separately at Stage Two, before turning to synthesised discussions in terms of themes. Presenting data items separately in this manner is not a regular feature of Braun and Clarke's RTA method but represents a slightly 'off-label' approach (Braun and Clarke 2022: 254). However, by treating the data at both granular and synthesised levels, I have aimed to draw attention to some of the subtle dynamics of learning in different contexts. Photographs are not invariant and interchangeable, but provoke different kinds of self-reflexive response, with different consequences and opportunities for learning in different circumstances. Presenting my responses to each photograph separately at Stage One has allowed me to unpack some of those differences. Equally, presenting participants' responses separately at Stage Two was essential to give a sense of each participant's unique identity and circumstances, as a way of drawing attention to how their responses seemed to be influenced by their unique patterns of life experience. Doing so enabled me to highlight how

learning seems to happen in different ways for different people in different circumstances; and to explore how participants' thinking and learning developed, sometimes in highly significant ways, during the research period.

Throughout the analysis, participants' responses have been examined in relation to my own. This follows the structure of the study, in which participants were introduced at Stage Two in order to triangulate, enrich and inflect my own practice-led research findings at both Stages One and Two, as discussed in Section 3.2 B.

Details of how the study's thematic findings were manifested and nuanced in various complex ways in the data will be presented and discussed in relation to Stage One in Chapter Four, and in relation to Stage Two in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four. Research Stage One

4.1 Introduction

In the initial, pilot stage of this practice-led study of the learning value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism, I responded self-reflexively to four photographs over a six-week period using the self-reflexive analytic protocol devised for the study, as discussed in Section 3.2 C.

To produce rich data, the four images differed in terms of genre and subject matter, my disposition towards them, and my prior knowledge about them. They consisted of a metaphorical landscape (Figure 1), a documentary-style outdoor portrait (Figure 2), a conceptual art photograph (Figure 3), and a historic street photograph (Figure 4). These were photographs which, respectively, I did not know, by a photographer I admire (Figure 1); I knew and liked, by a photographer I admire (Figure 2); I knew and disliked (Figure 3); and I did not know, by a photographer of whom I was unaware (Figure 4). The rationale for selection was explained in Section 3.2 D. Adopting a slow form of research, each photograph was re-examined up to four times, until I felt my reflections were exhausted; with my responses recorded in a multiple-entry spreadsheet, also discussed in Section 3.2 D.

My responses to each of the four photographs are presented in turn in Section 4.2, analysed in terms of six themes (Themes 1–6) relating to different aspects of the learning value of self-reflexivity, as listed in Appendix I. The thematic analyses can be seen in a series of tables (Tables 1–10) in Appendix II.

The findings from this stage of the research are discussed in Section 4.3, with conclusions presented in Section 4.4.

4.2 Presentation of Data

A. Thomas Joshua Cooper, *An Indication: Ritual Ground, Ledlewan, Old Stirlingshire, Scotland, 1988*, from *Dreaming the Gokstadt* (1988)

The first image chosen for review (Figure 1, overleaf) was one I did not know, by a photographer I have long admired. This dark-toned landscape photograph depicts a tract of rough grassland at the edge of a forest, with no main point of focus and no horizon line. I read it as metaphorical and expressionist, with 'connotations of otherworldliness'. It was 'suggestive of a dark fairy tale'. The picture space 'draws you in' and seems 'charged … with danger, or the possibility of some transformation'.

My response was entangled with emotion from the start (Theme 1). The picture, I wrote, was a 'vehicle for affective transport', I was 'drawn in, and held', and the experience was 'stilling and immersive'. I recorded it as a sensation of 'heterotopic[1] projection, some kind of movement away (beckoning away?) from the present real moment which seems desirable'. The experience was 'not one of joy but something quiet but darker'. Self-reflection uncovered several possible life-history influences underlying the response; it also enriched the response, and led to insights into the value of photographs of this type. The thematic analysis of my response and reflections is presented in Table 1 (Appendix II).

Reflecting on my former work as a photographer, I recognised this as the kind of picture I used to make myself, calling to me as a 'fellow-traveller, or apprentice'. I admired the image (and its image maker) for achieving, through framing and tonality, what I had aimed to achieve in my own picture-making: 'creating picture spaces that draw you in and hold you, [that] work on your imagination' (Theme 1). Reflecting on my desire to make such work, I noted my attraction to spending time alone in remote rural sites, linking this to a slight social anxiety, 'a hangover no doubt of … experiences of exclusion … at different schools' (Themes 1, 5). I also linked my response to my 'life-long tendency to be drawn to stories of enchantment', interpreting this as 'a preference for imagination over reality, some sense that reality is hard, it knocks you' (Themes 1, 5). From this, I began to develop a theoretical link between 'a preference for solitude, mild social phobia', and the attraction of

[1] The term 'heterotopia' is taken from Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' (1986), and refers to an experience generated by certain encounters, located in real space and time, which appear to transport us simultaneously into an unreal space of imagination. The act of viewing artworks has been claimed to potentially offer such an experience (Bate 2015).

‘heterotopic’ photography and other cultural forms that work on the imagination, where ‘you are drawn in alone, you travel alone’ (Theme 4). In a picture like this, ‘the space I project into is intriguing, magical, but the containment of the space is also calming. It feels like a refuge’ (Themes 3, 4).

Figure 1. Thomas Joshua Cooper, *An Indication: Ritual Ground, Ledlewan, Old Stirlingshire, Scotland, 1988*
Image redacted for copyright reasons. It can be seen online at: https://www.onlandscape.co.uk/2017/03/thomas-joshua-cooper/

Reflecting on viewing context, I was aware of multiple strands of low-level ongoing anxiety (intellectual, financial, social) ‘bubbling in the background’; and it struck me as unsurprising ‘that a reader prone to anxiety should be attracted to a picture that offers a sense of refuge’ (Themes 1, 4).

I recognised, towards the end of the process, that self-reflexivity had expanded my conception of the picture and the complexity of my relationship to it. It had generated ‘a branching tree of connections providing ever more elaborate explanations for a point of view’ (Themes 3, 4). Self-reflexivity, I wrote, ‘demands attention, prevents off-the-cuff responses: and this produces new thoughts, new hypotheses’ (Themes 4, 6). By engaging in it, I had uncovered ‘possible explanations for the basis of [the image’s] appeal to me … [which] could be extrapolated to many other similar images’ (Themes 3, 4). In terms of potential future growth, I noted that if it were possible to overcome some of the social-anxiety assumptions

that seemed to underpin my attraction to the picture, 'I might have fewer barriers to integration, be happier perhaps' (Theme 5).

Self-reflexivity had also shed light on the fluid qualities of meaning, and its link to the viewer's evolving thinking and changing personal circumstances. Repeat self-reflection across a period of time, I wrote, had produced new interpretations which were manifestly 'not fixed and complete after one encounter'; and which seemed to be an indication of 'interpretation not being in the object, but in the ever-changing subject' (Theme 4).

In general, I noted that self-reflection had increased my attachment to the photograph. 'I have come to feel closer to the image … I feel I know it better, that I will remember it, that my feelings about it are clearer to me' (Theme 6). The process also made me recognise the value of slow, patient attention for productive thinking. On returning to the image a second time, I initially recorded a sense of disappointment; 'but I keep looking, and it starts to work on me again.' It made me realise 'how one has to relax into a picture [and] tune into its wavelength, through letting go of hurriedness' (Theme 6). Moreover, the act of returning a second or third time 'seems to produce richer understandings' (Themes 3, 6). I commented, also, however, on the difficulty of the process, the time it takes and the effort involved. 'Once again this has taken a surprisingly long time … Hard to start, to force myself again to sit and think, and hard work undertaking the introspective analysis.' (Theme 6).

B. Joel Sternfeld, *Canyon Country, California, June 1983*, from *American Prospects* (1987)

The second image reviewed (Figure 2, overleaf) was one I knew well, by a photographer I have long admired. I selected it to explore the effect of self-reflexivity where I already had a strong sense of what I thought about the image. For some years I have read the picture as a subtly satirical commentary on the complacency of wealth. The image depicts a well-groomed, cigar-smoking businessman with his daughter, whose confident self-assurance is undermined by obscenely tight shorts (despite his efforts, he looks ridiculous) and the implicit foreboding in his daughter's faraway look (she has other interests and plans). My reading has been a 'preferred reading' (Hall 1993, see Section 3.2 C): I admire what I take to be Sternfeld's satire; the picture shows me what I want to see.

Self-reflection on my emotional response, memory and values/beliefs seemed to reveal a clear autobiographical rationale for why I had responded as I had, but it also led to a

substantial shift in my thinking about the picture, myself, and my relation to the world. The thematic analysis of my response and reflections is presented in Table 2 (Appendix II).

Figure 2. Joel Sternfeld, *Canyon Country, California, June 1983*
Image redacted for copyright reasons. It can be seen online at:
https://www.joelsternfeld.net/artworks/2018/3/25/american-prospects#group-21

My emotional response was initially one of ‘tension’ between mockery/contempt for the ‘capitalist values’ I saw embodied in the male figure, alongside a ‘degree of admiration’ for the couple’s grooming and good looks. On reflection, I recognised someone ‘from my own class and ethnic background’ with whom I shared certain ‘late-bourgeois … post-hippy’ values. Coming from a middle class family with connections to business, I recognised the male figure as the kind of person I might know well, such as a family member or university friend. On the other hand: ‘From teenagerhood … I have turned away from business-executive values, preferring a more intellectual and creative life.’ As a result of my career choices I have never earned as much as contemporaries who followed corporate careers, and ‘I resent the imbalance between business earnings and my own’. Fed by a mixture of snobbery and resentment, then, ‘I am disposed to find this businessman secretly ridiculous’.

Thus, my ‘conflicting attraction-repulsion’ seemed to reflect the identity struggle of my life (Theme 1).

Further reflection, however, caused my response to shift. I began to feel more empathy for the man, ‘in particular … from his gentle arm around his daughter’. As the father of a daughter – older than the girl in the image, now at the stage of leaving home – I recognised the ‘desire to protect’. Dwelling on the connection increased my emotional response and fellow-feeling: ‘Affect is … influencing what I remember … I recall with nostalgic sorrow my own children at the age of this girl, that intensely close bond as you put your arm around them and they lean in …’ (Theme 1). At the time of reflecting on the image, I was feeling some anxieties over my daughter’s wellbeing, which seemed to contribute to my developing response (Theme 1).

My evolving empathy for the man as a father was further catalysed by a reflexive discussion of the image with a group of students, all of whom identified with the child in opposition to the father, seeing him as a ‘controlling parent’. I regarded their remarks as ‘unfair’ ‘He is not holding her tightly,’ I wrote. ‘She is leaning in’. The encounter made me recognise ‘how strongly my identity is now that of a father’ rather than ‘the teenager or young adult I once was’ (Theme 5). Empathising more with the man as a father, I began to feel ‘more sympathy for his wardrobe failure’, recognising that ‘we are all prone to accidentally making fools of ourselves’ (Themes 2, 3). In place of the *schadenfreude* I had previously felt, around the implication that the daughter would move away in time, I began to ‘feel a sense of pity’, recognising the pathos inherent in fatherhood and the parent-child relationship, which I now saw strongly reflected in this image (Themes 2, 3).

This empathetic shift brought the realisation, in a transformative ‘stop and think’ moment, that my habitual alienation from business people, such as the man in the image, was a ‘long-term prejudice … [which] has obscured the sympathy I would prefer to be feeling for a fellow human being and a father’ (Themes 1, 2). I noted that, following reflection, ‘perhaps I feel a little more sympathy [now] with “others of difference”, at least in this form’ (Theme 5). I wrote that I would ‘probably’ have a similarly changed response now to other satirical portrait photography of this type (Themes 4, 5).

In my general reflections, I recognised that a number of new insights had emerged as a result of the slow, meditative nature of the process. This was an image I had known for years, and felt that I understood. However: ‘I have certainly gazed longer and thought more deeply about my response … I now understand more about my own responses since I have had to articulate them. I feel more strongly located in my relationship to this image’ (Themes

1, 5, 6). I recognised that my initial response (mockery) and my evolving response (greater sympathy) were both strongly influenced by previous life experiences/aspirations and present family relationships and concerns (Themes 1, 4). Overall, I wrote, self-reflexivity 'increases my sense of [the image's] richness as an affecting visual text' (Themes 3, 6). Alongside the social commentary I first noticed, the self-reflexive process had imbued the image with an added layer of discursive complexity and heightened emotional force.

C. Horáková + Maurer, *TPX-Index 13/ng40 Nordwand/1996-11-02*, from *TPX-Index* (2018)

The third image reviewed (Figure 3, overleaf), a conceptual art photograph, was selected as one that I knew and disliked: I had recently written an oppositional review of the book in which it appeared (Denison 2018). I was intrigued to explore whether self-reflexivity might shed light on the causes of my negativity and modify my response. The thematic analysis of my response and reflections is presented in Table 3 (Appendix II).

The image depicts a blurred portion of studio wall and floor, tipped on its side, made with TPX radiographic film – a specialist film used for medical diagnosis. I took the intention to be an ironic commentary on the relationship between photography and truth, with nihilistic implications, suggesting that 'photographs tell us nothing'. I rejected the rhetoric, arguing that photographs 'can … reveal a degree of truth … even if not the whole truth'. I saw the picture as 'unconvincing', 'pretentious' and without 'affective pleasures to compensate'. My critical response was entangled with negative emotion from the start. The image, I wrote, 'court[s] the viewer's dislike'; I was 'bored' and 'irritated' by it, and 'forcing myself to contemplate it' induced 'anger and frustration' (Theme 1).

In my reflections, I found it 'very hard to think of remembered experiences' that were influencing my dislike. However, protracted reflection pointed to a set of values, beliefs, preferences and commitments which seemed, to an extent, to lie behind my critique (Themes 1, 6). These included my former work as a photographer in which, I recognised, I had sought to make highly crafted images, published in well-printed books, at a level of 'technical' quality that this image (and the book in which it appeared) failed to meet (Themes 1, 5). The image also conflicted with my expectations of photography in general: 'Perhaps it bores me so much because … I expect a photograph … to describe something I can recognise' (Theme 1). The image seemed to violate my beliefs about the function of art, in its 'dual role of signification and … aesthetic experience', neither of which was present for me in this work

(Theme 1). I also recognised my long-term aversion to what I regard as 'pretentious' or 'obscurantist' communication, in both writing and art (Themes 1, 5). I noticed that my response was influenced by two different elements of my professional background: my former careers in photography and journalism (Theme 1).

Figure 3. Horáková + Maurer, *TPX-Index 13/ng40 Nordwand/1996-11-02*
Image redacted for copyright reasons. It is not available online, but can be seen in the book, *TPX-Index* (2018)

Reflections on the emotional viewing context produced curious, if inconsistent, responses. In my first entry, the sense of relaxation at the near-completion of my self-reflexive analysis led me to wonder if I had been too harsh in my initial judgements. In the second entry, I approached the task in a positive mood but found that the work 'dented my

positivity'. In the first case, mood began to influence response; in the second, response influenced mood (Theme 1).

The value of self-reflexivity seemed ambiguous in relation to this image. 'How much harder I have found it … to examine the personal basis for my response, where there is minimal representation of an exterior world that I can associate with past experiences.' Mostly the work seemed exhausting, and unproductive: 'I don't feel I have got far with this, sitting here on my own, feeling impeded' (Theme 6). Self-reflection did not increase my engagement with this image, improve my estimation of it, or lead to a changed response.

However, the time and effort involved in 'forcing myself' to work through the steps of the protocol produced the beginnings of a theoretical insight into the relationship between representation, emotional response and language (Theme 6). Abstraction, I wrote, can compel through formal elements (such as surface, colour, size, gesture and arrangement) which we can 'make sense of, because there is a language for them'. But with this image, the abstract form invited 'dysphoric' linguistic description: 'impenetrable, depthless, matt, muted, ill-defined, vague.' I went on to ask: 'Am I thinking my way into some tentative conclusion? … that a positive feeling [in abstract art] depends on what can be linguistically described in euphoric terms?' (Themes 3, 5).

D. Roman Vishniac, *Interior of the Anhalter Bahnhof, 1929–30*, from *Roman Vishniac Rediscovered* (2019)

The fourth image chosen (Figure 4, overleaf) was one I did not know, by a photographer I was unaware of. It was found through the near-random process of searching online through current photography exhibitions in the UK in early 2019. This historic street photograph depicts the entrance to a former railway station in Berlin viewed from the inside, with backlit figures appearing in streams of light pouring through the station doorways. I read the image as 'an exquisite example of "decisive moment" type photography', a modernist genre concerned with the recording of fleeting moments of everyday experience, and one that 'speaks inevitably … about the past'. The thematic analysis of my response and reflections is presented in Table 4 (Appendix II).

Figure 4. Roman Vishniac, *Interior of the Anhalter Bahnhof, 1929–30*

Image redacted for copyright reasons. It can be seen online at: https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/interior-of-the-anhalter-bahnhof-railway-terminus-near-potsdamer-platz-0

In reflecting on my response, it was clear that it was overtly entangled with emotion: it was a largely emotional response (Theme 1). The image produced 'delight, admiration, curiosity, longing, melancholy'. It appeared to 'interpellate me with the expectation that I will find this a delightful vision, and I do.' Gazing at the image activated a stream of personal reminiscences, including memories of similar light effects in particular locations 'all emblematic of emotionally intense times that are past', memories of rail travel through European stations as a teenager, and nostalgic recollections of people I have known and cared for who were alive at the time that the picture was made (Theme 1). Emotion and memory seemed inseparable. 'I am sent into a spin, slightly unfocused, reflecting on memories and times that are gone.' However, the tacit landscape of memories did not so much *explain* an initial response as *constitute* and enrich it, and intensify my feelings, as I gave free rein to

reverie and heterotopic projection (Themes 1, 4, 6). The image, I wrote, 'seems to invite me in, to walk through the doors, past the fluted pillar and out into the light'.

Some insights into my liking for the picture, however, were produced through reflection on my values. I wrote that its vision of a historic building lit by early-morning sunlight appealed 'to my fastidiousness about design … and my liking for the old and well-made' (Theme 1). I also saw the image as evoking 'a comforting myth of a more attractive and peaceful age before the onslaught of … mass culture, consumerism, shopping stalls, advertising, litter', a reflection on my aesthetic preference for the appearance, and some of the mores, of a previous era (Theme 1). An aspect of viewing context may also have affected my response. I wrote of emotional tensions at home at the time of viewing the image. 'In light of such tensions, perhaps I was more willing to be drawn into a calming, delighting escape … into another time and place?' (Theme 1).

On returning to the image for a second set of reflections, my response shifted slightly, from nostalgic reminiscence to melancholy. 'Melancholy dominates my second reading ... I feel the pastness strongly' (Themes 1, 3). I began to reflect on my own passing days, as someone in their mid-50s. 'Memory work,' I wrote, 'brings us face to face with our own passing, with the days and life that are gone' (Theme 4). My reflections drew explicit attention to an aspect of my character, a tendency to melancholy, which prompted me to make the connection between melancholic tendencies and the appeal of photographs – not only historic images but photography in general. I have 'always been prone to these kinds of thoughts … and being so, always having been so, is it any surprise that … I am drawn to photographs from the past? That I am drawn to photography?' (Themes 3, 4, 5).

In my general reflections, I wrote that 'once again, the discipline of thinking about personal context has helped me think further around the picture, elaborating the basis of my thoughts and feelings and in turn producing further thoughts and feelings' (Theme 6). This led to an insight into my learning. Noting Piaget's (1963) ideas about learning as 'the reaching of an equilibrium' in which thinking is made to fit the reality of experience, I reflected: 'Does the elaboration of interpretation and feelings through reflexivity create a better fit with reality?' I was not yet 'fitting reality, in any calm state of equilibrium', I felt, but was 'engaged in a process of getting closer to it, piecing together a little more, perhaps, of an infinitely complex field of understanding' (Theme 5).

4.3 Discussion

This section discusses the data from Stage One in terms of the six themes used in the analysis, taking each theme in turn. Themes 1–5 address ways in which self-reflexivity seemed to generate learning gains as I responded to Figures 1–4, while Theme 6 gathers general reflections on the value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism. Following the discussion of themes, this section closes with a discussion of the self-reflexive analytic protocol as a tool for generating learning and growth.

A. <u>Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context</u>

The primary rationale for including reflexivity/self-reflexivity in research is to provide an account of how 'a particular "reading" of data' was produced (Dean 2017: 111, see Section 2.2). Yet in photography criticism, self-reflexivity is rarely employed to provide an explanation of the personal basis of interpretation (Section 2.3 A). At the same time, despite an emerging interest in emotional response in photography studies (Brown and Phu 2014), feelings are still often assumed to be inexplicable (Smith 2014) and the interdependency of thinking, feeling, worldview and life history described by several writers (Söderqvist 1991, Sayer 2005, Illeris 2007, Brookfield 2012) is rarely interrogated (Section 2.3 B).

In this stage of the research, reflection on my emotions, past experiences, worldview and viewing context pointed to a range of autobiographical factors which seemed to help explain both my initial and my developing responses to Figures 1–4. My critical interpretations of all four images were entangled with emotions; and reflecting on emotional cues seemed the main channel by which life-history influences could be reached. My reflections thus indicated that both my thinking and feeling responses were shaped by my 'psychobiography' (Pels 2000) and that self-reflexivity is an effective process for bringing those influences to light.

The significance of the different reflexive sites, however, varied across the images. An analysis of the distribution of Theme 1 evidence by photograph is presented in Table 5 (Appendix II). My response to Figure 1 was linked to background experience, and to a lesser extent viewing context. My response to Figure 2 was linked to background experience and

worldview, and to a lesser extent viewing context. For Figure 4, my response was linked to background experience, and to a lesser extent worldview and viewing context. Figure 3 appeared to be something of an exception. I found it hard to link my response in significant ways to experience or viewing context, but some links could be drawn to my long-term preferences, values and beliefs.

My responses were thus most frequently and powerfully linked to memory and background experience. In the case of Figure 1, my former practice as a landscape photographer fed into my admiration for the image. For the most part, however, the experiences that seemed most pertinent for explaining my thinking/feeling were general life-experiences beyond the field of photography. These were typically habitual patterns of behaviour and thinking that are emotionally motivated, relating to matters I care about – especially matters that concern my sense of identity – and which the image also seemed to address or evoke. With Figure 1, the salient behaviour/thinking concerned my preference for solitary and imaginative experiences, linked to mild social anxiety and my sense of myself as an 'outsider'. With Figure 2, it was my lifetime's identity struggle, coming from a middle-class family with links to business, and – as my response to the image changed – my identity as a father based on powerful emotional bonds with my children. With Figure 4, my response consisted largely of poignant memories, a subject of engrossing fascination to someone with tendencies towards introspection, and who now finds himself 'a substantial way through my own life's span … my own childhood memories distant and increasingly vague …'

Where values came into play, unsurprisingly it was for similar reasons – values, after all, may be defined as emotionally-motivated beliefs relating to matters we care about. With Figure 2, these concerned self-identity and my beliefs about the kind of life I have wanted to lead ('a more intellectual and creative life …'). In the case of Figure 3, links between response and values were present but harder to identify ('I don't feel I have got far with this'), and less powerful once noticed. This may perhaps be explained on the grounds that the salient values in this case – what counts as a good photograph, a good piece of communication – concern matters that are less emotionally motivated, and can be viewed with more detachment.

Links between my response and the context of the viewing encounter seem intriguing but more elusive. They tended to shimmer into visibility, their significance possible but rarely certain. These included, with Figure 1, anxieties (intellectual, financial, social) 'bubbling in the background' possibly easing my desire to be drawn to an image offering 'a sense of refuge'; with Figure 2, concerns over my daughter's wellbeing perhaps increasing

my sympathy for the protective father-figure in the image; and with Figure 4, tensions at home possibly aiding my desire to be drawn into 'a calming … escape into another time and place'. All of these connections seem interesting but indefinite. My reflections on Figure 3 seem particularly ambiguous. In my first set of reflections, my positive mood began to soften my negative response; in the second, my negative response dented my positive mood. A tentative conclusion from this is that affective conditions seem to have a fragile and fleeting quality, and affective influence can travel in both (or possibly multiple) directions. As Gregg and Seigworth write, in relation to the emotional context of experience: 'affect … often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities' (2010: 2). Perhaps it is inevitable that the significance of viewing context will always be hard to pin down.

B. Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think

As writers such as Dewey (1910, 1916) and Mezirow (1991a, 1991b, 2009) have claimed, the principal learning aim of critical self-reflection is to root out erroneous or questionable presuppositions on which our beliefs and judgements are based (Section 2.4 A). As May and Perry explain, what seems self-evident may be based on error or misrecognition, and self-reflection provides a means for us to spot our mistakes (2017: 3). If we can recognise a presupposition to be defective or questionable, the consequence should be a *change* in the belief or interpretation that stems from the presupposition, commensurate with the scale and significance of the defect identified. Practical studies, however, linking self-reflection to changes of interpretation of research materials seem rare (Section 2.4 A).

An analysis of the distribution of Theme 2 evidence by photograph is presented in Table 6 (Appendix II). During this stage of the study, critical self-reflection led explicitly to a change of interpretation of one of the four images reviewed (Figure 2). As I write this discussion, however, and reflect again on my self-reflexive interpretations some three years after the initial reflections took place, I find my interpretation now shifting in the case of Figure 3 as well. This appears to pick up Mezirow's point that transformations can sometimes take time to come into effect (1991a: 171). My persistent opposition to Figure 3 during the initial period of study was based largely on my perception that the picture challenged a belief I have about photography (ie, that photography is able to communicate *some* level of truth, if not the whole truth), it did not give me the experience I expect and desire from a photograph, and I took no pleasure in it. Reflecting again, I see that I opposed it

because of its 'otherness' in relation to my beliefs, expectations and desires. My opposition was somewhat self-centred, I see now. Thinking again, I find I can now tolerate and respect its otherness. I begin to see the work as an honourable attempt at confronting a recognised problem in photography (the relation between photography and truth), and doing so in an unusual way, arguably with a level of deadpan wit. Thus I start to recognise some aspects of value in this work, even if I continue to disagree with its implicit rhetoric.

The changes in my thinking about Figures 2 and 3, brought about by critical self-reflection, cannot be claimed to be examples of fully transformative learning in the sense described by Mezirow (1991a): these are not life-changing mental shifts. Nonetheless, they do represent significant alterations in my interpretation of the two photographs, leading in both cases to an enlarged appreciation of their complexity and value as communicative texts. In both cases the interpretive shift turned on a moral issue, concerning my reactions to other people with whom I disagree in terms of values or belief ('others of difference'). The shift was enabled by my recognising something in my presuppositions (a tendency, perhaps, to oppose others of difference too readily) which sat uneasily with my values (a human rights-based desire for equal respect for all). Thus a tension was set up which could only be resolved by an interpretive shift.

In the case of Figures 1 and 4, critical self-reflection led to no explicit change in my interpretation. This seems to be largely because there was no moral tension between my interpretations and my value system, as far as I was aware, that demanded resolution. The idea that one of the causes of interpretive shifts lies in a tension between initial interpretations and values seems promising. The interpretive shift described by Marshall et al (1998), cited in Section 2.4 A, also turned on a contradiction between their initial interpretation and their values. In their case, the values in question related to a political aspiration for greater racial equality (1998: 128). In my case, the values relate, I think, to an aspiration for a more mutually tolerant and consensual social order. The implication seems to be that the interpretive shifts produced by self-reflection within a self-reflexive framework spring, partly at least, from the need to resolve values-based tensions that are peculiar to the individual researcher, and which may not be shared in the same way by others. This is consistent with the constructivist conception that learning is not a movement towards universal truths but a process of individual cognitive development within a social and cultural context (Piaget 1963, Illeris 2007, Pring 2015).

In transformative learning theory, transformations can occur while carrying out premise reflection either alone or in dialogue with others (Taylor 2009, see Section 2.4 A).

With Figure 2, the shift in my interpretation began while reflecting on my own, but was catalysed following a reflexive discussion with a group of students. With Figure 3, the change occurred in the absence of dialogue with others, but was delayed, occurring only when I returned to my reflections some time later, as discussed above. Taken together, these experiences indicate that solo critical reflection can be effective, but they point also to the potential added value of dialogue for interpretive shifts.

C. Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights

The purpose of including reflexivity in research is to expand understanding by 'unconcealing our own tacit world', as Steier has written (1991: 7). This tacit world includes the frameworks of ideas and values that we have 'interiorised' and which shape our judgements and beliefs (Polanyi 2009: 17). Practical studies of reflection, however, that provide evidence for a connection between self-reflection, tacit knowledge and expansions of understanding of research materials seem rare (Section 2.4 B).

An analysis of the distribution of Theme 3 evidence by photograph is presented in Table 7 (Appendix II). Self-reflexivity appeared to 'expand my understanding' in the case of all four images studied at this stage of the research. In the case of Figure 2, my expanded sense of the image's 'richness as an affecting visual text' derived from recognising, through self-reflection, the pathos connected to parenthood in the image that I had not noticed before. With Figures 1 and 3, self-reflection on experience, values and emotion prompted new theoretical insights around aspects of critical practice: a connection between the appeal of heterotopic landscape imagery and certain personality traits (Figure 1); and a connection between aesthetic responses to abstract photography and language (Figure 3). These insights represent only tentative first steps towards theory, and need more work in each case (beyond the scope of this study) to become fully elaborated. They do, however, seem undoubtedly to represent an expansion of consciousness, and an opening up of new interpretive possibilities.

With Figure 4, self-reflection activated a powerful recognition of the melancholy inherent in all photographs and its potential significance for photographic value. This is not a new theoretical insight, as the connection between photography, 'pastness' and melancholy has been made by Sontag (1979) and Barthes (1982). However, the self-reflexive process brought these writers' insight forcefully home to me. It seemed like an emotionally embodied

confirmation of an idea I have long been aware of; a coming-to-know in the form of a felt recognition. The experience has made a deep impression, and I suspect will not leave me.

For writers such as Kleinman (1991) and Rose (2011), the activation of tacit knowledge was experienced as a sudden rush of insight, an epiphany. In this study, my enriched conception of Figure 2's affective complexity stemmed, in part, from an epiphanic recognition of how strongly I now identify as a father, following reflexive discussion about the image with students. On the whole, however, the insights that reflexivity produced for me were experienced as a slow dawning, in line with the slow, ruminative nature of the process.

Tacit knowledge has been claimed to be especially potent when it is 'insider' knowledge in relation to the field being studied (Gray and Malins 2004). Insider knowledge from my former practices as photographer and journalist undoubtedly helped explain my admiration and fellow-feeling for Figure 1 and my dislike of Figure 3. Moreover, my theorisations about photography, discussed above, are unlikely to have emerged in the same way if I had not been immersed as an insider in the practice of photography criticism. However, many insights, especially those relating to Figures 1 and 2, stemmed not from insider knowledge but from a more general tacit knowledge associated with my existence as a person in the world involved in human relationships.

D. Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography

As Meyer and Land (2003) have written, threshold concepts act as portals to new and expanded forms of understanding of a topic or discipline, promising 'irreversible' learning leaps which often occur on the basis of recognising and integrating forms of tacit knowledge (Davies 2006, see Section 2.4 C). As the research neared its conclusion, it struck me that the data were suggesting that self-reflexivity could perhaps be seen in this light, related to how it can lead us to recognise ways that our interpretations are inflected by our unique pattern of life experiences, commitments and values.

In threshold concept theory, there is an *unexpected* quality to passing through a threshold: the learner often experiences resistance and disbelief before the transformation takes place (Meyer and Land 2003). For this reason it is important to assess the data from this stage of the research with caution, as I knowingly set out to explore whether self-reflexivity might lead to transformations and reconstruction of meaning. Nonetheless, while acknowledging the risk of confirmation bias, self-reflexivity's generative capacity for new

thoughts and insights seems, on the basis of this stage of the research, to be beyond doubt. An analysis of the distribution of Theme 4 evidence by photograph is presented in Table 8 (Appendix II). The process produced 'a branching tree of connections providing ever-more elaborate explanations for a point of view' (Figure 1); and had the effect of 'elaborating the basis of my thoughts and feelings and in turn producing further thoughts and feelings' (Figure 4). Self-reflexivity complicated and enriched my conception of Figure 2, and generated from scratch an affectively rich conception of Figure 4. The process brought insights into myself, as well as into the basis for my critical interpretation of all four images. And it produced a new generic way of thinking about Figures 1 and 2, which I recognised could be extrapolated to other images in the relevant genre.

Above all, however, self-reflexivity demonstrated – in contradistinction to the dominant emphases of mainstream critical practice (Sections 2.3 A and B) – that my responses to all four images were entangled with my emotions, and that my thinking/feeling responses had their roots in my life experiences and values/beliefs developed over an embodied lifetime, as discussed in relation to Theme 1 (Section 4.3 A). It was precisely this revelation and unspooling of an elaborate personal substructure underlying my thinking/feeling that led to all the expanded forms of understanding outlined above. This appears to point to self-reflexivity's capacity to serve as a pathway to a threshold concept, albeit one that is not yet widely recognised within the discipline.

My response to Figure 3 seems particularly interesting in this respect. While the self-reflexive process did not seem 'troublesome' in the case of the other images, it felt difficult and frustrating with Figure 3. 'How much harder I have found it,' I wrote, 'to examine the personal basis for my response where there is minimal representation of an exterior world that I can associate with previous experiences.' The process did not seem productive as I was doing it: 'I don't feel I have got far with this.' However, by forcing myself to examine the basis of my dislike, I did uncover some long-term aesthetic preferences, beliefs and values that helped explain my response. Then in a much later reflection which occurred while I was writing this chapter (as discussed under Theme 2 above), I recognised that my dislike was based in a resistance to accepting positions in discord with my own values and preferences. This transformative insight led to a more positive and tolerant appraisal of the image. This drawn-out alteration and expansion of my awareness seems to suggest something of the troublesomeness-later-resolved that is described pervasively in the threshold concepts literature (eg, Meyer and Land 2003).

E. Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth

Existential growth has often been claimed to be the ultimate goal of education and learning (Dewey 1916, Freire 1970, White 2006, Pring 2015), and some scholars have regarded self-reflection as a primary mechanism for attaining it (Bakhtin 1981, Archer 2000, Mezirow 2009, see Section 2.4 D). For Dewey, Bakhtin and Archer, the personal growth fostered by self-reflection is explicitly described as a continuous process, the work of a lifetime. Self-realisation is not attained, for these writers, in one great epiphanic or transformative learning moment. Accordingly, in any given self-reflective experience, if personal growth occurs, it is likely to be in the form of small, tentative and provisional steps.

Few prior studies appear to have linked growth to reflection as an interpretive practice in fields such as visual culture (Section 2.4 D). In this stage of this interpretive study, however, signs of possible, provisional growth can perhaps be seen in relation to reflection on Figures 1 and 2, and to a lesser extent with Figures 3 and 4. An analysis of the distribution of Theme 5 evidence by photograph is presented in Table 9 (Appendix II).

As discussed in Section 2.4 D, scholars have suggested that signs of personal growth in learning experiences may include clarifications about ourselves, enhanced metacognitive awareness, new connections between past and present experiences, an intensification of feeling/engagement, and an expansion of possibilities. In this study, my reflections on Figures 1 and 2 prompted insights into my self-identity, which underpinned not only my responses to the images but also habitual aspects of my behaviour and thinking. These related to my long-term preference for self-contained life-experiences influenced by social anxiety (Figure 1) and my prejudicial attitudes towards a particular category of people (Figure 2). Both insights appear to qualify as instances of attaining clarification about myself and metacognitive awareness of my thinking processes; and both seem to offer the possibility of positive change. In the case of Figure 1, I wrote that if it were possible to overcome certain ingrained self-beliefs 'I might have fewer barriers to integration, be happier perhaps'. With Figure 2, I noted that, following self-reflection: 'Perhaps I feel a little more sympathy with "others of difference", at least in this form.'

In addition, my reflections on Figure 2 produced an epiphanic shift in my sense of self-identity in terms of my conception of myself as a father, in what seems to be a clear instance of expanding self-awareness. The insight was catalysed by a reflexive discussion of the image with a group of students, in which I found myself reacting against the suggestion that the male figure in the image was a 'controlling parent'. The experience seems to support

Leggo's claim that the sharing of reflexive positions can create a 'world of echolocation' in which we 'find our bearings like bats, by means of knowing each other' (2008: 91).

Reflections on Figures 3 and 4 did not appear to produce signs of growth so strongly but both generated metacognitive insights into my thinking processes in relation to photography and learning. Figure 3 helped me clarify the basis of some of my aesthetic preferences (for craftsmanship, euphoric form, communicative directness). Figure 4 reinforced my understanding of my own attraction to photography based on my introspective tendencies ('… is it any surprise that … I am drawn to photography?'). It also produced an insight into the slow evolution of my learning: I saw that I was 'engaged in a process of getting closer to [a state of equilibrium], piecing together a little more, perhaps, of an infinitely complex field of understanding'.

In considering why growth may be prompted more by some self-reflexive experiences than by others, it strikes me that with Figures 1 and 2, reflections led me to identify aspects of my assumptions and worldview which seemed troublesome; and that this in turn opened up the opportunity for change or growth. With Figure 3, during the initial period of research, my opposition to the image seemed justified, both intellectually and morally, and I felt no need to change my view. My *subsequent* change of heart, however, discussed above in relation to Theme 1, was prompted by identifying a troublesome assumption underlying my initial reaction. A tentative conclusion from this may be that one way in which personal growth is initiated in self-reflexive research is when something troublesome in our assumptions or practices is identified, which invites us to change our thinking or behaviour.

F. <u>Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons</u>

In analysing my responses, in addition to looking for evidence that addressed the research question directly, I also identified reflections that seemed to contribute in a general way to understanding the value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism. Three recurrent ideas stood out. First, that the slowness of the process, determined by the methodical and ruminative demands of the protocol, was a significant factor in generating insights; second, that the process increased my affective engagement with the images; and third, that self-reflexive analysis was generally time-consuming and laborious to undertake. An analysis of the distribution of Theme 6 evidence by photograph is presented in Table 10 (Appendix II).

The value of slowness was evident in my reflections on all four images. Slow, methodical reflection both generated and elaborated interpretive insights in relation to Figures 1, 2 and 4. This outcome seemed especially notable in relation to Figure 2, an image that I thought I knew well. Even with Figure 3, where I seemed to make little headway in identifying personal grounds for my response, persisting with the methodical structure of the protocol produced some general insights. By 'forcing myself' to contemplate the image, I wrote that I was starting to '[think] my way into some tentative conclusion.' In general, the process brought into sharp focus the value of slow, patient attention in making sense of images. 'I keep looking, and it starts to work on me again,' I wrote in relation to Figure 1, recognising the importance of 'letting go of hurriedness' in order to respond productively to the image. In a related way, I found that returning to images more than once allowed my interpretations to develop, especially with Figures 1 and 2. In the case of Figure 1, it was not until my second cycle of reflections that I recognised my habit of escaping 'reality' into worlds of imagination, which seemed key to understanding my response. With Figure 2, it was during my second set of reflections that I recognised the 'long-term prejudice' that had underpinned my initial response, causing my interpretation to shift.

A striking effect of self-reflexivity was that it seemed to greatly increase my engagement with the three images to which I had a positive emotional response (Figures 1, 2 and 4). In the case of Figure 1, I wrote that 'I have come to feel closer to the image, I feel I know it better, that I will remember it'; and with Figure 2, that I had an increased sense of its 'richness as an affecting visual text'. In the case of Figure 4, it was the process of self-reflection that produced my intense emotional reaction ('I am sent into a spin, slightly unfocused, reflecting on past experiences from times that are gone'). With Figure 3, on the other hand, self-reflexivity seemed to have no significant impact on my emotional response, either positively or negatively.

These experiences can perhaps be explained by reflecting on the operation of self-reflexivity. A self-reflexive research process is one in which we view our research materials within a framework of personal experience and values; we link our research materials to our personal lives. It may therefore seem unsurprising that our emotional attachment to images increases as we become more personally invested in them. The lack of increased engagement to Figure 3 would follow from this, because of the difficulty I found in associating the image with any personal experiences. Moreover, an increase in affective engagement may be connected to the slowness of the process. An intriguing parallel is given by the literature of art and photography criticism, where a link has long been recognised between attentive, close

looking at artworks and the positive affective experience of meditative reverie (Fry 1920, Jussim 1989, Carter and Geczy 2006).

In terms of this study's research question, a finding about increased affective engagement matters, because of the connection in learning theory between engagement and learning (Bamber and Jones 2015, Gibbs 2015, Illeris 2007). The more affectively engaged we are with our research materials, the more likely we are to learn. If an increase in affective engagement does not itself qualify as learning, it arguably counts as a precursor to learning.

A number of writers on reflexivity have commented that the process can be experienced as risky, unsettling, even painful (Dean 2017, May and Perry 2017, Lumsden 2019). In my experience at this stage of the study, the process was never painful, but it seemed laborious and time-consuming, especially in the case of Figure 1, which prompted me to delve into a troubling aspect of my psychological make-up, and Figure 3, because of its imperviousness to personal association. With Figure 2, reflexivity was time-consuming, and led to an 'unsettling of previous ways of thinking'; but I experienced this transformation positively – perhaps because it allowed me to imagine that I was making a small step on the path to ethical improvement. With Figure 4, my reflections seem to flow more freely, possibly because they largely involved nostalgic (if melancholic) associations with positive past experiences. Reflexivity is, I suspect, probably as laborious as a researcher chooses to make it: the more the researcher commits to the process, the more time-consuming and potentially difficult it is likely to be. However, it seems that the more time one devotes to the process, the more insights are likely to be generated; and in some cases, the greater the affective engagement that may follow, as indicated above.

G. The self-reflexive analytic protocol

How effective was the self-reflexive protocol as a research tool? As discussed above, forms of learning were generated by the protocol in relation to all four of the images examined. These included insights into the personal basis for my judgements, preferences and emotional responses linked to life history (all four images), altered or enriched conceptions of the photographs under examination (Figures 1, 2 and 4), the development of theories of meaning and value for photography in general (Figures 1 and 3), and elements of personal growth (especially Figures 1 and 2). These learning gains were not produced in the same way across

all four images, as outlined above, but the protocol produced some form of learning for every image, and several in the case of Figures 1 and 2.

The practice of examining images in terms of the protocol more than once, and recording the different cycles of reflections using a ‘multiple-entry’ method of note-taking, produced additional observations and insights about all four images. The value of this practice as a form of slow research was discussed in Section 4.3 F; but its usefulness also stems from the way that later reflections were able to build on, or respond to, earlier reflections, in accordance with Taylor’s comment (2009: 9) that note-taking ‘externalises’ reflections and allows them to be critically reviewed. For example: ‘My earlier comments all still seem valid, but I have found I can add to them,’ I wrote in my reflections on Figure 1. Multiple-entry note-taking also served as a record of changing thinking and learning growth. ‘I see my judgements changing as I think more reflexively about this image,’ I wrote in relation to Figure 2.

By mapping the thematically-coded data extracts to the self-reflexive steps of the protocol, it has been possible to gain some insight into the operation of the protocol at a granular level (see Tables 1–4). The extracts have not been analysed quantitatively in this study, for reasons discussed in Section 3.3 B. The broad pattern of distribution of extracts, however, is telling.

Across the data as a whole, the two steps that generated most extracts were reflections on memory/life history (Step 5) and general reflections at the end of the process (Step 8), producing roughly a third each of all extracts. The fecundity of reflecting on memory for producing relevant extracts, in comparison to reflecting on worldview (Step 6) or viewing context (Step 7), may reflect the more extensive scale of the field of memory compared to the other two fields. There is, in short, potentially more to say at this step than at others. In the case of each individual image, memory work consistently produced around a third of all coded extracts. Nonetheless, reflections on worldview and viewing context produced some coded extracts for each of the four images, and these were often significant for generating learning: especially reflections on viewing context in the case of Figure 1 (Section 4.2 A); worldview for Figure 3 (Section 4.2 C); and both worldview and viewing context for Figure 2 (Section 4.2 B) and Figure 4 (Section 4.2 D).

Reflections on emotional response (Step 4) produced a substantial proportion of coded extracts for Figure 3 (about a third) and Figure 4 (about a quarter), which seems to reflect the way that my responses to both images were largely emotional responses. My theorising, in the case of Figure 3, about the relation between representation, emotional

response and language also occurred at this step, rather than at the end, where this kind of meta-reflection might otherwise have been expected. For Figures 1 and 2, fewer extracts were coded at this step, but this apparent shortage belies the significance of Step 4 for my reflections on these images, as it was largely through reflecting on emotional response that learning gains were generated at other steps of the process. As Brookfield (2012) observed, reflecting on our emotions can provide access to our underlying assumptions and values (Section 2.3 B); and this appears to have been borne out by this study. For Figures 1 and 2, reflecting on emotional response seemed to be the primary mechanism for activating tacit knowledge at Steps 5, 6 and 7 (Sections 4.2 A and B).

The usefulness of the final step, Step 8, as a generator of coded extracts reflects the synthesising function of this step, inviting the researcher to reflect on the process in its entirety. In the two images where the greatest learning gains appear to have been made (Figures 1 and 2), the final step produced more than a third of all coded extracts for Figure 1, and half for Figure 2. With Figures 3 and 4, Step 8 produced fewer coded extracts. In the case of Figure 3, this may reflect the fact that self-reflexive analysis seemed, at the time of the research, relatively unproductive in terms of learning (Section 4.2 C). For Figure 4, on the other hand, the principal gain of self-reflexivity was an enrichment of response (Section 4.2 D) and this was largely recorded in my reflections on emotional response at Step 4 and memory at Step 5, rather than at the end of the process. Nonetheless, the importance of Step 8 for providing an opportunity for synthesis and summative reflection seems beyond question.

Overall, analysis of the distribution of extracts indicates that, in the case of all four images, potent reflections were generated at each of the reflexive steps (Steps 4–8). Every step appears to have been productive to some extent for all images; none was shown to be superfluous. However, I am aware that the protocol pioneered in this study represents a first iteration, which is likely to benefit from further development by me or other researchers in the future.

As I reflected on the protocol after completing this stage of the research, an addition that seemed possibly useful was a new final step that explicitly called for reinterpretation, as a way of focusing the researcher's attention on the potential for transformative change. This additional step was therefore incorporated at the subsequent stage of the research, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

4.4 Conclusions

This first stage of the research appears to have indicated that self-reflexivity, as an interpretive practice based on self-reflection and disclosure, is capable of producing learning and growth in photography criticism in the following ways:

1. Self-reflexivity can shed light on the personal basis of the practitioner's critical and emotional responses, especially by illuminating links between thinking/feeling and background life experiences, values and habitual patterns of thinking that are emotionally motivated (Section 4.3 A).

2. Self-reflexivity can reveal ways in which critical interpretation is entangled with feeling linked to life history (Section 4.3 A).

3. Self-reflexivity can lead to an altered or transformed interpretation of images, especially where a moral tension is identified between an initial interpretation and the practitioner's values (Section 4.3 B).

4. Self-reflexivity can extend and enrich a practitioner's interpretation of images, and generate new conceptions of photography, through accessing the tacit world of ideas, values, preferences and associated emotions that underpin their habitual behaviour and thinking (Section 4.3 C).

5. Self-reflexivity in interpretation can produce forms of existential growth, especially when something troublesome is identified in the practitioner's assumptions or practices which invites them to change thinking or behaviour (Section 4.3 E).

The research has also suggested that:

6. Self-reflexivity's capacity to generate expanded and enriched understandings of photographs and photography is consistent with its serving as a pathway to a threshold concept in the discipline (Section 4.3 D).

7. Self-reflexivity is capable of greatly increasing the practitioner's affective engagement with photographs to which they have a positive response (Section 4.3 F).

Moreover, in relation to the self-reflexive analytic protocol:

8. The self-reflexive protocol pioneered in this study is an effective tool for producing transformations, expansions and enrichment of understanding in photography criticism (Section 4.3 G).

As a process of 'internal mental acquisition' (Illeris 2007: 22), learning can be understood as a felt experience, and one capable of being assessed by the subject who experiences (Section 3.2 A). My assessment at the close of this stage of the research is that I experienced forms of learning through engaging in self-reflexive critical practice in the various ways outlined above.

However, the research at Stage One was limited, in being based on the practice and experiences of only one researcher working alone. In reflecting on this pilot stage, I recognised that the study would be improved by introducing participants at Stage Two, in order to triangulate, enrich and inflect the data with multiple viewpoints, and to provide an opportunity to explore the learning value of self-reflexive criticism on an audience, as discussed in Section 3.2 B. The second stage of the research will be presented and discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five. Research Stage Two

5.1 Introduction

A. Overview

In the previous chapter, I discussed my practice-led, self-reflexive critical interpretation of four photographs (Figures 1–4) and the impact the process had on my learning. I concluded that self-reflexivity seemed capable of illuminating the personal influences underlying my judgements and emotional responses; revealing the entanglement of my thinking and feeling; transforming my understanding of photographs; enriching my interpretations; producing forms of existential growth; and increasing my affective engagement; all in a way consistent with its being a pathway to a threshold concept in the discipline. This comprised Stage One of the research.

The present chapter discusses Stage Two, in which I invited a group of eight research participants to undertake, with me, a similar, practice-led, self-reflexive analysis of a fifth photograph (Figure 5), to share our responses with each other in a 'circle of voices' event, and to reflect on the process in semi-structured interviews. There were two main aims of Stage Two, as discussed in Sections 3.2 B and 3.2 E: first, to triangulate, enrich and inflect the findings of Stage One by examining multiple self-reflexive perspectives (Koro-Ljungberg 2016); and second, to explore the learning value of self-reflexive interpretation for audiences.

Each participant's response and reflections, including my own, are presented in turn in Section 5.2, analysed in terms of the six themes used in Stage One. My response is presented first, to serve as a bridge from the previous chapter, and to draw attention to the ways in which participants' experiences corroborated or differed from my own. The others' responses follow in alphabetical order. Responses are also interrogated in terms of a seventh theme relating to the learning value of self-reflexivity for audiences. For clarity, comments relating to Theme 7 are presented in a separate sub-section (Section 5.2 J) as they refer to others' accounts and therefore follow the rest of the data. The thematic analyses can be seen in a series of tables (Tables 11–26) in Appendix III.

The findings from this stage of the research are discussed in Section 5.3, with conclusions presented in Section 5.4.

B. The participants

The participants were recruited as 'expert witnesses', critics and academics with knowledge and experience of current practices of critical interpretation. The rationale for recruitment of expert participants was discussed in Section 3.2 E.2. A brief biographical outline of each participant follows. In order to preserve anonymity, participants have been given pseudonyms, and their places of work and job titles have been disguised.

1. Alison. Artist with an interest in autoethnography. Senior lecturer at a university in the South-East. Middle class, 50s, mixed ethnic heritage.

2. Catherine. Photography critic with an academic background in photography and ethnography. Executive at an arts agency. Middle class, 30s, British.

3. David. Photography critic and photographer. Senior lecturer at a university in the South-West. Middle class, 30s, British.

4. Gerry. Photography and art critic. Lecturer at an art college in Ireland. Working class, 50s, Irish.

5. Jan. Sociologist and autoethnographer. Senior research fellow at a university in the Midlands. Working class, 60s, British.

6. Marion. Educationalist with an interest in autoethnography and photo-elicitation. Senior lecturer at a university in the North-West. Middle class, 50s, British.

7. Sofia. Film-maker and autoethnographer. Lecturer at a university in Turkey. Middle class, 30s, Turkish.

8. Tom. Photography and art critic. Professor at a university in Ireland. Working class, 50s, Irish.

To set myself in context with the other participants, I would describe myself, using the same format, as follows:

9. Simon. Photography critic and photographer. Senior lecturer at an art college in the West Midlands. Middle class, 50s, British.

C. The image

The image chosen for review was Mitra Tabrizian's *The Long Wait*, from *Border* (2005–06) (Figure 5, overleaf). It was selected jointly by the group from a shortlist of six images, by means of a ranking exercise in terms of resonance, as discussed in Section 3.2 E.3. The image was the group's overall favourite, but it was more resonant for some participants than for others. It was ranked as first choice by Alison, Catherine, Jan and Marion, second by Gerry, third by Sofia, Tom and me, and fourth by David.

I supplied contextual information about the image on the Reflexive Interpretation Template, containing the steps of the self-reflexive protocol, which participants were asked to complete as the first phase of this stage of the research (Section 3.2 E.1, Appendix IV). Tabrizian was born and brought up in Iran, but moved to Britain in 1977 as a teenager (Naficy 2006). *Border* addresses the topic of Iranians living in Britain and their experience of displacement. Each image in the series is a staged portrait of a single (real) individual, enacting an aspect of their lives. *The Long Wait* depicts a late middle-aged Iranian woman, Hengameh, sitting on a chair in an otherwise empty room, with a suitcase by her side. The door is shut, its handle missing. The caption accompanying the image, written by the photographer, gives Hengameh's story: living apart from her husband while bringing up their son in Britain, she is finally ready to rejoin him, but he is killed in the Iraq war before they can reunite.

Figure 5. Mitra Tabrizian, *The Long Wait*, 2005–06, scanned from *Portfolio* 44, December 2006

Image redacted for copyright reasons. It can be seen online at: https://www.mitratabrizian.com/border-2005-2006

Original caption: 'Hengameh: a photographer. Married to a leading Iranian photo-journalist, Kaveh Golestan. Kaveh's commitment to his work kept him in Iran, while Hengameh stayed in England to look after their young son, born and brought up here; "He would have no opportunities in Iran." Despite living in different countries the couple remained close, worked together and maintained their relationship, until recently when she was ready to rejoin her husband in Iran, now that their son is grown up. But it was too late! Kaveh was killed in the Iraq war' (*Portfolio* 44, 2006: 27).

5.2 Presentation of Data

A. My response/reflections

For me, the image seemed intended to evoke sympathy for a tale of suffering. I felt pity 'but with a certain distance and detachment … as if I'd come across this story in a newspaper.' I also felt alienated and troubled by the image's theatricality. Although representing a non-fictional story, the image was a 'performance at the photographer's direction'. I 'want[ed] to feel sympathy', but the mixing of genres (documentary and staged) made me 'mistrust what I was being shown': I was unsure what to believe.

Self-reflection indicated reasons for my response but also brought a substantial shift in my interpretation. After initially finding the image only moderately resonant, it brought me closer to the image, and made me less sceptical, through uncovering personal connections to the narrative. It helped me see weaknesses in my thinking that I wished to correct. The thematic analysis of my response/reflections is presented in Table 11 (Appendix III).

Reflecting on memory, I recognised that my distanced response may be linked to my not having experienced the kind of upheaval/loss represented in the image ('they are other people's stories') (Theme 1); but I wrote that I have always been acutely aware of the sufferings of my parents' and grandparents' generations (including injury and bereavement in two World Wars, and bankruptcy in the Depression). Reflecting on family stories made me start to see Hengameh as a reflection of my own mother, who died recently, and who had lost her brother in war as a teenager. 'Just having this thought gives me a sudden burst of sorrow; and more intense sympathy for the story represented in the picture' (Themes 1, 3, 6). My sympathy also grew as I reflected on my attachment to my childhood home, which I 'lost' at the age of 50 when my mother had to leave it; and to my present home, which had felt like a refuge 'throughout this year of Covid lockdowns'. I wrote: 'The idea that I might lose all this in a sudden cataclysm makes me shudder with horror' (Themes 1, 3). Reflecting on memory and context thus activated emotions with which my evolving interpretation became entangled (Themes 1, 3, 6).

As my own emotions, grounded in life history, became engaged, my distrust of the picture's theatricality 'more or less disappeared' (Theme 2). The process of inward reflection, carried out in three separate cycles across a period of two months, allowed me to 'relax and enter [the picture's] world of suffering' (Theme 6). The process, I wrote, had been 'a journey

… of moving closer towards the image', producing an enriched sense of the picture's communicative value. 'The image now seems quite haunting … a visual distillation of the essence of loneliness and defeat' (Theme 4).

Reflecting on values/beliefs, I detected a tension between my values and a habitual way of thinking and behaving that seemed to underlie my initial response (Theme 2). I wrote that I saw myself as a humanist, believing in the 'preciousness of human life … as a universal value'; but I reflected that 'in reality, I am normally quite a … neglectful humanist': I have become 'numbed' to news reports of migrants' sufferings. These fault-finding premise reflections (Mezirow 1991a) made me wonder whether 'my initial critical snippiness … was linked to this pushing away of empathy, this indifference … that many of us seem to develop … as a kind of emotional shield?' (Themes 4, 5). These reflections produced a general insight into criticality: that it 'cannot always be trusted, it can spring from an emotional blockage'; rather than being a neutral questioning process, criticality can have an affective basis (Theme 5).

B. Alison's response/reflections

Alison's response was entangled with powerful emotion from the start (Theme 1). Thematic analysis of her contribution is presented in Table 12 (Appendix III). She wrote on the Reflexive Interpretation Template that the image connoted 'strength' and 'resignation', but also prompted an intensely personal response because of a connection to traumatic events in her family history (Theme 1). It evoked her paternal great-grandmother's escape, with a single suitcase and two young children, from the Turkish massacre of Armenians in the early 20th century, fleeing on foot to Syria. Her great-grandfather, it is thought, was killed in Turkey. Disclosing the story was difficult. Alison admitted to feeling a 'block' about declaring it and losing control of it by 'giving it away' to the study. At the circle, she said her mouth was 'dry', her heart 'pounding'. These feelings were compounded, she said, by 'suddenly' noticing, on the floor next to her, an old suitcase full of family photographs that had belonged to her late father, which she 'hadn't opened'. Hengameh 'could be my great-grandmother', she said. 'It's very, very close. As I'm talking about it now I feel myself drifting off and becoming rather weightless …There are all sorts of locked-up emotional responses for me in the telling of this story' (Themes 1, 6).

Alison noted that ‘traditionally [in critical writing] you would ... be avoiding’ writing about personal family stories; but being ‘given permission’ to do so in the study set off many more ‘resonances’, so that ‘the photograph has the potential to touch … the viewer very deeply’ (Themes 4, 6). Reflexivity did not change her interpretation; but it ‘deepened’ her response (Theme 6). Her story had been semi-suppressed within her family, rarely talked about, and was ‘previously unreleased even to myself’. The process of moving through the protocol had ‘released’ the story for her (Theme 3). It had ‘helped me to articulate something about … my family background that I have perhaps not spelled out … previously. So that is a bonus (for me)’ (Theme 5).

It would have been possible to write about the picture in the normal way, Alison said, ‘without telling any of my own story’, focusing instead on Hengameh and the contemporary context. But had she done so, the personal connection would ‘be coming through ... between the lines ... in the way that I wrote about it’ (Theme 6). Even swept under the carpet, it would remain ‘lumpy and evident for all to see’. To disclose the personal story was, therefore, to make explicit what would be half-visible in any case. Alison noted that merely ‘projecting’ personal stories into an image would be a mistake, but ‘if we try and keep ourselves out of the picture entirely, that’s a fiction’ (Theme 6). These reflections on the influence of past experience on how we think and act enriched her conception of the picture: ‘Experience influences … behaviour; and you can see that in Hengameh, that’s what the photograph is about’ (Theme 3).

Besides her family story of displacement, Alison’s reading was also influenced by her sense of identity and worldview. She identified personally with Hengameh, writing of ‘her face drooping as older people’s faces do, when we stop forming an expression for the benefit of others’ (Theme 1). As a representation of strength and resignation, the image produced ‘echoes ... of so many of the women in my family, or just women that I know … So that’s to do with, I suppose, existence under patriarchy, and resignation’ (Theme 1).

The emotional context of the viewing moment, in particular the experience of Covid-19 lockdown during which the research took place, also influenced Alison’s attachment to the picture and sympathy for the figure depicted. ‘This pandemic has made me ... so much more aware of the vulnerability of being alive so everything feels heightened ... I am sure that that is deepening and influencing my response … How could it not be?’ (Themes 1, 3).

C. Catherine’s response/reflections

Catherine, an experienced critic, reported that she did not think she had ‘ever thought about a picture in as much detail as this’, and that the self-reflexive exercise had been a revelation, enriching her understanding of how photographs can be meaningful and affecting (Themes 3, 4, 6). A thematic analysis of her response/reflections is presented in Table 13 (Appendix III).

Catherine read the picture as a meditation on waiting, ageing and isolation, and also as a character study of an elderly woman whom she saw as sad but also ‘defiant ... and not friendly’. In her reflections, she recognised how much of her own life story she had ‘emptied into the frame’ (Theme 1). She realised she was associating the figure in the image with stories of two of her great-grandmothers, reputed to have been domineering, cruel to their children and grandchildren and the cause of ‘a lot of unhappiness’, a trauma that had been passed down through the family, and about whom she had ‘lately’ been thinking a great deal ‘from a transgenerational therapy perspective’ (Theme 1). Her reading of the image as a representation of isolation was also influenced by her sense of her own present and potential future solitude (Theme 1): partly because of her family history of traumatic relationships, Catherine had made a ‘decision ... not to have children, or ... a family’, in common with ‘quite a number of the women in our family at my age’. Separately, she reflected that she had recently relocated to a new city on her own, ‘something I have never done before’. Although disclaiming a close parallel with Hengameh’s story, Catherine’s experience of a ‘journey’ as a lone woman produced a degree of identification and an enriched sense of the image’s meaning: ‘For me it was a meditation on being on your own in the end. You are always on your own in the end. I think that is ... how I read it’ (Themes 1, 3).

Catherine said she was ‘surprised at the level of response’ she had, and that it was ‘really interesting that I would pour this much into this image’ (Themes 3, 4, 5). Self-reflexivity had not only enriched her conception of the photograph’s meanings, but intensified her emotional experience. It had not made her think ‘differently’ about the picture; but she ‘responded ... in a much deeper way’ because it resonated with her ‘own histories ... and experiences’ (Themes 1, 3, 6). She said: ‘I felt deeply moved’.

The self-reflexive process illuminated her own thinking processes and produced a general insight into sense-making. Examining what had been ‘informing my looking’ had demonstrated ‘how much of our own experiences and understandings about the world we project unknowingly onto others’ (Themes 4, 5).

Catherine emphasised, at several points, how rarely self-reflexive responses are given in photography criticism (Theme 6). ‘We are generally taught not to bring ourselves into any kind of analysis ... It’s like you’ve got two layers, where you have that initial [personal] reaction to a certain image, and then you disregard that, and you put on top all of the other stuff that you are supposed to be [thinking about].’ In suppressing personal and emotional associations, she said, ‘there is a tremendous amount lost’. The reflexive process had shown that emotional reactions and personal associations ‘inform our very view’ of how we see images; and ‘the ‘depth and richness’ of the various responses at the circle event ‘signals that [self-reflexivity] is something that is actually needed and wanted’ (Themes 4, 6).

In her interview, Catherine said that the circle event had inspired her with an enormous enthusiasm to engage straightaway in more self-reflexive examination and dialogue. ‘After we had that amazing discussion, I did it with my sister ... and it was really fascinating ...’ (Theme 5).

D. David’s response/reflections

David declared that he wasn’t ‘immediately drawn to this image’; that it didn’t ‘particularly speak to me either aesthetically ... or in terms of my subject matter interests’. The picture was ‘asking, above all, for compassion and empathy’, and at the start of his written response he wrote: ‘I do receive a sense of sadness ... It isn’t a very strong feeling, though’. However, the self-reflexive process produced a substantial and surprising change. ‘What I found was quite striking, quite remarkable, was how very personal it became’ (Themes 1, 3, 4). A thematic analysis of David’s response/reflections is presented in Table 14 (Appendix III).

Self-reflexivity increased the resonance of the picture by uncovering ways in which David and his family were connected to the narrative, or something similar. Reflecting on life history and values/beliefs, he wrote that he was ‘quite sensitive to issues around persecution and asylum’ which had ‘a lot to do with my German Jewish heritage’: his grandfather and parents emigrated to London in the 1930s (Theme 1). He had also been ‘strongly opposed to the US/British invasion of Iraq in 2003 ... This puts me in sympathy with political refugees from the region’ (Theme 1). The woman in the image also reminded him of his late maternal grandmother ‘who I was very close to’: she had worn headscarfs and, being deaf, was ‘very isolated during busy family occasions’ (Theme 1). By encouraging him to slow down and make personal connections, self-reflexivity enriched his conception of the picture and helped

him recognise its relevance to his own concerns. At the start, he had 'read the woman as more distinctly 'other' than I do in this moment ... now that I have invested more time with her/the photograph and identified ... personal connections' (Themes 3, 6). Referring to the 'distinction between reading a lot and reading well', he said the structured nature of the self-reflexive protocol 'makes you read a photograph well' (Theme 6).

Self-reflexivity, in short, made the image seem a better image: 'It made me just value it more ... It increased my interest … and it increased its value for me as an image' (Themes 4, 6). Self-reflexivity also increased his emotional experience: reflecting on personal associations activated a feeling of melancholy, and the 'rhetoric of the image ... buil[t] up that melancholy' (Themes 1, 4, 6). The expanded vision produced by self-reflexivity was likely to be irreversible, David said: 'There's no way that I would look at that photograph again and feel indifferent about it, having gone through that exercise.' In time, he might develop a different reading; 'but there's no taking away this, what has been now committed' (Theme 4).

Self-reflexivity also helped David understand his own thinking processes: it 'allowed me to identify and forced me to articulate the structures by which I make sense of the picture' (Theme 5). Self-reflexivity, he reflected, would be 'helpful for examining your unconscious bias ... or conscious bias too for that matter' (Theme 5). The ultimate effect of a self-reflexive mind-set, he said, could be a general expansion of our understanding of our place in the world and how to act: 'It's about being a more developed, wiser citizen, really, isn't it? And better able to contribute to the world. And self-reflection is absolutely fundamental, I think, to be able to do that' (Themes 5, 6).

David acknowledged how unusual it was to bring personal experience into writing about photography. Generally, he said, 'the point is to talk about the intentions of the image maker', and his normal practice was to 'draw on my knowledge, but not on my experiences; and to shut off from that'. Given the value of self-reflexivity, revealed by this study, he said 'it does seem really perverse to not give permission [to draw on personal experience] when it comes to deconstructing an image' (Theme 6). Nonetheless, given mainstream expectations, self-reflexivity would remain difficult to include in practice: 'It would [still] feel a bit indulgent ... and as a reviewer and writer on photography, it is something I would feel self-conscious about' (Theme 6).

E. Gerry's response/reflections

For Gerry, the picture evoked the 'tragedy and pathos' of lives lived in 'fraught geopolitical circumstances', and raised questions about the relation between home and identity, and what it means to have 'lived well' in terms of the moral decisions we have made. Reflection on his own life history and 'pattern of migration' revealed a number of connections to the narrative of the picture that helped account for his response (Theme 1). A thematic analysis of Gerry's response/reflections is given in Table 15 (Appendix III).

Gerry wrote that the picture 're-animated' several of his own significant life-decisions. He had been brought up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. As a grammar-school boy he had been 'bred for export' and was expected to make a better life, as a kind of refugee, elsewhere; but as an adult returned home – echoing Hengameh's unfulfilled wish to return to Iran – a decision that was 'as much a cultural/political commitment as a personal one' (Theme 1). In the image, Hengameh had moved as an exile/refugee from Iran and given up her career to bring up her son in the UK. Gerry reflected that, although his story was 'not as tragic' as that in the image, he too had made 'compromises and sacrifices', in terms of his career as a writer, through his decision to settle and provide a stable home environment for his son (Theme 1). Seeing these connections increased his 'empathy' with Hengameh and generated a personal interest in the questions, raised by the picture, of whether Hengameh 'did the right thing under given circumstance' (Themes 1, 3, 6).

Gerry stressed, several times, how unusual the self-reflexive approach was in photography writing (Theme 6). Normally, he said, he would be 'obliged' to focus on the 'historical and cultural dimension'. His academic training had stressed the importance of detached expertise: 'You are always the expert, being able to say, here's one context, here's another'. Personal narratives, he said, 'might inform the reading of the work ... but certainly would be something I keep out of the picture.' Personal beliefs and values are typically 'smothered' (Theme 6). He was 'quite shocked' at the circle by other participants' personal accounts. They made him realise 'that I had taken my approach to writing for granted ... it made me think how formulaic my writing can be' (Theme 5). Noting the value of taking interpretation slowly, as in this study, Gerry commented that 'professional' writing can be formulaic because it is typically completed to a tight deadline. 'One of the things with a two-week deadline is you can't go too far out of your comfort zone.' The effect of being taken 'on a different journey' by the study was to make him 'more conscious', more actively engaged in writing about the work. The writing was less 'easy' than if he had followed his 'standard

behaviour', but the effect was to produce a different kind of insight into the photograph (Themes 4, 6).

F. Jan's response/reflections

Jan read the picture as representing the experience and sufferings of 'women who wait'; and self-reflection indicated that her entangled intellectual/emotional response was drawing from values/beliefs linked to her academic interests, and partly from her life experience and current circumstances (Theme 1). A thematic analysis of Jan's response/reflections can be seen in Table 16 (Appendix III).

Jan wrote that the picture 'resonated' in terms of her research into the lives of women who 'wait for those in authority to pay them attention' rather than 'put[ting] themselves forward'; and that the 'huge sympathy' she feels for women in such situations produced an 'overwhelming sadness' for the figure in the image (Theme 1). Jan acknowledged a 'personal identification' with Hengameh as 'an older woman'; and reflected that her own past experience of 'waiting too long to end a marriage and walk through a door' had 'enhanced the empathic response to the photograph' (Themes 1, 3, 6). Jan's empathy was also influenced by her experience of living alone during Covid-19 lockdown, a period 'through which we are all forced to wait for the hoped-for release of a vaccine' (Theme 1). Lockdown, she wrote, made her feel 'pretty powerless' to make much difference in the world, 'apart from ... being alert to possibilities for undertaking small acts of human kindness to others, and "Others"' such as the figure in the image (Theme 1).

Reflexive self-awareness gave Jan an insight into her own habits of thinking and state of knowledge. An experienced qualitative researcher, she admitted that 'I don't know anything about photography' and had not realised, until it was pointed out at the circle, that the image was constructed to elicit a response. This made her feel 'a bit naive and ... a bit manipulated', but the realisation was 'great' because it opened up 'a whole new field' of how images can be understood (Theme 5). The process had also demonstrated the value of self-reflexivity for understanding the basis of our 'gut' responses: 'This is the whole nature of this exercise, isn't it, that when you do pause and look, to ask yourself what it is that made you stop and look?' (Theme 6).

G. Marion's response/reflections

For Marion, the image represented the experience of a 'woman ... in transition', who is 'alone' and 'cannot escape' a position that is 'not of her doing'. Marion identified with Hengameh, and her response drew largely from her own experiences (Theme 1). A thematic analysis of Marion's response/reflections is presented in Table 17 (Appendix III).

Marion's reading was strongly emotional from the start (Theme 1). She 'felt for the woman immediately' and wrote: 'I want to show the woman that I care'. Although her own story did not match that of the woman, she felt 'empathy for ... her isolation ... I recognise her isolation in myself' (Theme 1). Her response drew from her own life-long sense that 'I don't belong', based on having been adopted; and from her past experience of waiting, alone and vulnerable, at the end of an unhappy marriage: '[The picture] feels like times when I have been sitting in an official waiting room, to go and be judged, like in a courtroom when I was getting divorced' (Theme 1). 'I feel I have been treated wrongly as a woman, I have been physically and emotionally abused, perhaps like the woman in the photo' (Theme 1). As well as drawing from her life history, Marion's empathy drew also from the values of a Christian upbringing which gave her a 'strong humanitarian empathy with people ... I perceive to be suffering, along with a strong response to injustices I perceive in ... society generally' (Theme 1)

Although aware that she might be 'projecting my own feelings onto the photograph', self-reflexivity heightened her emotional response (Theme 6) and generated an imaginative richness in her interpretation of the picture as a character study: 'I see the woman in the photo maintaining her strength on a precipice, like I tried to do once' (Theme 3).

H. Sofia's response/reflections

For Sofia, the photograph was 'about trauma' and it triggered such an intense negative reaction that she found herself 'blocked' and unable to write more than a few lines on the Reflexive Interpretation Template, indicating her inability to engage (Themes 1, 6). She chose to remain in the research, however, and at the end of her interview felt able to disclose something of the basis of her response, declaring that the experience had been 'very useful' in terms of personal growth (Theme 5). A thematic analysis of Sofia's response/reflections is given in Table 18 (Appendix III).

In spite of feeling 'so excited at the very beginning' about taking part in the research, the image prompted negative emotions linked to previous life experiences that she did not want to think or write about. 'It negatively affects me,' she wrote. 'It is loaded, and I do not want to be loaded ... I had a relatively tough childhood, and it affects my adult life ... This photograph and story made me feel helpless' (Theme 1). Sofia's aversion to the picture was compounded by current life circumstances, as she was feeling 'in a panic' because she was 'overloaded with work' (Theme 1).

At the circle, Sofia stressed how difficult the process had been for her. She said she wanted to 'contribute more' to the research, but remained reticent about exactly what had prompted her reaction (and was not pressed to disclose more than she wished to). She commented that she 'just didn't like the image' and that her panic had been 'about my workload ... rather than the image'.

At the very end of her interview, however, Sofia said that other participants' stories at the circle had brought her to a better understanding of her response. Hengameh's loss in the image, she said, called to mind her own sense of loss of her own father, an alcoholic since her childhood, who was 'not there emotionally' for her. This 'trauma' was something she was trying to 'solve' and felt she was 'getting better each day'. Other participants' stories about 'loss', women's experiences and lack of agency had brought her to 'look at myself through [their] words'. So, despite the troublesomeness of self-reflexivity, it had ultimately led to a form of growth: 'It's a very useful practice, so thank you very much' (Theme 5).

I. Tom's response/reflections

Tom's participation represented a journey from an initial struggle to engage with self-reflexivity towards a transformed appreciation of the significance of the personal within critical interpretation (Themes 1, 4). A thematic analysis of Tom's response/reflections is given in Table 19 (Appendix III).

Tom, an experienced critic who found the image only moderately resonant at first, read it as a 'complex story' about identity and home, but his initial response emphasised image construction and contained minimal self-reflexivity. Responding to the prompts on the Reflexive Interpretation Template, he referred to his 'suspicion of the singularity of identity'; and said that the seated figure reminded him of his mother, now confined to a chair after a stroke; but he made little of the association.

In the circle, after hearing others' self-reflexive accounts, Tom acknowledged that his initial response had been 'too studied', a 'critic's response'. Engaging with emotion had been 'very difficult', he said, and 'the intellectual was always winning out for me ...' which reflected '... my own way of responding to photographs' (Theme 6). The circle experience 'provoked' him to see a more significant connection between Hengameh and his mother, who had moved the family from Protestant East Belfast to South Belfast during the Troubles 'because of political violence at a local level'. 'There is a story of displacement there,' he said, 'which perhaps I couldn't see until I'd heard others articulate it' (Theme 3). In his interview, the connections became clearer between his critical emphasis on the complexity of identity and his own life history (Theme 1). To be born a Northern Irish Protestant, he said, is to be stereotypically associated with certain political views, something he had experienced in his professional life. This is 'fundamentally wrong', he said, 'as I don't ... think of myself as Northern Protestant, and certainly not Unionist'. Recognising the connection between Hengameh and his mother, he said, had made the image 'very powerful' and emotionally affecting (Themes 1, 3, 6).

Tom said he had participated in the study to explore what reflexivity was, and what a reflexive response might be. In his interview, he recognised he was 'stumbling' in trying to articulate how his thinking was evolving (Theme 4). Although he was able to give an 'intellectual and ideological' explanation for his suspicion of 'singularity of identity', he now recognised there were personal grounds for it too. 'I can intellectualise it, or I can personalise it … and I suspect probably the personal comes first' (Theme 4). What was 'really valuable' about the study was that it 'caused a pause' around the separation of the personal and the intellectual. 'And I think you are absolutely right, they *can't* be separated' (Themes 4, 6). Exactly how 'our critical responses ... are entangled with our lives' is a 'profound ... and important' matter to understand; and by examining these issues, the study had sought to 'unsettle' normal practices of criticism and 'inflect ... the understanding of photographs' (Themes 4, 6).

As a result of being part of the 'really interesting and thought-provoking' study, Tom said that he would attempt to incorporate self-reflexivity into his next writing project (Themes 5, 6).

J. Responses as members of an audience

This sub-section presents comments from all participants, in turn, that shed light on the learning value of self-reflexivity for audiences (Theme 7), based on their experiences of hearing each other's self-reflexive accounts at the circle. For clarity, comments are mapped to the particular aspect of audience-learning to which they relate: transparency (7A), illumination by detail (7B), 'me-too' resonance (7C), self-knowledge (7D), emotional connection (7E) and bridge-building (7F). Previous academic research highlighting these or similar forms of audience learning gain was discussed in Section 2.4 E.

To outline my response first, drawing from my self-interview: I found Gerry's and Alison's accounts especially illuminating, through experiencing 'me-too' moments of resonance. Gerry's observation on the universality of displacement, I wrote, 'makes me reflect that I am perhaps displaced in all sorts of ways I had not previously considered' (7C). Alison's comment about her suitcase of family photographs next to where she was sitting made me suddenly realise I had a similar suitcase next to where I was sitting, producing an insight into how transgenerational family narratives are constructed: 'for many of us, family stories ... migrate across the generations in the form of photographs ... and this keeps them alive' (7C). I also found that self-reflexivity helped me understand my own and others' positions better and helped to bridge difference. I would 'normally bristle', I wrote, at a comment such as Jan's, that women 'need to act more and wait less', as I felt it did not reflect my experience of women I know; but that Jan's 'reflexivity allowed me to see some of the emotional basis for why she should take that line, and I could therefore understand and empathise' (7A, 7D, 7F). I also recognised that the event had increased my emotional connection to other participants, noting that 'hearing insights into people's personal lives and histories' had 'made me feel closer to them' (7E).

Alison commented that, in a field where self-reflexive practice is still emergent, hearing others' contributions had illuminated ways in which self-reflexivity can be carried out well. It had opened up 'how much one can say oneself ... and how far you can go' in terms of 'giving permissions' about what kind of personal information might be 'relevant or appropriate' to disclose (7B). She highlighted as particularly resonant Jan's way of 'connecting the whole self ... to the thinking', in disclosing how her experience of being alone in lockdown had contributed to her response (7B).

Catherine said that Alison's family story was so interesting that it 'informed me … to look back at that image', to think about it again in a new way (7B). Especially striking, for

Catherine, was Alison's comment about her suitcase of photographs, next to her but invisible to the webcam, because of its salience for how we make sense of photographs generally: 'there is always stuff out of shot in images too', she said, hidden but relevant to their meaning (7B). Alison's reference to transgenerational trauma produced a 'me-too' moment: the image, she disclosed at the circle, 'related to work I've been doing on myself around what you were talking about, [Alison], the transgenerational stuff in my own family' (7C). Self-reflexive disclosure produced emotional connections with other participants, including 'feeling upset' for those suffering stress, and bonds of friendship with the whole group: 'all I wanted to do after the exercise is contact every single person' to maintain the relationship (7E). This heightened empathy suppressed her normal instinct to argue with points of detail: the sharing of self-reflexive disclosure produced a 'kind of quietness' that fostered a 'time' and a 'space' that encouraged 'deep listening' and 'properly engaging', rather than a desire to score points as in the 'cut and thrust' of normal conversation and debate (7F).

David described the experience of hearing 'highly personal and highly charged' self-reflexive accounts as 'quite wonderful' and illuminating, enriching both emotional response and understanding (7B). He highlighted the accounts of Alison, Catherine, Jan and Marion who had produced 'a much more nuanced and ... expansive reflection on the female experience' than had been 'hinted at' when he first looked at the image himself (7B).

Gerry also pointed to the way that self-reflexive disclosure produced insights into the picture and the world that might not otherwise have emerged. Discussion had shown that, within the group, 'everyone's story was a story of migration' in one form or another, illuminating the widespread significance of journeys for people's sense of identity: 'The image brought that discourse to life, and I wouldn't have anticipated that,' he said (7B). Self-reflexivity also produced emotional bonding. The experience of sharing stories with people from widely-separated locations online was one of 'crossing boundaries,' Gerry said. 'I kind of went away and said, I know these people. I'd do it again ... It was a very interesting thing to do' (7E).

Jan echoed Gerry in finding participants' self-reflexive accounts of 'their own experiences of movement … and notions of home' provocative and personally resonant (7C). Catherine's observation that 'we're always on our own in the end,' also, 'spoke very powerfully to me for all sorts of reasons' (7C). Alison's disclosures about her physical state of nervousness, linked to her traumatic family story, touched her, but allowed her to position herself in contrast: she felt similar nerves but for different reasons, linked to anxieties around communication from being alone under lockdown (7D). Like others, she described self-

reflexive sharing as a bonding experience: ‘I could have gone on talking to those people’ (7E).

Marion highlighted Alison’s family story as particularly resonant and illuminating. It produced a strong bond of empathy: ‘You could walk alongside her in that story’ (7E). By feeling closer to Alison, she felt more engaged by Alison’s interpretation. ‘Her story just resonated with how I felt ... and the meaning I got from the image’ (7C). Alison’s reluctance to ‘give away’ her story to the research produced an insight into questions of truth and rhetoric in the photograph: Hengameh had ‘given away’ her story to Tabrizian and may have lost control of how it was presented as a result (7B). Moreover, hearing multiple self-reflexive accounts had ‘deepened [her] understanding’ of how value can be judged in photography: ‘If it has touched all of us in different ways, then does that mean it’s a great photo ... that it has touched us emotionally?’ (7B).

Sofia also highlighted Alison’s account, commenting that it helped explain the basis of her interpretation. It ‘gives us clues about how this person forms sentences about her feelings, her daily life, her past, and then about the picture’ (7A). Alison’s demonstration of ‘honesty’ also made Sofia ‘trust’ her more as an author (7A). Others’ self-reflexive accounts prompted a number of ‘me-too’ moments: ‘After listening to your stories, I remember my other personal stories’ she said at the circle (7C). In addition, the experience generated empathy and bonding: ‘We were communicating ... even while we were listening ... It affects us with emotion’ (7E).

For Tom, others’ self-reflexive accounts were crucial for helping him recognise the significance of the personal. He said, at the circle, that his own personal stories had initially seemed ‘tenuous’ to him, but ‘in light of your responses ... have become a bit more solid’. Their responses had ‘provoked’ his recognition of the significance of migration to his own family (7C).

5.3 Discussion

This section discusses the data from Stage Two in terms of the seven themes used in the analysis, taking each theme in turn. Themes 1–5 relate to ways in which self-reflexivity based on self-reflection and disclosure seemed to produce learning gains for participants acting as

practitioner-researchers, Theme 7 relates to forms of learning experienced by participants acting as an audience of self-reflexive interpretation, while Theme 6 gathers general reflections on the value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism.

The principal aim of introducing participants at Stage Two was to triangulate, enrich and inflect my own practice-led research findings; and for this reason, participants' responses are discussed below in relation to my responses, both from Stage One (presented in Chapter Four) and Stage Two.

A. Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context

My Stage One research indicated that reflection on memory, values/beliefs and viewing context was effective in helping explain both my critical and my emotional responses to the photographs under review, as discussed in Section 4.3 A. My interpretations of all four images were entangled with emotions linked to life history, and reflecting on emotions seemed the primary channel by which life-history influences could be reached. The research suggested that the most powerful influences on my thinking/feeling were habitual patterns of behaviour and thinking that are emotionally motivated, relating to matters I care about (often concerning identity) and which the image seemed to address or evoke.

With Figure 5, my critical response was not overtly entangled with emotion at first (I felt 'distanced'), but the self-reflexive process activated an emotional response which influenced my developing critical response, as described in Section 5.2 A. The experience suggests, perhaps, that once emotions linked to life history are engaged, they will colour our critical response to an image. As at Stage One, reflection on life history, values/beliefs and viewing context had the effect of shedding light on both my initial 'distanced pity' and my later empathetic involvement. Initially the narrative of the image felt 'other' to my personal experience, 'as if I'd come across this story in a newspaper'; but reflection on my values ('humanist'), the traumatic family history of my parents' and grandparents' generations, and my attachment to my former and present family homes, produced points of contact with the image that led to a changed response of increased engagement and empathy. As at Stage One, the most potent influences on my thinking/feeling were deep-seated patterns of thinking about matters I care about (mother, home, loss) evoked by the image; but viewing context

also came into play, as I reflected on my intensified attachment to home ('which has felt like a refuge') during the period of Covid-19 lockdown.

The participants' responses broadly corroborated my own but with some nuancing. An analysis of the distribution of Theme 1 evidence by participant is presented in Table 20 (Appendix III). For all, without exception, interpretation and feeling were entangled. For three (Alison, Marion, Sofia), the image prompted emotionally-freighted personal associations linked to life history from the outset. For the remaining five (Catherine, David, Gerry, Jan and Tom), their initial response displayed a degree of detachment, but their emotions became activated and entangled as a result of self-reflecting on the personal basis of their responses, as had happened with me. This latter sub-group included all the professional critics; their initial, ostensible critical neutrality no doubt reflecting the habits of mainstream critical practice, as discussed in Section 2.3. However, the activation of emotion across the whole group seems to suggest that apparent critical neutrality has an affective basis even where it remains concealed.

For every participant, self-reflection illuminated the epistemological basis of their thinking/feeling in life history, worldview or viewing context, providing some clarity about the uniquely personal perspective through which each response was constructed. Past experience/memory provided the most potent influences on thinking/feeling for all eight participants, as it had for me. Figure 5 evokes suffering (including loss, displacement, solitude), and it is perhaps unsurprising that suffering featured prominently in participants' self-reflexive responses. Three (Alison, Catherine, David) cited trauma within their family history, among other matters (as I had done); three (Jan, Marion, Sofia) referred to personal experiences of suffering. Two (Gerry, Tom) cited a personal history of migration or displacement linked to geopolitics. Two (David, Tom) associated Hengameh with the suffering of an elderly close female relative (as I had done); while Catherine referred to her own personal condition of solitude. Some participants' life/family-history associations (Alison, David, Gerry, Tom), in relating to geopolitical conflict, seemed perhaps more fitting to the image's narrative than some of the others' stories. It is notable that this sub-group included most of the professional photography critics. Some of the others' associations (divorce, father's alcoholism, great-grandmothers' cruelty) seem perhaps less relevant, and therefore less appropriate, in terms of the norms of reflexive research, in which a primary focus on the research material rather than oneself is thought desirable (Pels 2000, Finlay 2002), as discussed in Section 2.2. Even so, the data strongly suggests that, regardless of the

'quality' of the criticism as criticism, self-reflexivity can reveal how emotionally-significant life experiences play a powerful role in shaping our responses to photographs.

In addition to life experience, worldview was significant in influencing six participants' responses (David, Marion, Gerry, Jan, Alison, Tom). David and Marion cited their general sympathy for refugees, drawing from family history (David) and religious upbringing (Marion). Gerry referred to his 'civil and family commitments' which he saw paralleled in Hengameh's story. Jan, Alison and Tom cited beliefs bound up with personal identity: feminist commitments and sympathies in relation to women who suffer/wait for Jan and Alison; and a belief, drawing from personal history, in the complex relationship between social origin, worldview and identity for Tom. At the same time, four participants said they identified with Hengameh, on the basis of age/gender (Alison, Jan, Marion) or age (Gerry). Just as I had found identity was an important factor underlying my responses, as noted above, it also seemed salient for over half the participants.

Contextual circumstances at the viewing moment seemed significant for four participants. Jan and Alison cited Covid-19 lockdown as contributing to their empathy for the vulnerable and those who wait. Alison and Catherine indicated how the preoccupations of the moment can colour sense-making: both said their stories of transgenerational trauma were matters they had been thinking about in the months preceding the research, while Catherine also cited her recent experience of solitary relocation as influencing her thinking. Sofia said that being 'overloaded' with work contributed to her resistance to engaging with the image. Whenever context was cited, it appears to have been a supplementary rather than central influence on the response, as it had been for me.

B. <u>Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think</u>

In my research at Stage One, in addition to shedding light on the basis of my responses, critical self-reflection changed my interpretation of two of the four photographs studied, in line with the transformative process described by writers such as Dewey (1910, 1916) and Mezirow (1991a, 1991b, 2009); and representing what seems to be rare practical research evidence for the transformative effect of self-reflection on the interpretation of research materials (Section 2.4 A). The interpretive shifts were caused by identifying a moral tension between my initial interpretation and my values, which needed to be resolved (Section 4.3 B).

My reflections on Figure 5 produced a similar interpretive shift for similar reasons, as described in Section 5.2 A. I recognised a tension between the detachment I initially felt, including my distrust of the rhetoric of the image, and three personal factors: my humanist values, my emotional investment in stories of loss in my family, and my personal experiences and fears around loss. The effect was to dispel my scepticism and see the image differently, as 'a visual distillation of … loneliness and defeat'. Reflection also produced a potentially transformative interpretive shift in my relation to the world, as I recognised the 'numbness' I have habitually developed as a reaction to news reports of migration and displacement. The transformative impact of self-reflection on interpretation was therefore consistent, for me, across both stages of the research.

None of the participants, however, admitted to changing their interpretation after identifying a problematic element in their assumptions. All except Sofia reported a movement towards the image (a 'deepening' of response, an increase in empathy); and for two, David and Tom, the movement seemed similar to my own, from detachment towards greater emotional connection. However, neither David nor Tom framed this shift as a *change* based on questionable initial assumptions. It seems that no participant experienced a moral tension, as I did, that required resolution. Not all images provoke moral tension, as demonstrated by my research at Stage One, which could account for the difference; but there may be other factors at play. As primary researcher, I had conceived the research in light of Mezirow's conception of premise reflection as a 'fault-finding review of presuppositions' (1991a: 102), and was therefore primed to be consciously self-critical. If other participants were less self-critical, this may reflect Dewey's observation that most people tend not to be self-critical unless challenged (1916: 189). Such a challenge might have arisen at the circle of voices, where participants were in a position to be challenged by others acting as 'critically reflective mirrors' (Brookfield 2009: 133). However, Figure 5 elicited a broadly sympathetic response from all: there was no significant divergence of opinion likely to prompt such a challenge. A more divisive image might have had a different effect. The general lack of Theme 2 evidence from participants' responses is represented in Table 21 (Appendix III).

As the research proceeded, however, three participants (David, Jan, Tom) reflected that the reflexive protocol had the potential to produce changed interpretations, even if it had not done so for them in this study. As David said, it would be 'helpful for examining your unconscious bias ... or conscious bias too'. Tom noted that it served to 'unsettle' habitual ways of thinking. To encourage that to happen – and in view of Dewey's observation on self-

criticality – future iterations of the protocol may carry a more explicit prompt for users to engage in a 'fault-finding review' of their own initial interpretation.

C. Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights

At Stage One, I found that through self-reflection I was able to access 'interiorised' frameworks of ideas and values (Polanyi 2009) which enriched my interpretations and generated new insights (Section 4.3 C). This appeared to represent rare practical research evidence for the connection between self-reflection, tacit knowledge and expansions of understanding of research materials, as discussed in Section 2.4 B. With Figure 5, too, self-reflection activated emotions which produced a more sympathetic response, opened my eyes to my personal and family connections to the image's narrative, and generated an enriched conception of the photograph as a 'visual distillation of … loneliness and defeat'. My responses across both stages, therefore, suggested that self-reflection in photography criticism can activate tacit knowledge/emotions leading to heightened perception, enriched interpretation, and an expansion of consciousness.

My experiences seemed to be corroborated by several participants. For five in particular (Alison, Catherine, David, Gerry, Tom), uncovering links between their responses and tacit knowledge/emotions was a revelatory experience, releasing insights and connections that were unforeseen and surprising in the way predicted by Steier (1991, see Section 2.4 B). An analysis of the distribution of Theme 3 evidence by participant is presented in Table 22 (Appendix III).

Alison described the process as one that had 'released' traumatic family stories that were 'previously unreleased even to myself'. Catherine, also tapping into transgenerational trauma and personal life history, admitted she was 'surprised' by how much of herself she had 'poured' into the image. David, Gerry and Tom approached the image initially with critical detachment, but, for all three, self-reflection uncovered unexpected connections between the image, family history and values/beliefs which enhanced their emotional engagement and empathy with the figure. Like Catherine, David expressed surprise at 'how very personal' his response became. Self-reflection was, perhaps, less strongly revelatory for Jan and Marion, but both found that reflecting on personal history and values/beliefs produced a heightened personal involvement in the image's narrative.

In addition to an increased sense of connection, self-reflexive engagement also generated specific insights into the image's meaning that might not have arisen otherwise. Alison's reflections on transgenerational trauma within her family prompted an insight into Hengameh's demeanour (showing, in her words, 'strength, determination, courage … resignation … and groundedness'). It indicated how 'experience influences and affects behaviour; and you can see that in Hengameh, that's what the photograph is about'. Catherine's reflections on her decision to remain childless prompted her to regard the image as suggesting 'you are always on your own in the end'. Gerry's recognition of parallels between his own decisions/sacrifices and Hengameh's led to the insight that the image prompts end-of-life questions, which he was soon to face himself, about what it means to have 'lived well' in terms of the choices we have made.

In relation to this theme, Sofia's experience was an exception. Her response was linked directly to traumatic life history, but was so powerfully negative that it prevented engagement with the image. Self-reflexivity produced no new insights, because self-reflexive engagement was impossible for her with this image. This point will be discussed further in Section 5.3 F below.

At Stage One, my self-reflexive insights arose from a mix of insider knowledge related to photography and a more general tacit knowledge associated with living in the world, as discussed in Section 4.3 C. Similarly with Figure 5, my reflexive interpretation drew partly from insider knowledge of the concept of 'compassion fatigue' discussed by writers such as Sontag (1979), but mainly from my more general experience of culture, family and relationships. Among the participants, Jan's 'huge sympathy' for Hengameh drew partly from insider knowledge of her research into women's experiences of waiting; but for the most part, participants' self-reflexive insights were based on general tacit knowledge grounded in life experience. Photography specialists drew on their insider knowledge, as I had done, in recognising the *differences* in response produced by a self-reflexive methodology compared to mainstream practice, as will be discussed below in Section 5.3 F. Otherwise, there were no significant distinctions between photography insiders and others in the extent to which tacit knowledge generated an enriched perception of the image.

D. Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography

My research at Stage One suggested that self-reflexivity can produce enriched understandings of photographs and photography in a way consistent with its being a pathway to a threshold concept (Section 4.3 D). In Meyer and Land's (2003) model, threshold concepts act as portals to new and expanded forms of understanding of a topic or discipline (Section 2.4 C), and I found that self-reflexivity generated insights into the photographs that could be extrapolated to photography generally, expanding my conception of the field. More importantly, self-reflexivity appeared to show that interpretation was entangled with emotion linked to life history for every image examined, a potentially transformative and integrative conception of photography criticism that is not yet generally acknowledged in the field (Sections 2.3 A and B).

My experience with Figure 5 was broadly consistent with these findings. Although thinking and feeling were not overtly entangled at first, they became so; suggesting that, once activated, emotions linked to life history will colour our critical response, as discussed in Section 5.3 A. However, I recognised at Stage One that my reflections had to be treated with caution, as in threshold concept theory, crossing a threshold has an unforeseen quality (Meyer and Land 2003), and I had knowingly set out to explore whether self-reflexivity might lead to transformations of understanding (Section 4.3 D).

The research participants, however, were not similarly primed; and their responses, although diverse, seem to bolster the idea that self-reflexivity can act as a pathway to a threshold-type learning experience. Not all participants seemed to cross a threshold, but some did appear to do so. An analysis of the distribution of Theme 4 evidence by participant is presented in Table 23 (Appendix III).

The key defining characteristic of a threshold concept is that it transforms understanding in a way that is unexpected (Section 2.4 C), with some scholars taking 'lightbulb' moments as evidence that a threshold has been crossed (Wisker, Cameron and Antoniou 2008). Three participants (Catherine, David, Alison), all experienced visual culture practitioners, explicitly acknowledged that self-reflexivity had opened up an expanded vision in a way that was unexpected and emotionally intense, with implications for understanding and evaluation that could be extrapolated to photography generally and beyond. Catherine said she was 'surprised' at her heightened response, and that the process had demonstrated the hidden influence of the personal in how we see the world: it had shown 'how much of our own experiences and understandings … we project unknowingly onto others'. David said the

experience had been ‘striking’ and ‘remarkable’, and that exploring personal connections had made him ‘value’ the image more. The effect, he said, would be irreversible, a defining characteristic of threshold concepts (Section 2.4 C): ‘There is no taking away this, what has been now committed’. Alison described the self-reflexive process as one of being given ‘permission’ to access emotions and experiences normally forbidden in critical practice, with the result of setting off many more ‘resonances’ than occur in normal practice. The effect, she found, was to give a photograph ‘the potential to touch … the viewer very deeply’.

According to Meyer and Land (2003), threshold concepts are not only transformative but can be troublesome to accept (prompting resistance) and integrative (allowing new connections to be made between concepts already grasped) (Section 2.4 C). Tom appears to have crossed a threshold in terms of all three characteristics. He participated in the research to explore what reflexivity was, but his initial response displayed implicit resistance to the protocol’s prompts. Engaging with emotion was ‘very difficult’. After hearing others, his position began to shift: his response had been ‘too studied … a critic’s response’, he said, as he started to recognise personal connections to the image. Later, demonstrating the ‘bottleneck’ described by Wuetherick and Loeffler (2014), he admitted to ‘stumbling’ as he tried to articulate his evolving thinking; but he finally accepted, in what seemed like a ‘lightbulb’ moment, that personal experiences/emotions are entangled in all our intellectual judgements: ‘I think you are absolutely right, they *can’t* be separated’. As a result of participating in the study he aimed to incorporate reflexivity into future writing projects.

Gerry demonstrated some aspects of the threshold experience. His reaction was less evidently transformational, less an emotional rite of passage, than those of Catherine, David and Alison, but was similar to theirs in some ways: reflexivity had made him ‘more conscious’, more actively engaged than if he had followed his ‘standard behaviour’, and the effect was to produce a different kind of insight and a higher level of affective response.

The other participants (Jan, Marion, Sofia) displayed no clear signs of crossing a threshold. For Meyer and Land (2003), however, a threshold concept is difficult and often takes time to acquire. Many learners never acquire it. In this research, all eight participants were encountering self-reflexive photography criticism *for the first time*. That four (or possibly five) had what looks like a threshold learning experience in recognising the value of drawing on emotions/life history in critical interpretation, seems powerful evidence for self-reflexivity’s transformative capacity as a learning mechanism in this field.

E. Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth

As discussed in Section 2.4 D, personal growth is a life-long process, and where it occurs in a particular learning or self-reflection experience it is likely to be in the form of small, provisional steps, which may include: clarifications about ourselves or our thinking processes, a renewed enthusiasm, or an opening up of possibilities to change practice or behaviour. Although the literature of reflection and growth is extensive, few studies seem to have linked reflection as an interpretive practice to growth in fields such as visual culture (Section 2.4 D). My interpretive research at Stage One, however, suggested that self-reflexivity had produced tentative forms of growth for me, related to clarifications about myself and my thinking processes, which seemed to have the capacity to lead to positive change, as discussed in Section 4.3 E. These seemed to occur most strongly where I identified something troublesome in my assumptions or practices which invited a change of thinking or behaviour.

My response at Stage Two followed a similar pattern. Through self-reflection I discovered a tension between my broader values (humanism) and my habits of thinking and behaviour (compassion fatigue) that seemed to underpin my initial response to Figure 5. This not only led to a change of response, but invited me to work on closing the gap between values and behaviour in daily life. Self-reflection also led to an insight into my practices of criticality, as I noticed that my critical thinking had an affective basis linked to 'emotional blockage'. This insight will lead me to be more self-reflexively cautious about criticality in the future.

Tentative signs of growth could also be seen among the participants. An analysis of the distribution of Theme 5 evidence by participant is presented in Table 24 (Appendix III). The group's experiences did not mirror my own, as a lack of self-reflexive fault-finding (discussed in Section 5.3 B) produced no evident moral tensions demanding resolution. However, both Alison and Sofia experienced disturbance which self-reflection clarified and stabilised to some extent. Alison described her story of escape from Turkey as a transgenerational trauma, passed down through her family as a suppressed anxiety, rarely discussed, but which she had recently been attempting to address on her own. Self-reflexive analysis of Figure 5 was difficult but helped her, she said, 'articulate something … that I have perhaps not spelled out … previously. So that is a bonus (for me)'. Sofia's blocked response, related to family trauma, seemed an example of the 'zone of blocked attention' which Mezirow saw as an opportunity for transformational growth (1991a: 5); and her blockage was cleared, to some extent, through exposure to participants acting as 'critically reflective

mirrors' at the circle (Brookfield 2009: 133). Others' stories had brought her to 'look at myself through [their] words'. The effect was that she was able to embrace her traumatised response as part of her ongoing work of self-healing.

Others experienced forms of growth in terms of increased metacognitive awareness. Alison, Catherine, David and Tom said they had come to recognise the significance of the personal underpinning their sense-making. For Gerry and Jan, the self-reflexive dialogue of the circle revealed limitations in their thinking practices, which pointed to possibilities for growth for each. Gerry recognised his 'formulaic' critical habits which had been challenged by the self-reflexive exercise. Jan acknowledged her limited understanding of visual rhetoric but came to recognise the value of self-reflexivity for understanding our 'gut' responses to photographs: 'This is the whole nature of this exercise, isn't it, that when you do pause and look, to ask yourself what it is that made you stop and look?'

Other possible signs of growth could also be detected. Catherine and David both declared a heightened enthusiasm for critical practice: Catherine said the 'amazing discussion' at the circle had made her want to repeat the exercise straightaway in her own time outside the research; while David said the experience had been 'quite wonderful' and was something he would incorporate into his teaching. Tom declared that he intended to change his writing practice as a result of taking part in the research.

F. Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons

At Stage One, in addition to addressing the research question directly, I examined my responses for evidence that contributed in a general way to understanding the value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism, and made three main observations: self-reflexivity increased my emotional engagement with the photographs to which I had a positive response; the slowness of the self-reflexive process seemed significant for generating insight; but I found the process laborious and time-consuming (Section 4.3 F).

Figure 5 produced similar findings for me. Self-reflexivity manifestly increased my affective engagement. Initially I was distanced and distrustful, but uncovering personal connections (mother, family traumas, attachment to home) activated powerful emotional responses: '… just having that thought gives me a sudden burst of sorrow; and more intense sympathy …'. Protracted rumination over time, again, was significant for generating both

affective involvement and learning. My two-month period of reflection, I wrote at the end, represented 'a journey … of moving closer towards the image', during which I was able to 'relax and enter [the picture's] world of suffering'; and it was only in my third cycle of reflection that I achieved two of my more significant insights, about my habitual 'numbness' to contemporary reports of migration (Section 5.3 B) and the affective basis of my criticality (Section 5.3 E).

The participants' responses were examined, similarly, for general evidence relating to the value of self-reflexivity in photography criticism. An analysis of the distribution of Theme 6 evidence by participant is presented in Table 25 (Appendix III).

Among the participants, all except Sofia experienced a heightened affective response through self-reflexivity, as I had done. Sofia's strongly negative reaction obstructed any engagement with the image (to be discussed further below), but for the others, self-reflexivity generated a marked increase in positive feeling and attachment. For Alison, self-reflexivity set off 'many more resonances' that allowed the image to 'touch the viewer very deeply'. For Catherine, it caused her to respond 'in a much deeper way' and she was 'deeply moved'. For David, initially distant, self-reflexivity increased his 'interest' in the picture, increased its 'value', and created a 'build up' of the melancholy prompted by the image's rhetoric. Jan, Gerry and Tom said that self-reflexivity increased their empathy with Hengameh and their engagement with the picture. Recognising personal connections produced an 'overwhelming sadness' for Jan, made the image 'very powerful' for Tom, and caused Marion to identify with Hengameh in a strongly emotional way: 'I felt for the woman immediately … I recognise her isolation in myself.' At Stage One I noted that the increase in attachment appeared to follow from becoming more personally invested, as a result of making connections between the image and our lives (Section 4.3 F); and this appears to have been the case for the participants too. Taken together, an increase in affective engagement seems to be one of the most prominent, unambiguous and widely-shared positive effects of self-reflexivity in photography criticism, representing one of this study's major findings.

The value of slow research, which I noticed in my own responses, is harder to gauge for the participants, as for practical reasons they were only asked to work through the protocol once rather than several times as I had myself. However, Catherine and David both acknowledged the time it had taken to undertake the exercise, and its positive effect on their responses. Catherine wrote that she had never 'thought about a picture in as much detail as this', while David said that time was crucial in altering his view of the image: the woman, he said, had come to seem less '"other" … now that I have invested more time with her' and he

described the methodical structure of the protocol as a tool for 'reading an image well'. Tom's transformed appreciation of the value of self-reflexivity (Section 5.3 D), and the 'releasing' of Sofia's emotional blockage (Section 5.3 E), both took place only at the end of the research process as a result of protracted reflection and dialogue across time. These findings seem to provide some tentative support for my observations about the generative potential of taking time over self-reflexive practice.

Some of the most noteworthy comments from participants were those that addressed the *overall* value of self-reflexivity as an approach to photography criticism. The starting point of this study, the 'gap' which it seeks to fill, is the claim that self-reflexivity is rarely carried out in photography criticism and rarely mentioned in visual culture literature, as discussed in Section 2.3 A. The eight participants included six academics and/or writers in visual culture disciplines (Alison, Catherine, David, Gerry, Tom and Sofia), four of them practising photography critics, all of whom were experiencing self-reflexive photography criticism for the first time. Did they accept the premise, and think the gap worth filling? And if so, why? As Sofia was unable to engage significantly in the research, she offered no comment on the issue. The other five all explicitly accepted the premise and, as a result of taking part in the research, commented positively on the value of self-reflexivity as a practical methodology. Alison said that 'traditionally you would … be avoiding' personal stories in criticism, but found that having 'permission' to do so set off 'many more resonances' that greatly enhanced her response. Catherine stated that critics are 'taught not to bring ourselves into the analysis', but that the study had shown there was 'a tremendous amount lost' in not doing so. Gerry said he would normally keep personal narratives 'out of the picture' as professional expectations 'obliged' him to focus on 'the historical and cultural dimension'; but the reflexive process had made him more 'conscious' while writing, and produced a different kind of insight and heightened affective engagement. David recognised that normal critical practice was to 'draw on my knowledge … not on my experiences'; and declared that it seemed 'really perverse' not to have 'permission' to use self-reflexivity in criticism, given its value for enhanced emotional engagement, enriched response, metacognition and personal growth. Tom said what was 'really valuable' about the study was it had 'unsettled' normal critical practices and 'caused a pause' around the customary separation of the personal and intellectual: 'And I think you are absolutely right, they can't be separated'. Understanding the mechanics of their entanglement, as the study was trying to do, he said, was a 'profound ... and important' matter to understand. That all four professional critics, and five of the six participants with expertise in visual culture, agreed that self-

reflexivity is largely unrecognised in visual culture criticism, and would potentially be a valuable addition to critical methodology, seems highly significant. Jan and Marion, experienced self-reflexive researchers but not photography specialists, have not been highlighted here as they were unable to comment on the study's claim of a 'gap' in photography criticism; but both recognised the value of self-reflexivity from their own disciplinary practices.

Three participants (Catherine, Gerry, Alison) indicated that a key reason for incorporating self-reflexivity – in addition to the other justifications covered elsewhere in this discussion – is that it can produce a more authentic form of critical writing, revealing what the writer is 'really' thinking/feeling, but may be suppressing in accordance with the norms of critical practice or for other reasons. Catherine and Gerry both described mainstream writing as an act of concealment: personal experiences 'inform our very view' of photographs, Catherine said, and yet as a critic 'you disregard that' in favour of 'the other stuff you are supposed to be [thinking about]'. Gerry said, similarly, that critics are 'aware of' their personal connections to an image but these are typically 'smothered' in favour of the type of response expected by the discipline. For Alison, suppression practices are only partially effective, in any case, leaving hints and traces of what lies behind the words. If she had written about Figure 5 in the normal way, she said, her own personal story would be 'coming through … between the lines'. Even if swept under the carpet, it would remain 'lumpy … for all to see.' It seems to follow from these observations that if what is normally concealed were disclosed, writing might become more comprehensible and transparent, with more precise forms of epistemological positioning, as discussed in Section 2.3 A; and richer and fuller, with more individualised elements of detail and colour. The practice might also generate a form of growth for the researcher, as the development of an authentic personal voice has been described as a marker of self-realisation (Bakhtin 1981, Pring 2015, see Section 2.4 D).

Some of the participants' experiences and reflections, however, also pointed to the potential difficulties and limitations of self-reflexivity. Sofia's 'blocked' resistance to engaging with the protocol, because of traumatic associations triggered by the image, suggests that in some circumstances, for some writers/learners, self-reflexivity may be too difficult to handle. Tom also reported that he found engaging with emotion 'very difficult' and that it felt easier for him to remain within the comfort zone of the 'intellectual'. The fact that others in the group found disclosing trauma possible, even 'releasing' in Alison's case, suggests that traumatic associations will not necessarily scupper self-reflexivity. It is beyond

the scope of this study to comment on why trauma might be obstructive for some and not for others. However, blockage must be noted as a potential, if not necessarily likely, response to a self-reflexive expectation. Besides blockage, David predicted it would remain difficult to practise self-reflexivity when the culture of mainstream criticism does not expect it. Despite recognising its value, 'it would [still] feel a bit indulgent' to introduce it in writing; it is something he said he 'would feel self-conscious about'. In light of Brookfield's remark that research based on personal narratives still 'has a hard time being accepted as legitimate within the academy' (2017: 69), the path towards acceptance of self-reflexivity in photography criticism remains, perhaps, a steep one. This matter will be addressed again in terms of the implications of the study in Section 6.5.

G. Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences

One of the aims of Stage Two was to explore the learning value of self-reflexivity for audiences. The evidence produced by the study is limited, as it was generated from a single two-hour circle-of-voices discussion in which participants presented their self-reflexive responses to the group in relation to a single image. However, even within these constraints, the event seemed to produce learning for participants in a number of ways. These included learning through transparency (coded here as 7A); through engagement by means of illuminating detail (7B), 'me-too' resonance (7C) or self-knowledge (7D); and through empathy, leading to increased emotional connection with the author (7E) and bridge-building where there is difference of opinion (7F). Precedents in the literature for all these forms of learning were discussed in Section 2.4 E. Every participant, without exception, seemed to experience some learning as an audience-member of self-reflexivity. An analysis of the distribution of evidence by participant is presented in Table 26 (Appendix III).

The most prominent and widely-shared forms of audience-learning experienced in this study related to insights gained through heightened engagement by means of illuminating detail (7B) and 'me-too' moments of personal resonance (7C). The substance of each participant's insights/learning and points of resonance varied widely, as outlined in Section 5.2 J. They included Alison's expanded understanding of how self-reflexive writing can be practised well; Marion's insights into the ambiguous authorship of Figure 5's narrative, and the significance of emotional resonance for photographic value; Catherine's recognition of the importance of what lies outside the frame for photographic meaning; Gerry's realisation

about the near-universal experience of displacement, alongside Jan's and my own recognition of the significance of displacement in our own lives; David's acknowledgement of aspects of female experience that had not occurred to him previously; and my recognition of the significance of suitcases full of family photographs for the construction of family identity narratives, among other matters. The range and diversity of insights arising from this one small exercise seem to point to the potential of self-reflexivity for reader/audience learning through heightened engagement, and also to the open-ended nature of the learning that might arise.

Empathy also figured strongly as an audience response, with six of the nine participants (including myself) claiming an increased emotional connection (7E) to other speakers after hearing their self-reflexive accounts. As discussed in Section 2.4 E, an emotional connection between writer and audience has been claimed to be a pathway to cognitive resonance (Bochner and Ellis 2016, Kay 2016), consensus-building and transformative learning (Taylor 2009), as well as heightened aesthetic experience (Fry 1961). Emotional bonding may have been catalysed for some participants, however, by the 'live' nature of the event. Gerry, for example, highlighted the 'boundary-crossing' pleasure of sharing personal stories online with people sitting in diverse locations; while Sofia spoke of the affective impact of 'listening' while people told their stories. These findings cannot, therefore, necessarily be transferred directly to the more distanced experience of reading – as opposed to hearing – a self-reflexive text; but they remain promising and seem to invite further research.

Transparency is generally taken to be the central rationale for reflexivity in research, enabling readers to understand the basis for how a particular interpretation has been reached (Sections 2.2 and 2.4 E). For me, the participants' self-reflexive written and verbal contributions provided clear evidence for the uniquely personal influences underlying their responses, as discussed in Section 5.3 A in relation to Theme 1. Among the participants, Sofia also highlighted explanatory clarity (7A) as a feature of self-reflexive criticism, saying that Alison's account provided 'clues' about how she constructed her 'feelings, her daily life, her past' and her interpretation of the image. Other participants commented frequently on how interesting or revealing others' contributions had been, as discussed above, but did not specifically cite transparency as a form of learning gain. This may be simply a matter of the use of language, the concept of explanatory clarity being implicit, to some extent, within that of providing illuminating or resonant detail. However, it may also be significant that the image chosen for review was one on which there no notable divergence of opinion, as

discussed in Section 5.3 B. A more divisive image might have given participants more reason to look for explanations of 'questionable' interpretations that troubled them.

Similar points can be made around the self-reflexive learning pathways of self-positioning in relation to others (7D) and bridge-building where there is difference of opinion (7F). Both feature among participants' responses. Jan commented on recognising a distinction between her form of anxiety around self-reflexive disclosure and Alison's. Catherine said that self-reflexive dialogue had fostered a 'kind of quietness' and 'deep listening' which restrained her from disputing points of interpretation with which she disagreed. I noted in my self-interview that I might normally have 'bristled' at Jan's comments about what she claimed were women's habits of passively waiting for attention; but that on hearing of her research background and personal experiences of waiting, I was able to 'understand and empathise'. Both of these learning pathways depend upon there being a recognition of difference between listener and speaker. Where there is broad consensus over an image, as here, these opportunities are suppressed, and a more divisive image might have been more productive.

Overall, the study suggests that self-reflexive photography criticism is capable of producing learning gains for readers/audiences. It also points, however, to the desirability of further research, both into the experience of readers (as opposed to listeners), and into self-reflexive writing about more divisive forms of imagery.

H. The self-reflexive analytic protocol

At Stage One, the self-reflexive protocol appeared to be an effective mechanism for generating forms of learning in relation to each image studied (Section 4.3 G). Significant insights were generated at each step. Moreover, my way of using the protocol, working through it several times in relation to each image, taking time over the process, and using a 'multiple-entry' form of note-taking, seemed to contribute to the generation of insight and enriched understanding. At Stage Two, the protocol was similarly effective in expanding my understanding. It led to a change in my interpretation of Figure 5, enriched my conception of the image's meaning and value, and highlighted an aspect of my behaviour that I wished to correct (Section 5.2 A).

For four participants at Stage Two (Alison, Catherine, David, Gerry), the protocol generated insights in relation to several themes across most or all of its reflexive steps, as it

had for me. For Jan and Marion, the protocol proved particularly effective in producing metacognitive insights in relation to Theme 1, and produced some insights in relation to other themes. The protocol seemed less effective for Sofia and Tom, as both experienced the self-reflexive process as difficult, at least initially, as discussed in Sections 5.2 H and I.

The thematic tables (Appendix III) indicate, however, that even where participants found the protocol productive, the great majority of participants' coded extracts were generated at the latter two phases of the research – the circle of voices and interview. This can perhaps be explained as follows. All participants in the study were approaching self-reflexive photography criticism for the first time. As discussed in Section 5.3 F, participants were only asked to work through the protocol once rather than several times; and as discussed in Section 5.3 B, participants were not primed, as I had been, to approach the protocol as a self-critical 'fault-finding review of presuppositions' (Mezirow 1991a: 102). For these reasons, the protocol can perhaps be taken, in this study, as providing participants with an initial introduction only to self-reflexive criticism. In the latter phases, participants had opportunities to engage more with the process, with other participants who were learning about the process, and with me as interviewer asking them to reflect on the value of the exercise. It seems unsurprising, perhaps, that when engaging with a novel (and for photography critics, a counter-intuitive) way of thinking about photographs, it took time to settle into the appropriate cognitive register and for insights to begin to multiply.

As discussed in Section 4.3 G, I regard the protocol pioneered here as a first iteration which is likely to evolve. As discussed in Section 5.3 B, my next iteration may carry a more explicit prompt for researchers to engage in self-critical fault-finding. If the protocol and rationale for using it become more widely known within the discipline, future researchers will approach it with a level of prior knowledge and expectation, which may allow them to use the protocol with confidence from the outset – or indeed to adapt it to better suit their research needs.

5.4 Conclusions

Stage Two of the research was intended, primarily, to triangulate, enrich and inflect the findings of Stage One, as well as to explore the learning value of self-reflexive interpretation

for audiences. The conclusions of the second stage are therefore given in a corresponding order to those of the first, presented in Section 4.7.

Stage Two appears to have corroborated and nuanced all the findings of Stage One, providing evidence from a diverse group of participants that self-reflexivity based on self-reflection and disclosure is capable of producing learning and growth, in the following ways:

1. Self-reflexivity can illuminate the basis of a practitioner's critical and emotional responses to photographs, by revealing links between thinking/feeling and emotionally-significant personal life experiences, worldview and the context of the viewing moment (Section 5.3 A).

2. Self-reflexivity can reveal how thinking may be entangled with feeling linked to life history, and that a practitioner's critical 'neutrality' may have an affective basis even where it remains unacknowledged (Section 5.3 A).

3. Self-reflexivity can change or transform a practitioner's conception of images or themselves *if* they engage actively in self-critical fault-finding (Section 5.3 B).

4. Self-reflexivity can extend and enrich a practitioner's conception of images or themselves by activating personal connections and releasing insights grounded in tacit knowledge and personal experience, in a way that can seem revelatory and surprising (Section 5.3 C).

5. Self-reflexivity in interpretation provides opportunities for personal growth, including positive changes in our ways of seeing/acting in the world, the settling/resolution of emotional disturbances, sharpened understanding of critical processes, and heightened enthusiasm for critical practice (Section 5.3 E).

6. By revealing links between interpretation, emotional response and life history, self-reflexivity can produce a transformative conception of how meaning and value are constructed in photography; thus serving as a pathway to a threshold concept in photography criticism, albeit one that is not yet widely recognised (Section 5.3 D).

7. Self-reflexivity is capable of increasing the practitioner's affective engagement with photographs, regardless of the character of the initial response, as a result of becoming more personally invested in their meaning (Section 5.3 F).

In relation to the self-reflexive analytic protocol:

8. The self-reflexive protocol is an effective learning tool for some practitioners, but may benefit from a more explicit prompt around self-criticality and more conceptual framing before its usefulness can be fully realised by all (Section 5.3 H).

For readers/audiences of self-reflexive critical writing:

9. Self-reflexivity can lead to learning gains, especially through heightened engagement with self-reflexive texts, by means of illuminating detail and 'me-too' moments of personal resonance (Section 5.3 G).

10. Self-reflexivity can generate increased empathy and emotional connection to the author of a self-reflexive text, which may serve as a precursor to learning (Section 5.3 G).

In addition, the study has suggested that:

11. For practitioners of criticism, self-reflexivity is likely to be a little-understood research practice at present, but may be experienced as a valuable innovation (Section 5.3 F).

12. Self-reflexivity may be capable of producing more authentic critical writing, by avoiding the suppressions that are customary in mainstream practice (Section 5.3 F).

13. Self-reflexivity can, nonetheless, be a difficult practice to undertake, because it challenges professional expectations, and because of its capacity to produce emotional disturbance (Section 5.3 F).

In summary, the research with participants at Stage Two was a small-scale study and my interpretation represents a single researcher's partial reading of the data. Nonetheless, the research appears to have supported, nuanced and extended all my findings in Stage One about the metacognitive benefits and other forms of learning that can be generated by self-reflexivity in photography criticism. The conclusions from both research stages will be synthesised and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Six. Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study, an exploration of the learning value of self-reflexivity as an interpretive practice based on self-reflection and disclosure in the context of photography criticism, sought to answer one research question:

- What is the value of self-reflexivity within critical interpretation for producing learning and growth?

In answering the question, the study had two broad aims, as outlined in Section 1.3. These were, first, to make a contribution to reflective practice and threshold concepts research by illuminating the complex learning potential of self-reflection when used within a self-reflexive interpretive framework, in education settings and beyond; and second, to help extend and improve photography criticism, in education as well as professional settings, by exploring self-reflexivity's capacity to generate transformed and enriched understandings of photographs, ourselves and the world in a 'postcritical' form of critical practice.

Interim conclusions about how the research at Stages One and Two answered the research question were presented in Sections 4.4 and 5.4. These interim conclusions are synthesised into final conclusions in Section 6.2, presented in the same order as in previous chapters for clarity. The conclusions are discussed in relation to how they address the study's aims, and how they help build an original contribution to knowledge. The study's contribution to knowledge is then presented in Section 6.3.

The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed in Section 6.4; and, finally, the study's implications for education, critical practice, and interpretive research are considered in Section 6.5.

6.2 Conclusions of the Study

The project appears to have demonstrated a number of ways in which self-reflexivity, as an interpretive practice based on self-reflection and disclosure, has value for producing learning and growth. The study's principal findings, presented as Conclusions 1–10, are as follows:

1. Self-reflexivity is able to illuminate ways in which critical interpretation and emotional response may be influenced by emotionally significant life experiences (past or present), values/beliefs and habitual patterns of thinking and behaviour (Sections 4.3 A and 5.3 A).

This first conclusion aligns, to an extent, with what has long been expected of self-reflexivity: that it can provide a metacognitive and explanatory account of some of the personal reasons why researchers/critics think as they do (Section 2.2). A more novel twist is the less commonly-discussed finding that self-reflexivity can shed light on why researchers/critics *feel* as they do about their materials, by linking feelings to life history and worldview. Feeling has sometimes been considered by scholars of visual and cultural studies to be beyond the reach of research (Barthes 1982, Turner 1996, Smith 2014, see Section 2.3 B) but the study suggests this is not the case.

This finding addresses both research aims. It sheds new light on the metacognitive and revelatory potential of self-reflexivity based on self-reflection, and in doing so helps build a case for the use of self-reflexivity in photography criticism.

The conclusion contributes to knowledge about self-reflexivity's ability to explicate emotional responses in terms of influences from worldview and life history.

2. Self-reflexivity can reveal the entanglement of critical interpretation with feeling linked to life history, even where the affective basis of reasoning is not initially recognised (Sections 4.3 A and 5.3 A).

Several writers have drawn attention to the influence of emotion on thinking (Archer 2000, Smith 2014) and of life history on emotion (Sayer 2005, Brookfield 2012), but emotions continue to be under-acknowledged within the culture of criticism and interpretive research,

where a stance of critical detachment is generally favoured (Holmes 2010, Lumsden 2019, Felski 2015, see Section 2.3 B). This second conclusion points to the extent to which critical 'detachment' may be illusory.

This finding addresses both research aims. Like Conclusion 1, it sheds light on self-reflexivity's metacognitive potential, and opens up a way of improving practice. By taking a self-reflexive approach, the critic/researcher becomes able to recognise and disclose the often hidden presence of emotions linked to life history within their critical interpretations, with the effect of furthering their own and readers' understanding of their meaning claims.

The conclusion contributes to knowledge by highlighting how self-reflexivity has the power to uncover the pervasive entanglement of thinking/feeling/life history, in a critical and research culture in which these links are often unrecognised. It helps make the case for a new, postcritical form of practice in which emotion and personal narratives are acknowledged and valued.

3. Self-reflexivity has the power to transform a critic/researcher's understanding of their research materials or themselves, *if* they engage actively in self-critical fault-finding in relation to their values and assumptions (Sections 4.3 B and 5.3 B).

This third conclusion builds on claims by Mezirow (1991a) and others (Section 2.4 A) that critical self-reflection can lead to transformations in how we think about the world and ourselves. The study suggests that when premise reflection is incorporated into a self-reflexive methodology, interpretive transformations may occur, especially when a tension is discovered between the initial interpretation and the researcher's values, requiring resolution in either a change of interpretation or values (Section 4.3 B). However, the study found that transformations are not an inevitable consequence of self-reflexivity, but occur only if the critic/researcher engages actively in a 'fault-finding review of presuppositions' (Mezirow 1991a: 102, see Section 5.3 B).

This finding addresses both research aims. It provides evidence, uncommon in education research (Section 2.4 A), that self-reflection can produce shifts in *interpretation*; and it helps clarify the conditions in which they may occur. In doing so, it indicates a way in which interpretations of photographs can be refined and improved. The conclusion contributes to knowledge in helping build an elaborate conception of self-reflection as an interpretive mechanism capable of producing learning gain.

4. Self-reflexivity can extend and enrich a critic/researcher's conception of their research materials, the disciplinary field or themselves, by activating personal connections and releasing insights grounded in tacit knowledge, and the beliefs, values and preferences that underpin habitual behaviour and thinking (Sections 4.3 C and 5.3 C).

This conclusion corroborates and develops the work of scholars such as Kleinman (1991) and Rose (2011) (Section 2.4 B), by showing how self-reflection on memory, worldview and viewing context can produce surprising and revelatory connections between an image and emotionally-freighted personal experiences, leading to new insights into meaning. In relation to Gray and Malins' comment (2004: 22) that tacit 'insider knowledge' may be especially potent, the study found that insights were generated both from insider knowledge and general tacit knowledge associated with living in the world.

This finding addresses both research aims. It provides evidence, uncommon in education research (Section 2.4 B), that helps build an understanding of the kinds of tacit knowledge that self-reflection can release in the service of self-reflexive interpretation, the self-reflexive processes that enable it to do so, and the nature of the critic/researcher's affective experience when such releases occur; and in doing so, it opens a way for critical writing to be enriched. The conclusion, like others, contributes to knowledge in helping build an elaborate conception of self-reflection as an interpretive mechanism capable of producing learning gain.

5. Self-reflexivity in interpretation can produce opportunities for personal growth, including positive changes in our ways of seeing/acting in the world, the settling of emotional disturbances, heightened understanding of our thinking processes, and increased enthusiasm for critical practice (Sections 4.3 E and 5.3 E).

Critical self-reflection over the course of a lifetime has been proposed as a route to existential growth (Bakhtin 1981, Archer 2000, see Section 2.4 D), but signs of growth from any single self-reflexive interpretive exercise are likely to be small, tentative and provisional. This fifth conclusion is, accordingly, phrased in terms of producing 'opportunities for' growth. These were especially notable, for me, where self-reflection drew attention to habitual forms of thinking/behaviour that were in conflict with my values, inviting positive behavioural change (Section 4.3 E). This finding is connected to Conclusion 3, related to transformative learning.

As with Conclusion 3, the study found that a self-critical, fault-finding approach to one's assumptions and values seems necessary for prompting positive change. Other opportunities for growth highlighted by the study were summarised in Section 5.3 E.

This finding addresses both research aims. It provides evidence, uncommon in education research (Section 2.4 D), that highlights self-reflection's potential within a self-reflexive interpretive framework for producing small steps towards existential growth, as well as the tentative nature of such steps and some of the conditions that might help produce them; and in doing so it points to an expanded conception of what photography criticism can achieve. The conclusion, like others, contributes to knowledge in helping build an elaborate conception of self-reflection as an interpretive mechanism capable of producing learning gain.

6. Self-reflexivity can act as a pathway to a threshold concept in photography criticism, by revealing links between interpretation, emotional response and life history and thereby producing a transformative conception of how meaning and value are constructed in the field (Sections 4.3 D and 5.3 D).

A number of participants seemed to experience a transformative and unexpected enlargement of understanding about how meaning and value are constructed in photography criticism (Section 5.3 D), as a result of recognising the influence of life history on interpretation and emotional response (Conclusion 1), and the entanglement of thinking and feeling (Conclusion 2). Self-reflexivity based on self-reflection thus appears to serve as a route to an important threshold concept in the discipline, as defined by Meyer and Land (2003, see Section 2.4 C), albeit one that is not yet widely acknowledged (Sections 2.3 A and B).

This sixth conclusion is of key significance for this study. It addresses both research aims. It draws attention to self-reflection's transformative capacity as a learning mechanism when used as part of a self-reflexive interpretive framework, and seems to indicate clearly how self-reflexivity can benefit and extend the practice of criticism, in a way consistent with postcritical approaches emerging in photography and cognate fields.

The finding contributes to knowledge in revealing the transformative potential of recognising, through self-reflection, that thinking/feeling/life history are entangled in critical interpretation.

7. Self-reflexivity is capable of greatly increasing the critic/researcher's affective engagement with photographs, as a result of becoming more personally invested in their meaning (Sections 4.3 F and 5.3 F)

One of the most prominent and widely-shared positive effects of self-reflexivity suggested by the study was the way it seemed to produce a marked increase in my own and participants' affective engagement in the photographs under review. In terms of the research question, the finding matters because engagement is recognised as a precondition for learning (Illeris 2007, Bamber and Jones 2015, Gibbs 2015). The greater value of the finding, however, lies in how it addresses the research aim of improving criticism. A research method that increases a researcher's engagement in their materials can perhaps be taken as an unambiguous benefit for critical practice.

8. The self-reflexive protocol pioneered in this study is effective for producing transformations, expansions and enrichment of understanding in photography criticism, especially if used in a slow, iterative and self-critical way (Sections 4.3 G and 5.3 H).

As discussed in Section 3.2 C, guidelines for undertaking reflexive research are rare in any field (Pillow 2003, Dean 2017, Lumsden 2019), and none exists, as far as I know, in visual culture or related fields. This conclusion is therefore highly significant, representing one the study's major contributions to knowledge. The protocol used here, however, represents a first iteration only, and one that is likely to evolve. Work with participants (Section 5.3 H) also suggested that, so long as self-reflexivity remains little understood within visual culture, some researchers/learners may find it hard, at first, to use to its full potential. This situation is likely to improve if, with future publications, knowledge about the protocol and the rationale for self-reflexivity spreads within the discipline.

This conclusion addresses both research aims. It highlights an innovative practical mechanism through which learning gains can be produced in self-reflexive research, and introduces a potentially beneficial new interpretive method for photography criticism.

9. Self-reflexivity can generate insights and learning for audiences, especially through heightened engagement by means of illuminating detail and ‘me-too’ moments of personal resonance (Section 5.3 G).

The study indicated that self-reflexivity can produce insights and learning gains not just for researchers/practitioners but also for audiences of self-reflexive writing. Every participant at Stage Two seemed to experience some form of learning as a result of hearing others’ self-reflexive accounts at the circle event, as discussed in Section 5.3 G. Audience data was produced, however, in relation to a single live event and one image, and this promising ninth conclusion is therefore presented tentatively with those caveats in mind. The finding could benefit from more research into the experience of readers, and into responses to writing about more divisive or ambiguous imagery.

This conclusion addresses both research aims. It helps clarify the learning effect of self-reflexivity based on self-reflection for audiences, and its potential to produce a highly resonant form of postcritical writing. Like others, the conclusion contributes to knowledge in helping build an elaborate conception of self-reflexivity as an interpretive practice capable of producing learning gain.

10. Self-reflexivity can produce a heightened emotional connection for audiences to the author of a self-reflexive text, which may serve as a precursor to learning (Section 5.3 G).

This conclusion picks up Bochner and Ellis’s (2016) argument, made in the context of autoethnography, that personal/subjective research can foster emotional connections between writers and audiences, and inspire resonance (Section 2.4 E). The study suggests this process may apply similarly within photography criticism. As discussed in Section 5.3 G, the majority of participants reported experiencing strong affective connections to each other after hearing their self-reflexive accounts. As with the previous conclusion, however, this finding is presented tentatively, with the proviso that it may not apply so strongly in the more distanced context of reading (as opposed to listening to) self-reflexive accounts.

This conclusion addresses both research aims. Like the previous conclusion, it aids understanding of the learning potential of self-reflexivity for audiences, and the ability of the practice to increase the resonance of critical writing. Like others, the conclusion contributes

to knowledge in helping build an elaborate conception of self-reflexivity as an interpretive practice capable of producing learning gain.

The study also produced three further conclusions, which address in a more general way the value and prospects of self-reflexivity as an interpretive practice within photography criticism:

11. For photography critics/researchers, self-reflexivity is likely to be little understood at present, but may be experienced as a valuable innovation (Section 5.3 F).

One of the most resonant findings of the study was the affirmation by five of the six participants with expertise in visual culture of the existence of a ‘reflexivity gap’ in photography criticism – this study’s foundational claim and starting point – and the value to be gained from closing it, as discussed in Section 5.3 F. The finding cannot be generalised to the whole field of photography critics but is nonetheless highly suggestive and promising.

Although not addressing the research question directly, this eleventh conclusion strongly supports the study’s aim of extending and improving criticism. It seems to act as a summary conclusion: a synthesising commentary by ‘expert witnesses’ on the learning and affective benefits (Conclusions 1–10) they had experienced through taking part in the study.

12. Self-reflexivity may be capable of producing a more authentic form of critical writing, by avoiding the suppressions that are customary in mainstream practice (Section 5.3 F).

This twelfth conclusion also addresses the study’s aim of improving critical practice. It picks up on the recognition by a number of participants (Section 5.3 F) that mainstream criticism involves the habitual concealment of significant personal information which self-reflexivity gives researchers ‘permission’ to reveal. The study thus suggests that self-reflexivity may produce a postcritical form of writing that is fuller, richer, more transparent and more honest.

13. Self-reflexivity can, nonetheless, be a difficult practice to undertake because it challenges professional expectations, and because of its capacity to produce emotional disturbance (Section 5.3 F).

The study's final conclusion sounds a note of warning. Despite the apparent multiple benefits to be gained from a self-reflexive approach, as listed above, some practitioners may find it hard to incorporate in practice, for personal or cultural reasons, as discussed in Section 5.3 F. If this study can contribute, in a small way, to changing cultural conditions so that self-reflexivity becomes more widely accepted within critical practice, as a method for enriching understanding and producing learning gains, it will have met both its aims.

6.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Following discussion of the conclusions, above, it can be seen that the project's original contribution to knowledge takes three main forms.

A. First, the study demonstrates the way that self-reflexivity can reveal the pervasive entanglement of thinking and feeling in critical practice, and the extent to which thinking/feeling is influenced by life history, as captured in Conclusions 1 and 2. Although some scholars have commented on these links in other fields, they are not generally recognised in the theory or practice of photography criticism, as discussed in Sections 2.3 A and B. These findings therefore represent a substantial contribution to knowledge in the discipline. By revealing the often illusory nature of 'critical detachment', the study supports the emerging case for a postcritical and potentially more authentic form of criticism (Conclusion 12) that brings emotional response and the personal basis of meaning into the open in photography studies and cognate fields (Section 2.3 B). These findings point to a significant way in which the practice of criticism can be extended and improved.

B. Second, the study develops an expanded model of self-reflection as a complex life-long learning mechanism, when used as part of self-reflexive interpretive practice, that reaches

beyond its customary use as a self-accounting process in self-reflexive research (Section 2.2). Its ability to shed light on the influences underpinning feeling as well as thinking is captured in Conclusions 1 and 2; and its potential for generating transformed and enriched interpretations of research materials, and forms of personal growth, is captured in Conclusions 3, 4, and 5, to the extent that it seems to offer a pathway to a high-level threshold concept in photography studies and cognate fields, as captured in Conclusion 6. Each of these aspects of self-reflection's learning potential has been observed before (Section 2.4), but they are not generally considered together in the literature, and they have rarely been explored in practical studies of reflective practice in education research (Section 2.4). This study's findings about self-reflection's value for producing multiple forms of learning gain when used as a slow, ruminative, exploratory and (above all) self-critical practice in self-reflexive interpretation, therefore represent a significant contribution to knowledge – in terms of reflective practice and threshold concepts theory, and qualitative research methodology – opening up a new conception of how self-reflexivity can be used within photography studies and beyond.

C. Third, the study has pioneered an innovative protocol for engaging in self-reflexive critical interpretation, which has been found to be effective for generating multiple forms of learning gain, as captured in Conclusion 8. Guidelines and protocols for engaging in reflexive (or self-reflexive) research are rare in any field (Pillow 2003, Dean 2017, Lumsden 2019) and are unprecedented, as far as I know, in photography criticism and related fields. The study's self-reflexive analytic protocol therefore represents an important contribution to knowledge in relation to interpretive research methodology and the practice of criticism. The protocol presented here, however, is a first iteration. I have already identified a useful refinement to incorporate in its next iteration (Section 5.3 H); and the protocol is likely to continue to evolve with further use.

6.4 Strengths and Limitations

The study has two key strengths, and two main ways in which it could benefit from further research. The first key strength is its *innovative* quality. The study's starting point, the idea of

the ‘reflexivity gap’ in photography criticism, came to me as an epiphanic insight sparked by an encounter between two different disciplinary fields, visual culture and social science, as discussed in Section 1.2. The project’s investigation of the learning value of self-reflection within a self-reflexive interpretive framework in photography criticism is inherently interdisciplinary, involving the investigation of ideas and practices drawn from the diverse fields of education, learning theory, qualitative research methodology, cultural theory, social science and visual culture in a way that, as far as I am aware, has not been done before. This is the first study, I believe, of reflexivity within visual culture criticism; and the first practice-led research examination of critical practice, as far as I know, within visual culture or related areas. It is also, to my knowledge, the first educational study of the learning value of critical self-reflection in relation to interpretation in visual culture or cognate disciplines. The design and testing of a rigorous self-reflexive analytic protocol for which, again, there appear to be no precedents in visual culture or related fields, add to the study’s path-finding quality. While self-reflexivity is not entirely absent from photography criticism, the methodology explored here would seem to represent a significant innovation for mainstream research and practice within the discipline, a claim supported not only by the literature (Section 2.3 A) but also by the expert participants taking part in the study (Section 5.3 F and Conclusion 11).

The second key strength is the potential *importance* of the study both for reflective practice research and photography criticism. The study has provided compelling evidence, hitherto seemingly rare in practical education research (Section 2.4), for the power of self-reflection to transform and enrich acts of academic interpretation in fields such as visual culture, and lead to personal growth (Conclusions 3–5); and it has suggested, furthermore, that self-reflexivity can lead to a largely unrecognised threshold concept in criticism, opening up an expanded conception of how photography and related practices can be understood (Conclusion 6). In addition, the project has found that self-reflexivity can greatly increase affective engagement with photographs (Conclusion 7) and potentially produce a more authentic form of critical writing (Conclusion 12), two outcomes of unambiguous value for photography criticism. Moreover, the self-reflexive process highlighted here offers a way for visual culture studies to resolve the epistemological inconsistency of generally recognising perspective but overlooking reflexivity (Sections 2.2 and 2.3 A); and to develop a postcritical understanding of the origins and operations of emotional responses to photographs, a topic of re-emerging interest in the field (Section 2.3 B). The claim that incorporating self-reflexivity into photography writing would be an innovation of value and importance was affirmed by the majority of expert participants taking part (Section 5.3 F and Conclusion 11).

The study is limited, however, first, by its small scale. The study involved nine participants (including me), and five images that were selected for inclusion to an extent, but not entirely, on the basis of resonance (Sections 3.2 D and 3.2 E.3). Its findings are therefore suggestive but cannot be generalised directly across visual culture studies as a whole. As discussed in Section 5.3 G, audience learning data in particular was limited by being produced by a single live event, and by the selection of an image about which there was a broad consensus of opinion. Further research seems desirable into the learning experience of readers, and into images that are more divisive or ambiguous, or that lack resonance.

The study was also limited by being the first of its kind to examine the operation of self-reflexivity as a learning mechanism in photography criticism. This research feels like a beginning, rather than a conclusive ending. The study raises countless, intriguing new questions for future research projects to address, in terms of both breadth and depth. Breadth includes exploring self-reflexive interpretation in relation to other creative practices such as painting, film, crafts, fashion, literature, music, architecture; or non-art practices such as advertising, news media, politics and so forth. Depth includes closer examination of the sites of reflexivity identified in this study's protocol, to seek further clarification, for example, about what kinds of memories or values might be drivers of thinking/feeling responses, or might produce the most transformative or enriching insights, in relation to different images in different contexts, for researchers with different life histories, social positions and perspectives. The pervasive entanglement of thinking, feeling and life history which this study has highlighted, in relation to how we make sense of the world and how we make sense of others' sense making, is undoubtedly an immense and complex subject of enormous potential significance, but is one about which there is much more still to learn.

6.5 Implications of the Study

The study carries significant direct implications for education, criticism, and qualitative and interpretive research, which follow from its original contribution to knowledge.

The study's most evident, practical contribution to formal education lies in its provision of a ready-to-use, effective, self-reflexive method (or protocol) that can be employed, or adapted, by anyone engaging in acts of interpretation in education, such as

writing essays, dissertations, theses or other scholarly papers. The study has focused on learning gains experienced in self-reflexive photography criticism, but the protocol can potentially be used with equivalent gains in other interpretive fields. Its various steps addressing basic facts and context (Step 1), the communicative intentions of sources (Step 2), initial interpretation (Step 3), reflexive self-exploration (Steps 4–7), general reflections (Step 8) and reinterpretation (Step 9) are all readily adaptable to acts of interpretation in other disciplinary contexts.

The research also has clear implications for critical studies curricula and pedagogy. As discussed in Section 1.2, in arts-based higher education in the UK, the academic subject of critical studies focuses on the practice of criticism and its rationales and methods. The study's development of what appears to be a fruitful new postcritical approach to criticism has implications for curriculum content, how learners are encouraged to engage in critical writing, and how work is assessed. Felski (2015) recounts how she overhauled her own undergraduate literary theory classes in the US in line with a postcritical orientation, starting with teaching traditional critique and later bringing in postcritical ideas about affect. Students, she writes, had to 'think carefully about their attachments as well as cultivating detachment' (2015: 180), finding a balance between feeling and reason. The impact was 'a surge of élan in the classroom, a collective sigh of relief at encountering an analytical language for reflecting on, rather than repudiating their aesthetic attachments' (op cit: 181). My own experiments introducing self-reflexivity into my critical studies classes, undertaken as an informal spin-off from my research, have produced similarly positive reactions.

This study has not focused on pedagogy, but a number of suggestions about classroom practice can be made, for use in higher education or other educational settings, which might be picked up and developed by future researchers. I have found, from my own teaching, that a useful conceptual starting point is to introduce learners to literature linking interpretation with life history and emotion (eg, Bourdieu 1984, Sayer 2005, Brookfield 2012) and that connects critical self-reflection with learning and growth (eg, Mezirow 1991a, Bakhtin 1981). I have also found that learners appreciate practical guidance on how to self-reflect – such as by using a multiple-entry spreadsheet (Section 3.2 D) – and on productive sites of self-reflexivity to consider. Moreover, the study's self-reflexive protocol can be used in the classroom as a ready-made pedagogical tool for reflexive exercises, or adapted to suit alternative classroom contexts.

The effectiveness, demonstrated by the study, of practice-led research for producing learning gains, has led me, in my teaching, to focus on experiential learning practices (Kolb

2015), such as practical exercises in engaging self-reflexively with photographs and other materials; and to trial self-assessment (Boud 1995) as one way in which learners can reflect on their development and growth. In addition, the study's findings about the catalysing effect of self-reflexive dialogue (Sections 4.3 B, 5.3 E–G) and the model of close, empathetic listening developed in the circle of voices (Section 3.2 E.4) indicate the potential learning value of self-reflexive classroom discussions, and some of the ways in which they can be safely and productively managed. All of these suggestions are drawn from ways that my own teaching practice has begun to be influenced by the experience of undertaking this study, and are offered as pointers to potentially fruitful future lines of practical classroom experimentation and inquiry.

In terms of photography criticism, the study has developed a new, self-reflexive, postcritical approach, not generally used at present (Section 2.3 B), which appears able to deliver substantial advances of understanding about photographs, photography, ourselves and the world. The clear implication is that professional and academic critical practice could benefit from more widespread use of the approach. An effective self-reflexive protocol has been introduced that practitioners can use or adapt for their own needs. Currently, the culture of the discipline does not expect self-reflexivity (Section 2.3 A), and the approach is likely to encounter resistance (Conclusion 13). Part of my own future role as a researcher and practitioner will be to continue to explore and model self-reflexivity, as discussed in Section 6.4, and raise awareness of its rationale and value for visual culture through further publications and other forms of dissemination. If, initially, a handful of other practitioners can be persuaded to trial self-reflexivity in their own practice, the approach could, I hope, take hold in the discipline and spread from there.

The study has similar implications for professional and academic criticism in cognate disciplines. All cultural practices are saturated with ideology and implicit values (Hall 1993; Hall, Evans and Nixon 2013) to which the critic must respond from their own perspective (Section 2.3 A). Just as self-reflexivity provides a mechanism for revealing the personal underpinnings of perspective in relation to photography, leading to enriched interpretations, advances in understanding, and growth, it seems likely it would operate in a similar way with other cultural forms. This work has already begun in some fields (Section 2.3 B). Felski's pioneering work (2015, 2020) in postcritical literary theory, in particular, seems closely attuned to the ethos of this study. Wilson (2014), moreover, provides an exemplary demonstration of critically self-reflexive pop music criticism, which parallels this study's findings by leading to a transformed understanding of his topic, himself, and his relation to

the world. A self-reflexive interest in the personal and affective basis of meaning is still emerging in critical disciplines, but it is gathering momentum, and this study should, I hope, give it a further boost.

The study has important implications, also, for qualitative and interpretive research in the humanities, social sciences and other fields, carried out in education settings or beyond, which follow from its original findings about the capacity of critical self-reflection to transform and enrich *interpretations*, and produce growth, when used as part of a self-reflexive framework (Conclusions 3–6). A culture of unreflexive 'detachment' still pervades much humanities and social science interpretive practice (Felski 2015, Bochner and Ellis 2016; see Section 2.3 A). The study's findings about self-reflection's interpretive potency, and its capacity to generate growth, suggest that the model of self-reflexivity trialled here as a slow, ruminative, self-critical interpretive practice alert to feelings and the influences of life history could, in theory, deliver substantial research and learning benefits within all interpretive disciplines where self-reflexivity is currently under-employed, as well as leading to personal growth, in line with the ideals of the existentialist trend in the philosophy of education (eg, Freire 1970, White 2006, Pring 2015; Sections 2.4 A and D). The potential adaptability of the protocol to other disciplines was outlined above. Further research into self-reflexivity's potential as a learning and growth mechanism in other fields would, of course, be necessary. A strong implication of the study, however, is that such research would be desirable and has a good chance of success.

The study's implications for education, criticism and research do not come without a level of risk. As one of the participants (Tom) pointed out, addressing texts in terms of 'what does it mean to me?' carries a risk of disengagement if a learner or practitioner judged a text to be irrelevant to their personal circumstances and interests. In addition, self-reflexivity could be misconstrued as an invitation to focus primarily on oneself rather than the text, leading to an excess of subjectivity which is the hallmark of naive writing (Williams 2014) – an unintended consequence that I have occasionally witnessed in my own classrooms. In education, the teaching of self-reflexivity needs careful handling, as well as enough learning time – underlined by the study's findings about the value of slow research (Sections 4.3 F and 5.3 F) – to allow learners to develop sufficiently self-disciplined and self-critical habits for learning to occur. The self-aware but outward-looking process embodied in the protocol of focusing first on the text and its contexts, before engaging in critical self-reflection and then returning to the text at the end (Section 3.2 C), would seem a crucial type of control in the classroom if self-reflexivity is to deliver effective learning and growth.

The educational opportunities offered by self-reflexivity, however, greatly outweigh the risks. As Illeris has written (2007: 74), there is an 'increasingly urgent' need for self-reflexivity in education to produce the self-knowledge and self-efficacy required to negotiate the uncertainties of contemporary life (Section 2.4 D). Echoing Illeris, another of the study's participants (David) commented that the capacity to engage in critical self-reflection is 'fundamental' to becoming a 'more developed, wiser citizen … better able to contribute to the world' (Section 5.2 D). The study's revelations that self-reflexivity appears able to foster not only enhanced understandings of the world and ourselves, but also greater empathy and understanding of others, seem to imply that the practice might indeed offer a way of thinking and being in the world that is conducive to richer personal lives and a more tolerant, inclusive and harmonious social realm.

[Word count: 55,480]

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Appendix I. Themes and Sub-themes produced by Analysis

A full list of the themes and sub-themes identified through data analysis, as discussed in Section 3.3, is given below. Connections are made between each theme and the relevant section(s) of the Literature Review at which the key thematic idea is contextualised.

Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context

1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture

Theme 1 captures ways in which self-reflexivity produced gains in metacognitive understanding by revealing links between thinking, feeling, personal life history, worldview and emotional viewing context (or 'haecceity'), in line with the framework of the self-reflexive analytic protocol (Section 3.2 C). It indicates the extent to which thinking and feeling responses were often entangled, and how emotions could serve as metacognitive pathways to a better understanding of the basis of our thinking. This theme connects to the literature discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3.

Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think

2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world

Theme 2 collects responses suggesting that critical self-reflection had the effect of transforming interpretations or conclusions about the photograph(s) under review, ourselves or the world, through the fault-finding premise reflection and 'stop and think' processes discussed in Section 2.4 A.

Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights

3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/ myself/the world
3C. Thinking about my values/beliefs enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/ the world
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world

Theme 3 collates evidence indicating that self-reflection on feeling, life history, worldview and emotional viewing context was able to not just *explain* thinking (as demonstrated in Theme 1) but also *enrich and extend* thinking, through the activation of tacit knowledge, as discussed in Section 2.4 B.

Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography

4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value

4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences

Theme 4 captures responses that seemed to provide evidence for self-reflexivity's capacity to serve as a pathway to a threshold concept in photography criticism, in terms of the transformative, integrative but sometimes troublesome qualities of threshold concepts, as discussed in Section 2.4 C.

Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth

5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better
5D. I might/will change my critical practice

Theme 5 addresses self-reflexivity's potential for producing personal or existential growth, capturing evidence in the data for unexpected clarifications about ourselves/our relation to the world, greater metacognitive awareness of the structures underpinning our thinking, and signs of positive motivation to make changes in life generally or in critical practice, as discussed in Section 2.4 D.

Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons

6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel

Theme 6 captures additional patterns of response that offered general evidence for the value of self-reflexivity as a research methodology for critics/researchers. It included commentary

on self-reflexivity as a practice of slow research, and on its value for increasing affective response and authenticity. It incorporated participants' reflections on self-reflexivity as an innovative practice; but also included comments pointing to the difficulties of self-reflexive research.

Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/listeners

7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer
7D. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the author
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position

Theme 7 describes a variety of ways in which self-reflexivity was found to produce forms of learning for participants acting as audiences of criticism. These included: increases in explanatory clarity; heightened engagement/interest as a result of illuminating detail or moments of 'me-too' resonance; enhanced self-knowledge; increased empathy for the author; and greater tolerance for alternative points of view, as discussed in Section 2.4 E.

Appendix II. Thematic Analyses from Research Stage One

Thematic analyses of my responses and reflections on Figures 1–4 from Stage One of the research (Chapter Four) are presented below in Tables 1–4, with the number and distribution of extracts relating to each theme and sub-theme mapped against the point in the self-reflexive analytical protocol at which they were generated.

Analyses of each of the six themes follow in Tables 5–10, in which the number and distribution of extracts relating to each theme and sub-theme are mapped to the photographs against which they were generated.

Key to the abbreviations in the column headings in Tables 1–4:

Crit:	Initial critical interpretation (protocol Step 3)
Emot:	Emotional response (protocol Step 4)
Mem:	Reflexive analysis I: memory and life experience (protocol Step 5)
V/B:	Reflexive analysis II: values and beliefs (protocol Step 6)
Ctxt:	Reflexive analysis III: circumstances of viewing (protocol Step 7)
Refl:	General reflections (protocol Step 8)

Thomas Joshua Cooper: *An Indication, Ritual Ground, Ledlewen, Old Stirlingshire, Scotland, 1988*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context							
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions		x	xx				3
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values			xx				2
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture	x		xx				3
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture			xxx				3
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture				x			1
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture							
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture	x				x		2
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture					x		1
Total Theme 1	**2**	**1**	**9**	**1**	**2**		**15**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think							
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture							
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world							
Total Theme 2							**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights							
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world			x			xx	3
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world					x	x	2
Total Theme 3			**1**		**1**	**3**	**5**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography							
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography			x			xxxx	5
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value							
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences			x				1
Total Theme 4			**2**			**4**	**6**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth							
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world			x	x	x	xx	5
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been							
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better							
5D. I might/will change my critical practice							
Total Theme 5			**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**5**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons							
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights		x	x			xx	4
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it						xx	2
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult						xx	2
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be							
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel							
Total Theme 6		**1**	**1**			**6**	**8**
TOTALS	**2**	**2**	**14**	**2**	**4**	**15**	**39**

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Responses to Figure 1: An Indication, Ritual Ground, Ledlewen, Old Stirlingshire, Scotland, 1988

Joel Sternfeld: *Canyon Country, California, June 1983*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context							
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions			xx				2
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values			xx				2
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			x			x	2
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture			x				1
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture			Y	x		Y	3
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture			x				1
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture					x		1
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture					x		1
Total Theme 1			**8**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**13**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think							
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture		x			x	xx	4
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world						x	1
Total Theme 2		**1**			**1**	**3**	**5**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights							
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world			Y			x	2
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world			x			x	2
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
Total Theme 3			**2**			**2**	**4**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography							
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography						xx	2
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value							
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences							
Total Theme 4						**2**	**2**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth							
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world						xx	2
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been						x	1
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better							
5D. I might/will change my critical practice							
Total Theme 5						**3**	**3**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons							
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights						x	1
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it						xx	2
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult						x	1
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be							
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel							
Total Theme 6						**4**	**4**
TOTALS		**1**	**10**	**1**	**3**	**16**	**31**

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of Responses to Figure 2: Canyon Country, California, June 1983

Horáková + Maurer: *TPX-Index 13/ng40 Nordwand/1996-11-02*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context							
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions		xx					2
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values		x					1
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			xx				2
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture			x				1
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture			x	xx			3
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture		x	x	xx			4
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture					xx		2
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture							
Total Theme 1		**4**	**5**	**4**	**2**		**15**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think							
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture							
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world							
Total Theme 2							**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights							
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world		x					1
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
Total Theme 3		**1**					**1**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography							
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography							
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value						x	1
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences							
Total Theme 4						**1**	**1**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth							
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world							
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been		x	xx				3
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better							
5D. I might/will change my critical practice							
Total Theme 5		**1**	**2**				**3**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons							
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights		x					1
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it							
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult						xx	2
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be							
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel							
Total Theme 6		**1**				**2**	**2**
TOTALS		**7**	**7**	**4**	**2**	**3**	**23**

Table 3. Thematic Analysis of Responses to Figure 3: TPX-Index 13/ng40 Nordwand/1996-11-02

Roman Vishniac: *Interior of the Anhalter Bahnhof, 1929–30*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context							
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions		xx	xx	x			5
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values		x					1
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture		x	xxx				4
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture		x	xx				3
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture				xx			2
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture				xx			2
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture					x		1
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture					xx		2
Total Theme 1		**5**	**7**	**5**	**3**		**20**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think							
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture							
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world							
Total Theme 2							**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights							
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world		x	x				2
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world					x	x	2
Total Theme 3		**1**	**1**		**1**	**1**	**4**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography							
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography						x	1
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value							
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences							
Total Theme 4						**1**	**1**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth							
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world			x				1
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been						x	1
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better							
5D. I might/will change my critical practice							
Total Theme 5			**1**			**1**	**2**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons							
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights		x				x	2
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it			x				1
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult							
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be							
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel							
Total Theme 6		**1**	**1**			**1**	**3**
TOTALS		**7**	**10**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**30**

Table 4. Thematic Analysis of Responses to Figure 4: Interior of the Anhalter Bahnhof, 1929–30

Theme 1. My interp. & emot. response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context	TJ Cooper	J Sternfield	H + Maurer	R Vishniac	Total	Affected
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions	3	2	2	5	12	4/4
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values	2	2	1	1	6	4/4
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture	3	2	2	4	11	4/4
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture	3	1	1	3	8	4/4
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture	1	3	3	2	9	4/4
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture		1	4	2	7	3/4
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture	2	1	2	1	6	4/4
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture	1	1		2	4	4/4
TOTALS	**15**	**13**	**15**	**20**	**63**	

Table 5. Distribution analysis of Theme 1 by photograph

Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think	TJ Cooper	J Sternfield	H + Maurer	R Vishniac	Total	Affected
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture		4			4	1/4
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world		1			1	1/4
TOTALS	**0**	**5**	**0**	**0**	**5**	

Table 6. Distribution analysis of Theme 2 by photograph

Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights	TJ Cooper	J Sternfield	H + Maurer	R Vishniac	Total	Affected
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world		2	1		3	2/4
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world	3	2		2	7	3/4
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world						0/4
3D. Thinking about my emot. viewing context enriches what I now think about this pic./myself/the world	2			2	4	2/4
TOTALS	**5**	**4**	**1**	**4**	**14**	

Table 7. Distribution analysis of Theme 3 by photograph

Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography	TJ Cooper	J Sternfield	H + Maurer	R Vishniac	Total	Affected
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography	5	2		1	8	3/4
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value			1		1	1/4
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique pers. experiences	1				1	1/4
TOTALS	**6**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**10**	

Table 8. Distribution analysis of Theme 4 by photograph

Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth	TJ Cooper	J Sternfield	H + Maurer	R Vishniac	Total	Affected
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world	5	2		1	8	3/4
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been		1	3	1	5	3/4
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better						0/4
5D. I might/will change my critical practice						0/4
TOTALS	**5**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**13**	

Table 9. Distribution analysis of Theme 5 by photograph

Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons	TJ Cooper	J Sternfield	H + Maurer	R Vishniac	Total	Affected
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights	4	1	1	2	8	4/4
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it	2	2		1	5	3/4
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult	2	1	2		5	3/4
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be						0/4
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel						0/4
TOTALS	**8**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**18**	

Table 10. Distribution analysis of Theme 6 by photograph

Appendix III. Thematic Analyses from Research Stage Two

Thematic analyses of each participant's response and reflections on Figure 5 from Stage Two of the research (Chapter Five) are presented below in Tables 11–19, with the number and distribution of extracts relating to each theme and sub-theme mapped to the point in the research at which they were generated – the steps of the protocol, the circle event, or the interview.

Analyses of each of the seven themes follow in Tables 20–26, in which the number and distribution of extracts relating to each theme and sub-theme are mapped to the participants who generated them.

Key to the abbreviations in the column headings in Tables 11–19:

Crit:	Initial critical interpretation (protocol Step 3)
Emot:	Emotional response (protocol Step 4)
Mem:	Reflexive analysis I: memory and life experience (protocol Step 5)
V/B:	Reflexive analysis II: values and beliefs (protocol Step 6)
Ctxt:	Reflexive analysis III: circumstances of viewing (protocol Step 7)
Refl:	General reflections (protocol Step 8)
Reint:	Reflexive re-interpretation (protocol Step 9)
Circle:	Circle of voices
Intvw:	Interview

My response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: *The Long Wait, 2005–2006*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Reint.**	**Circle**	**Intvw**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions			x							1
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values										
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			x							1
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture			xxx							3
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture				xx						2
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture										
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture					x					1
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture					x					1
Total Theme 1			**5**	**2**	**2**					**9**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture							x			1
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world									x	1
Total Theme 2							**1**		**1**	**2**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world			x							1
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world						x			x	2
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world					x					1
Total Theme 3			**1**		**1**	**1**			**1**	**4**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography			x							1
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value										
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences										
Total Theme 4			**1**							**1**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world				x						1
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been				x			x		x	3
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better										
5D. I might/will change my critical practice									x	1
Total Theme 5				**2**			**1**		**2**	**5**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights						x	x			2
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it			x			x			x	3
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult										
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be										
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel										
Total Theme 6			**1**			**2**	**1**		**1**	**5**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from									x	1
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights										
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights									xx	2
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer									x	1
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer									x	1
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position									x	1
Total Theme 7									**6**	**6**
TOTALS			**8**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**3**		**11**	**32**

Table 11. Thematic analysis of my response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

Alison's response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: *The Long Wait, 2005–2006*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Reint.**	**Circle**	**Intvw**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions	x	x	x					x		4
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values			x						xx	3
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			x							1
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture			x					xx		3
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture									x	1
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture										
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture								x		1
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture		x								1
Total Theme 1	**1**	**2**	**4**					**4**	**3**	**14**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture										
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world										
Total Theme 2										**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world								x		1
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world								x		1
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world					x					1
Total Theme 3					**1**			**2**		**3**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography								x	x	2
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value										
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences										
Total Theme 4								**1**	**1**	**2**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world						x				1
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been			x							1
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better										
5D. I might/will change my critical practice										
Total Theme 5			**1**			**1**				**2**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights										
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it						x			x	2
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult	x		x					x		3
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be									xx	2
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel			x						x	2
Total Theme 6	**1**		**2**			**1**		**1**	**4**	**9**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from										
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights								x		1
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights									x	1
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer										
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer										
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position										
Total Theme 7								**1**	**1**	**2**
TOTALS	**2**	**2**	**7**		**1**	**2**		**9**	**9**	**32**

Table 12. Thematic analysis of Alison's response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

Catherine's response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: ***The Long Wait, 2005–2006***	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Reint.**	**Circle**	**Intvw**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions	x	x								2
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values		x				x				2
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			x						xx	3
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture		x					x	xx		4
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture										
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture										
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture			xx		x			x		4
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture							x	x		2
Total Theme 1	**1**	**3**	**3**		**1**	**1**	**2**	**4**	**2**	**17**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture										
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world										
Total Theme 2										**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world							x			1
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world								xx		2
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
Total Theme 3							**1**	**2**		**3**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography									x	1
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value										
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences						x			x	2
Total Theme 4						**1**			**2**	**3**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world										
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been						x			x	2
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better									xx	2
5D. I might/will change my critical practice										
Total Theme 5						**1**			**3**	**4**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights									x	1
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it							x	x		2
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult										
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be									xxxxx	5
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel									xx	2
Total Theme 6							**1**	**1**	**8**	**10**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from										
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights									xx	2
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights								x		1
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer										
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer									xx	2
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position									x	1
Total Theme 7								**1**	**5**	**6**
TOTALS	**1**	**3**	**3**		**1**	**3**	**4**	**8**	**20**	**43**

Table 13. Thematic analysis of Catherine's response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

David's response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: ***The Long Wait, 2005–2006***	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Reint.**	**Circle**	**Intvw**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions						x		x		2
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values										
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture						x		x		2
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture						x		x		2
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture				xx				x		3
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture										
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture										
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture										
Total Theme 1				**2**		**3**		**4**		**9**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture										
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world										
Total Theme 2										**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world			x	x		x			x	4
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world						x				1
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
Total Theme 3			**1**	**1**		**2**			**1**	**5**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography							x	xx	x	4
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value										
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences										
Total Theme 4							**1**	**2**	**1**	**4**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world										
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been							x	x		2
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better								x		1
5D. I might/will change my critical practice										
Total Theme 5							**1**	**2**		**3**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights						x		x		2
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it						x		x	xx	4
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult								xx	x	3
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be								x	x	2
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel										
Total Theme 6						**2**		**5**	**4**	**11**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from										
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights								x	x	2
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights										
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer										
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer										
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position										
Total Theme 7								**1**	**1**	**2**
TOTALS			**1**	**3**		**7**	**2**	**14**	**7**	**34**

Table 14. Thematic analysis of David's response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

Gerry's response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: *The Long Wait, 2005–2006*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Reint.**	**Circle**	**Intvw**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions		x								1
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values			x							1
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			xx					x		3
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture			x							1
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture			x	x						2
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture										
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture										
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture										
Total Theme 1		**1**	**5**	**1**				**1**		**8**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture										
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world										
Total Theme 2										**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world		x				x				2
Total Theme 3		**1**				**1**				**2**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography									xx	2
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value										
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences								x		1
Total Theme 4								**1**	**2**	**3**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world										
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been									xx	2
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better										
5D. I might/will change my critical practice										
Total Theme 5									**2**	**2**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights										
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it				x						1
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult										
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be						x		xx	x	4
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel								x	x	2
Total Theme 6				**1**		**1**		**3**	**2**	**7**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from										
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights									xx	2
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights										
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer										
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer									x	1
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position										
Total Theme 7									**3**	**3**
TOTALS		**2**	**5**	**2**		**2**		**5**	**9**	**25**

Table 15. Thematic analysis of Gerry's response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

Jan's response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: *The Long Wait, 2005–2006*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Reint.**	**Circle**	**Intvw**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions		x						xx		3
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values		x								1
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			x							1
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture									x	1
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture		x		x				x		3
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture		x						x		2
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture		x			x					2
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture					x					1
Total Theme 1		**5**	**1**	**1**	**2**			**4**	**1**	**14**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture										
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world										
Total Theme 2										**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world									x	1
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
Total Theme 3										**1**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography										
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value										
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences										
Total Theme 4										**0**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world										
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been							x		x	2
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better										
5D. I might/will change my critical practice										
Total Theme 5							**1**		**1**	**2**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights										
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it									x	1
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult										
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be									x	1
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel										
Total Theme 6									**2**	**2**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from										
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights										
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights								x	x	2
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer								x		1
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer									x	1
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position										
Total Theme 7								**2**	**2**	**4**
TOTALS		**5**	**1**	**1**	**2**		**1**	**6**	**7**	**23**

Table 16. Thematic analysis of Jan's response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

Marion's response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: *The Long Wait, 2005–2006*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Reint.**	**Circle**	**Intvw**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions		x						xx		3
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values										
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			xx	x		x		xx		6
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture			x			x		xx		4
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture				x				x		2
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture										
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture										
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture										
Total Theme 1		**1**	**3**	**2**		**2**		**7**		**15**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture										
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world										
Total Theme 2										**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world								x	x	2
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
Total Theme 3								**1**	**1**	**2**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography										
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value										
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences										
Total Theme 4										**0**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world										
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been										
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better										
5D. I might/will change my critical practice										
Total Theme 5										**0**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights										
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it						x		x		2
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult										
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be										
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel										
Total Theme 6						**1**		**1**		**2**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from										
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights								xx		2
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights								x	x	2
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer										
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer									x	1
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position										
Total Theme 7								**3**	**2**	**5**
TOTALS		**1**	**3**	**2**		**3**		**12**	**3**	**24**

Table 17. Thematic analysis of Marion's response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

Sofia's response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: *The Long Wait, 2005–2006*	**Crit.**	**Emot.**	**Mem.**	**V/B.**	**Ctxt.**	**Refl.**	**Reint.**	**Circle**	**Intvw**	**Total**
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions		x						x		2
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values			x					x		2
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture			x					x	x	3
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture			x						x	2
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture										
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture										
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture					x			x		2
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture					x			x		2
Total Theme 1		**1**	**3**		**2**			**5**	**2**	**13**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture										
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world										
Total Theme 2										**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
Total Theme 3										**0**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography										
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value										
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences										
Total Theme 4										**0**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world									x	1
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been										
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better										
5D. I might/will change my critical practice										
Total Theme 5									**1**	**1**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights										
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it										
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult								xx		2
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be										
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel										
Total Theme 6								**2**		**2**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from									xx	2
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights										
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights								x		1
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer										
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer									x	1
7F. I don't agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer's position										
Total Theme 7									**3**	**4**
TOTALS		**1**	**3**		**2**			**8**	**6**	**20**

Table 18. Thematic analysis of Sofia's response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

Tom’s response/reflections: Mitra Tabrizian: *The Long Wait, 2005–2006*	Crit.	Emot.	Mem.	V/B.	Ctxt.	Refl.	Reint.	Circle	Intvw	Total
Theme 1. My interpretation and emotional response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context										
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions									x	1
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values										
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture								x	x	2
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture									x	1
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture				x						1
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture										
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture										
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture										
Total Theme 1				**1**				**1**	**3**	**5**
Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think										
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture										
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world										
Total Theme 2										**0**
Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights										
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world									x	1
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
3D. Thinking about my emotional viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world										
Total Theme 3									**1**	**1**
Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography										
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography										
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value									x	1
4C. Yes, now I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences									xx	2
Total Theme 4									**3**	**3**
Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth										
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world										
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been									x	1
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better										
5D. I might/will change my critical practice									xx	2
Total Theme 5									**3**	**3**
Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons										
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights										
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it									x	1
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult								x	x	2
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be									xx	2
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel										
Total Theme 6								**1**	**4**	**5**
Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences										
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from										
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights										
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights								x		1
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer										
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer										
7F. I don’t agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer’s position										
Total Theme 7								**1**		**1**
TOTALS				**1**				**3**	**14**	**18**

Table 19. Thematic analysis of Tom’s response/reflections on Figure 5: The Long Wait, 2005–06

Theme 1. My interp. & emot. response can be linked to life history, worldview or viewing context	**Simon**	**Alison**	**Cath.**	**David**	**Gerry**	**Jan**	**Marion**	**Sofia**	**Tom**	**Total**	**Affected**
1A. My critical response is entangled with my feelings/emotions	1	4	2	2	1	3	3	2	1	19	9/9
1B. Thinking about my emotions puts me in touch with pertinent past experiences/values		3	2		1	1		2		9	5/9
1C. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I think about this picture	1	1	3	2	3	1	6	3	2	22	9/9
1D. Thinking about my past experiences helps explain what I feel about this picture	3	3	4	2	1	1	4	2	1	21	9/9
1E. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I think about this picture	2	1		3	2	3	2		1	14	7/9
1F. Thinking about my values/beliefs helps explain what I feel about this picture						2				2	1/9
1G. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I think about this picture	1	1	4			2		2		10	5/9
1H. Thinking about my emotional viewing context helps explain what I feel about this picture	1	1	2			1		2		7	5/9
TOTALS	**9**	**14**	**17**	**9**	**8**	**14**	**15**	**13**	**5**	**104**	

Table 20. Distribution analysis of Theme 1 by participant

Theme 2. Reflecting on my assumptions has changed what I think	**Simon**	**Alison**	**Cath.**	**David**	**Gerry**	**Jan**	**Marion**	**Sofia**	**Tom**	**Total**	**Affected**
2A. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about the picture	1									1	1/9
2B. Reflecting on my assumptions, I have changed my mind about myself/the world	1									1	1/9
TOTALS	**2**									**2**	

Table 21. Distribution analysis of Theme 2 by participant

Theme 3. Reflecting on my stored experience/values/emotions has produced new insights	**Simon**	**Alison**	**Cath.**	**David**	**Gerry**	**Jan**	**Marion**	**Sofia**	**Tom**	**Total**	**Affected**
3A. Thinking about my emotions enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world	1	1	1			1				4	4/9
3B. Thinking about my past experiences enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world	2	1	2	4			2		1	11	6/9
3C. Thinking about my values enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world				1						1	1/9
3D. Thinking about my viewing context enriches what I now think about this picture/myself/the world	1	1			2					4	3/9
TOTALS	**4**	**3**	**3**	**4**	**2**	**1**	**2**		**1**	**20**	

Table 22. Distribution analysis of Theme 3 by participant

Theme 4. Self-reflexivity is a threshold to an enriched way of thinking about photography	**Simon**	**Alison**	**Cath.**	**David**	**Gerry**	**Jan**	**Marion**	**Sofia**	**Tom**	**Total**	**Affected**
4A. I see now that self-reflexivity opens up a new and richer way of thinking about photography	1	2	1	4	2					10	5/9
4B. I found self-reflexivity hard … but now I see it has value									1	1	1/9
4C. Yes, I see how my perspective and assumptions are influenced by my unique personal experiences			2		1				2	5	3/9
TOTALS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**3**				**3**	**16**	

Table 23. Distribution analysis of Theme 4 by participant

Theme 5. Self-reflexivity produces personal growth	**Simon**	**Alison**	**Cath.**	**David**	**Gerry**	**Jan**	**Marion**	**Sofia**	**Tom**	**Total**	**Affected**
5A. I understand myself better, and my relation to the world	1	1						1		3	3/9
5B. I understand my thinking process better, what my assumptions have been	3	1	2	2	2	2			1	13	7/9
5C. I could/will do things differently in life, make things better			2	1						3	2/9
5D. I might/will change my critical practice	1								2	3	2/9
TOTALS	**5**	**2**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**2**		**1**	**3**	**22**	

Table 24. Distribution analysis of Theme 5 by participant

Theme 6. Self-reflexivity is valuable/appropriate in photography criticism, for other reasons	Simon	Alison	Cath.	David	Gerry	Jan	Marion	Sofia	Tom	Total	Affected
6A. Self-reflexivity encourages slow thinking, which produces new insights	2		1	2						5	3/9
6B. Self-reflexivity brings me closer to the image, increases my feelings about it	3	2	2	4	1	1	2		1	16	8/9
6C. Self-reflexivity is hard work, is difficult		3		3				2	2	10	4/9
6D. Self-reflexivity is not normally included in criticism, but should be		2	5	2	4	1			2	16	6/9
6E. Self-reflexivity creates honest/authentic criticism, it reveals what writers really think and feel		2	2		2					6	3/9
TOTALS	**5**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**7**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**5**	**53**	

Table 25. Distribution analysis of Theme 6 by participant

Theme 7. Self-reflexivity has learning value for readers/audiences	Simon	Alison	Cath.	David	Gerry	Jan	Marion	Sofia	Tom	Total	Affected
7A. I now understand why the writer thinks as they do, where they are coming from	1							2		3	2/9
7B. I am fascinated by this reflexive story, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights		2	2	2	2		2			10	5/9
7C. This resonates with me personally, it increases my interest in the image/produces insights	2		1			2	2	1	1	9	6/9
7D. This helps me see who I am, how I am similar to/different from the writer	1					1				2	2/9
7E. I feel empathy, an emotional connection to you/the writer	1		2		1	1	1	1		7	6/9
7F. I don’t agree but I can now understand/tolerate the writer’s position	1		1							2	2/9
TOTALS	**6**	**2**	**6**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**4**	**1**	**33**	

Table 26. Distribution analysis of Theme 7 by participant

Appendix IV. Reflexive Interpretation Template

Please use this form to help you undertake your reflexive interpretation of the photograph examined in this study. Feel free to write as much or as little as you like in response to the questions. The prompts are offered as guidance only. Thank you very much for taking part in this research project.

The photograph: (Title, photographer and date to be supplied, following agreement by participants)

Mitra Tabrizian, The Long Wait, from *Border*, 2005–06.

Outline background/context: (Details to be supplied by researcher)

Mitra Tabrizian was born and brought up in Iran, but moved to Britain in 1977, shortly before the Iranian Revolution, coming alone as a teenager. She has studied, lived and worked as a photographer and film-maker in London since then and is currently a professor of photography at the University of Westminster. Her work, frequently staged and artificially lit, has addressed a range of politically charged issues including gender, race, corporate culture and immigration. For examples of her projects and films, including other images from the *Border* series, as well as some texts, see: https://mitratabrizian.com/

Border (2005–06) addresses the subject of Iranians living in Britain, as émigrés, exiles or refugees, and their experience of displacement. Each image in the series is a staged portrait of a single (real) individual, enacting an aspect of their own lives. The caption accompanying 'The Long Wait' was supplied by the photographer, scanned here from an article in *Portfolio* magazine (No 44, December 2006). According to the 2011 UK census, 84,735 people born in Iran were living in the UK. Previous UK census figures were: 1981, 28,617; 2001, 42,494.

1. Intended meaning

What do you take to be the photographer's intention, or intended meaning? You might deduce this from the context (as supplied above), any other information you are aware of, or from the photograph's visual rhetoric

2. Initial critical interpretation

Before you start to think reflexively, what are your initial thoughts about this picture, its connotations, its implicit values? Do you find yourself 'with' the photograph or 'against' it?

3. Emotional response

What is your emotional, visceral, gut reaction to the photograph? How does it affect you?

4. Reflexivity: memory work

What events or experiences from your past, either distant or recent, help explain your critical and emotional response to this photograph?

5. Reflexivity: values and beliefs

Which of your personal attitudes, values and beliefs help explain your critical and emotional response to this photograph?

6. Reflexivity: circumstances of viewing

As you write these reflections, what are your general circumstances right now? How are you feeling, and how might that be influencing your response?

7. General reflections

Looking back over your reflections, which reflexive factors are most significant in influencing your response? Has reflexive analysis prompted you to rethink any of your prior assumptions?

8. Reflexive re-interpretation

Following reflexive self-analysis, do you see the photograph any differently?

Research use only:

Participant ID code: ………………….

Date of receipt: ……………………….

Appendix V. Diversity Questionnaire

Please complete this form if you are interested in taking part in this study. The form will be used to help us ensure that we have a diverse group of participants. The study seeks to explore the relationship between interpretation and positionality; and in order to generate rich and varied data, participants are sought who represent a diversity of positions and viewpoints. All positions and viewpoints will be treated with absolutely equal respect.

Your personal information will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be seen in its raw form only by the researcher. It will be used as part of the evidence studied by the project, and parts may be published in anonymised form in the thesis and subsequent publications. The raw data will be stored in an encrypted database and will be destroyed at the end of the research period. Thank you very much for your interest in this research project.

Your name:
Your job title and place of work:
Your email address and phone number:

In the questions that follow, please place a **X** against the answer that best describes you.

1. Age

Under 21
21–29
30–39
40–49
50–59
60 and above

Prefer not to say

2. Gender

Male Female Prefer not to say

Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

Yes No Prefer not to say

3. Nationality

Please state:

4. Ethnic Origin

(Ethnic origin questions are not about nationality, place of birth or citizenship. They are about colour and broad ethnic and cultural groups. Please tick the category that you feel best reflects your ethnic origin.)

Asian
Asian – Indian
Asian – Pakistani
Asian – Bangladeshi
Other Asian Background

Black or Black British
Black – Caribbean
Black – African
Other Black Background

Chinese or other ethnic group
Chinese
Other Ethnic Background

Mixed Heritage
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Other Mixed Background

White
White British
White English
White Scottish
White Welsh
White Irish
White Continental European
White N American
Other White Background

Prefer not to say

5. What do you regard as your class background?

Working class
Lower middle class
Middle class
Upper middle class
Upper class

Prefer not to say

6. How would you describe your political position?

Left
Centre-left
Centre
Centre-right
Right
Complex mix of the above

Prefer not to say

7. What is your sexual orientation?

Bisexual
Gay
Lesbian
Heterosexual

Prefer not to say

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Research use only:

Participant ID code: ………………….

Date of receipt: ……………………….