180 degrees: an extension of self in photography

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180 DEGREES
AN EXTENSION OF SELF IN PHOTOGRAPHY

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfillment of the
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in

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By
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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

180 Degrees is a conceptual body of digital photography and video that deals with self-portraiture, identity and change. Intended to serve as a form of therapy, the work analyzes who I have become over the last couple of years by illustrating issues of compulsion, obsession and insecurity. The investigation confronts unexpected and unsettling attributes of my character. Some of it is a little uncomfortable for me to reveal but if nothing else it is the truth.
180 Degrees

180 Degrees is a body of work that deals with identity and change. In almost every sense of the word the work represents a fundamental shift from my typical approach to photography. In terms of media, content, motivation, influence and aesthetic, my priorities and intentions have evolved. 180 Degrees analyzes my routines, habits and perceptions. Times past are reflected upon and memorialized. Image and identity are called into question; neuroses, insecurities and imperfections are put on the table for examination. Opinions are shared and supported. Self-expectations are illustrated and however uncomfortable, unfair or distorted, are open for observation.

A new and different person has evolved within my skin and in many ways it is not the man I envisioned. A sense of distortion has overcome my convictions and tarnishes the way I see myself. The signs of age have come early to me. A regimented diet with little variation and a regular exercise routine have not prevented an extending belly and softer body from developing which pierces my deepest fear, that of returning to obesity. I smoke in excess and instantly regret such faults. I never sleep well. I have become compulsive and subject to routine. It has become very difficult for me to make art and even more difficult to come to terms with my problems. My hope is that by addressing these issues in 180 Degrees I will be able to come to terms with my qualms and overcome them. Also, hope is in place for a degree of self-discovery and release from the sometimes ridiculous expectations I have of myself. These walls are a confession, an intervention and perhaps most importantly, my therapy.

During this time I have questioned my place in photography. I have questioned the process and the expressive possibilities of the medium; I have even questioned the worth of my artistic motivations. Indeed it has been a time of reckoning and a time of struggle. Through the struggle my energy has remained focused on the answers to such questions, trying to crack the equation and regain my artistic identity. To create work that reflects these new interests, I felt the need to employ a new approach and digital production proved the obvious choice. Taking an objective and somewhat detached stance in terms of imagery, the photography is controlled, contrived and, for the most part, eliminates traditional photographic process and presentation. Digital video is used to address the viewer more directly through sound, text, time and movement. As a whole 180 Degrees relies on time, movement, collage, repetition, obsession and compulsion to communicate. A breakdown of the individual pieces follows.

180 Degrees: The Photographs

Sick (fig. 1-6) addresses my continuing struggle with cigarette addiction. For almost ten years I have been an on-again off-again smoker, never really considering myself addicted. However in the last year or so my classification as a smoker has been more difficult to define. I find myself smoking more and having less control over the urge. Some days I wake up coughing, always tired and with heavy eyes. I know the dangers of smoking and even as I engage in the activity, I consciously realize the damage I am doing. Smoking is always about that cigarette and that moment. Rarely do I consider
the buildup of addiction, unless a sore throat or smelly fingers become too strong to bear. *Sick* consists of 192 stark and unforgiving depictions of myself smoking and questions my habit by illustrating the mindless and excessive repetition of addiction.

The photographs form a sequence engaging the urge and repetition of smoking, the very quick and thoughtless process of filling an ashtray and the loss of control while doing so. Making these photographs was a painful experience. Dragging multiple cigarettes back to back as hard as I could to emphasize the smoke was nauseating and exhausting. The process dried my eyes out and made my lungs and throat sore and constricted. Amazingly, I continue to smoke.

**To Scale** (fig. 7, 8) examines my obsession with weight. As a child and teenager I was obese and suffered as a result. The endless insults and creative name-calling created a lack of confidence and insecurities about my self-image. At seventeen I worked very hard to lose sixty-five pounds. The loss resulted in both a physical and internal transformation; a new person was born. Confident and content, the work paid off and much of what I have accomplished as a young adult would not have been possible otherwise. Recently, new fears and insecurities have replaced my weight problem, namely the obsession of maintaining my weight. I weigh myself at least four times a day and the difference of three or four pounds can dictate the tone of my activities. In the almost ten years that have passed since the loss my weight has fluctuated in no more than seven pounds in either direction of 160. Nevertheless every morning, noon and night I step on the scale to monitor my obsession. My friends call it a “fat-kid syndrome.” I call it necessary.

Living financially strapped and by myself has put certain limitations on the food I eat. As a vegetarian and healthy eater I find it complicated to subsist in Louisiana, a culture steeped in meat, seafood and anything fried. Vegetarians are exceedingly rare and the concept is generally looked at with distrust, at least it seems that way from my experience. Choices are limited when eating out and more than a few of the items sold as vegetarian simply are not. The major grocery stores lack a selection of vegetarian goods and specialty stores are beyond my financial capabilities. Consequently I have devised and lived by a limited diet with little variation made up of primarily two meals and a few accessories. Such repetition renders even the most tasteful meals bland and insignificant and replaces satisfaction with sustenance. The countless times I sit eating predictably the same meal while alone has given me time to consider just how monotonous my diet really is. Produced loosely in the vein of product photography the images in *Food* (fig. 9, 10) are what I eat.

**Scars** (fig. 11, 12) approaches the idea of self less directly. One morning I looked out my living room window to find a crew of men patching cracks in the street with a wand that paints tar. The process was quick and mindless, a temporary solution that addresses the symptom of the problem and not the source, a strategy employed in my own life all too often. Yet as the men brushed strokes of tar over the cracks I noticed a very painterly motion and thought of Robert Motherwell’s *Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 110* (8). The photography of Minor White also came to mind (11). The next day I set
out to photograph these scars and searched the street for compositions. While photographing I questioned the quality and permanence of the work and related it to the dealings of my life. In many ways I cover up my problems with quick fixes and surface-level solutions, leaving the heart of the issue to fester and grow.

The two pieces depicting haircuts are entitled **Hair 2001 (Becoming an American)** (fig. 13, 14) and **Hair 2004** (fig. 15, 16). **Hair 2001 (Becoming an American)** was made the day before I came to Baton Rouge for the first time. Arriving home from India only two weeks before with hair and a beard that had grown unencumbered for six or seven months, I felt it would be appropriate to cut it to create a good first impression. The series symbolizes a shedding of the life I left behind in preparation for a new life to come. The pace of graduate school relegated the idea until earlier this year, only months before I enter a similar phase in my life. Coincidentally, when I came across the negatives I had been growing my first beard since that shave in 2001. Now three years later it seemed appropriate to answer that set of negatives with a complement and so I did. Executed in black and white for cohesion with the original effort, **Hair 2004** depicts the shedding of a more conventional beard and shows the signs of age and experience. Together the pieces express the passing of time and the evolution of self.

180 Degrees: The Videos

Both **Sick** (fig. 17, 18) and **Relapse** (fig. 19) continue to address my addiction to cigarettes and are intended to compliment the photographic piece of the same nature. **Sick** addresses my addiction through text superimposed over stark images of myself engaging in it. One would think that witnessing your mother survive chemotherapy and seeing her sister succumb to it after a two-year battle would be enough to swear off cigarettes forever but my case proves otherwise. I have always considered myself stronger than addiction; now I find myself a slave to it. As the process embeds itself in my subconscious, the struggle intensifies. **Sick** identifies both the loss of control and the desire to regain it. **Relapse** very simply states the repeated failure of trying to quit and stresses the buildup of addiction.

**Killing Time** (fig. 20, 21) was made at a coffee shop I worked at for more than two years. While I had respect for my bosses, was paid well and performed my job dutifully, it became a nuisance and the repetition of my duties tested my patience. This frustration was compounded by the fact that I was a recent graduate struggling with the decision to go to India or maintain my savings and live comfortably and conventionally in the United States. In the coffee shop a struggle ensued. I spent most of my waking hours there, often without a customer for two or three hours. During these times a deafening silence rang out, forcing me to consider the options. The video is edited to create a slow and droning pace that reflects the course of a shift and the monotony of cleaning, waiting and reflecting. The lack of any customers emphasizes the isolation with an abundance of time to consider what else I might be doing. The continuous cleaning reflects my nature as somewhat compulsive but also as someone who prefers to stay
busy, even when the work is done. **Killing Time** questions duty and obligation, illustrates inertia and compulsion and maintains hope for a better chance.

**Saigon River** (fig. 22, 23) bears witness to a greater understanding of my father. In 1999 while living on a steamship being tugged up the Saigon River I watched the sunrise over the trees. Looking into the jungle I realized my father had come to Vietnam only a few years older than I was at the time, not as a tourist or on business, but as a soldier. This realization led me to consider his expectations and fears and compare them to my own. The difference was immense and I realized how grateful I was to have a father that could provide me the opportunity to explore and learn. I began to understand the sacrifices he made to put me in such a position and in an instant I realized the unconditional love I had for my father. Over the next thirty of forty minutes I wrote a short poem and filmed the passing landscape with my 16mm camera. It is a piece of work that has existed in my head for four years but it is only now that I have the resources to bring this epiphany to life.

An analysis of myself would be incomplete without commenting on current events. Considering myself informed and interested in world politics I find the recent positions of Unites States to be both menacing and frightening. We are a world at war and the situation is quickly becoming more polarized and dire. Amazingly, as America engages in aggressive and unilateral politics and news reports become more brutal and morbid, I find the general population becoming progressively more desensitized, apathetic and accepting. I see information becoming more filtered and controlled with less substance and content. The world is both fragile and volatile partly as a result of American arrogance and carelessness. Bombs do not solve differences. Unilateral governance bares isolation, not security. Military police breed fear, not obedience. And, in my opinion, the motivations behind American policy lie more in money and power than they do freedom. **Behind Every Decision** (fig. 24. 25) raises these points and more while illustrating the passive absorption of simplistic news and information.

During my time in Baton Rouge I have seen a great deal of things that unsettle me and have often felt unable to change what bothers me. I have seen a city that continues to sprawl away from poverty and color, a people prone to obesity and disease and a predilection to alcoholism and addiction. I have seen violence, depression and isolation, a fear to change, severe pollution that is overlooked or ignored by the general population and an all-conquering apathy that befuddles me. I have chosen the University Lakes to symbolize the conditions of sprawl, poverty, pollution, apathy, addiction, disease and depression and made a video of the same name.

Originally created to replace undeveloped swampland, the University Lakes in Baton Rouge came to represent progress and prosperity as Sorority Row and upscale houses were built along its shores (9). People swam, fished and boated in the man-made waters but as the lakes aged some problems began to develop. Due to runoff and pollution the lakes continually lose depth and periodically become overpopulated with fish. Oxygen shortages result causing putrid odors, algae and mass fish kills (2, 4, 7). Consequently the lakes have needed to be dredged three times, the last of which
happened in 1981-82 (3, 5, 6). Sewage lines running beneath the lakes are notorious for chronic seepage and overflow causing fecal coli form counts to run as high as ten times the allowable contamination (10, 12). As a result swimming was outlawed October 24, 1986 (1). Ironically, even in the face of such distinctions, the lakes remain a symbol of beauty, progress and prosperity, even to me, as I pass them in my car, on my bike or while jogging.

**University Lakes** (fig. 26-28) plays up the contrast of these interpretations and summarizes my experience in Baton Rouge. Often isolated and at odds with the landscape, subject to routine, struggling for and questioning direction, 1085 days of searching the waters have worn me down but made me wise. The walls that form my boundaries have provided an abundance of experience to draw from. I have submerged myself in the culture of south Louisiana, assimilated as much as possible and indulged in what has become home to me. A new perspective has been shaped by the lessons of the last three years. The experience has strengthened me and prepared me to move on. It is time to get out of the boat.

**Conclusion**

Supported by these words and artwork my hope is to obtain a better understanding of myself and to evolve into a more complete and stable person. 180 Degrees is a diagnosis of who I am and what I see. Made in support of and for myself I am unsure of how the work will be received in a gallery setting, where people will be permitted to look into a very personal side of my life. To tell the truth, I do not really care. But when I step around the walls that display my work, I intend to find the clarity and power to change and move forward, to become the man I envision. A man who is eager and attentive, proactive and productive, healthy and happy, free of cigarettes and weight obsession, secure, successful and content.
Bibliography


Illustrations

*Sick* (Pre-opening) (fig. 1)

*Sick*-Performance 1 (fig. 2)
Sick-Performance 2 (fig. 3)

Sick-Performance 3 (fig. 4)
Sick-Detail (fig. 5)

Sick-Installed with videos Sick and Relapse (fig. 6)
**Food** (fig. 9)

![Food](image1)

**Food**-Detail (fig. 10)

![Food Detail](image2)

**Scars** (fig. 11)

![Scars](image3)
Scars—Detail (fig. 12)
Hair 2001 (Becoming an American) (fig. 13)
Hair 2001 (Becoming an American)–Detail (fig. 14)
Hair 2004 (fig. 15)
Hair 2004-Detail (fig. 16)
Killing Time - Video Still 1 (fig. 20)

Killing Time - Video Still 2 (fig. 21)
Saigon River- Video Still 1 (fig. 22)

Saigon River- Video Still 2 (fig. 23)
Behind Every Decision - Video Still 1 (fig.24)

Behind Every Decision - Video Still 2 (fig.25)
University Lakes- Video Still 1 (fig. 26)

University Lakes- Video Still 2 (fig. 27)

University Lakes- Video Still 3 (fig. 2)

Oxygen-depleting bacteria routinely infects water, killing fish and producing putrid odors
Vita

Bradly Dever Treadaway was born in Mobile, Alabama, and spent his formative years in Knoxville, Tennessee. In 1999 he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Tennessee in Media Arts. He has traveled to 48 states and 19 countries, including a four-month trek through India and Nepal and nine countries while participating in the University of Pittsburgh's Semester at Sea program. Works from his travels have been exhibited in Louisiana, Tennessee, Kentucky, Maryland and California. Mr. Treadaway intends to continue making art, traveling, learning and teaching as a Master of Fine Arts.