

Project Proposal

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MA Fine Art

Working title: **Waiting Room**

The starting point for my intended research is a personal one and concerned with blocked or lost memories and times. In particular the constructs created to fill in the gaps. What's 'real', what's 'imagined', what does it matter?

A confusion of memory and imagination, *'Confabulation is a behavioral problem caused by producing false memories. Confabulated memories may never have happened or they could be a confused combination of events. [...] There is always an element of truth in a confabulated memory.'* (Brain Injury Survivors Guide, 2010)

There is room for confabulation when trauma interrupts the internal narrative. Put bluntly confabulation is the spontaneous narrative report of events that never happened. In the introduction to *Contemporary Art and Memory* Joan Gibbons asserts that *'In our postmodern condition of contingency and relativism, it seems that there is no way in which the fictional or confabulatory aspects of memory can be denied.'* (Gibbons 2009:6)

Filling in the gaps that are there, for whatever reason, with a narrative, plausible or otherwise: *'Confabulation was first mentioned in the medical literature in the late 1880s, applied to patients of the Russian psychiatrist Sergie Korsakoff. He described a distinctive type of memory deficit in people who had abused alcohol for many years. These people had no recollection of recent events, yet filled in the blanks spontaneously with sometimes fantastical and impossible stories.'* (Phillips 2006:32+)

Indeed the word reasserted itself in my consciousness recently while reading a work of fiction in which the protagonist is told he has Korsakoff's syndrome and who, you

realize later, appropriates aspects of other people recollections and confused ones of his own to create an alternative exciting and false history for himself.

I'm not so interested in the 'fantastical and impossible' stories of Korsakoff's syndrome but more as I experienced it (to a degree) with the confusion of recollections, and filling gaps with false narratives and where they might come from.

Considering that '*As stated by the eminent cognitive neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga: 'Everything in life is memory, save for the thin edge of the present.'*' (Foster 2009:2) What's real is now and now is now then. So if, as philosophers have long hypothesised, '*What makes you the same person over time is, broadly, the continuity of your mental life.*' (Baggini 2011:34) what happens when there is an interruption? If you're not even sure of what's missing how can one relate the trauma of loss? Engage with life traces, echoes of things past, sometimes haunting and maybe even misleading?

My proposed project is intended to explore aspects of internal psychological space, especially memory (Random Access Memory, capturing, processing, storing and retrieving). My practice is drawing me towards spaces of transit - allowing introspection and self-reflection, especially (but not exclusively) from the point of view of a passenger.

When travelling from A to B the time after leaving and before arriving allows the traveller a window of time in which the primary concern is simply getting there. '*A movement whose only end was itself...*' (Auge 2008: 71). This is true of the driver, cyclist, the walker and the passenger and many of us have gone for a walk for its own sake to clear our heads. It can be a time where the 'white noise' of everyday existence subsides, the volume turned down if only for a while.

The mental space afforded to a driver is different to that of a passenger but not entirely. Although the driver is engaged in driving and navigating the route and obstacles inherent in the journey because most of the skills required are automatic (implicit memory, allowing you to do things automatically) the feeling of quiet, mental and emotional space is as much part of the journey, if not more so

(concentrating, yet automatic, creating a usually unattainable 'space' in the mental landscape). As Alain De Botton says in *The Art of Travel*, as seen on Channel 4 *'Road journeys can be the midwives of interesting thoughts.'* (Alain De Botton : *The Art of Travel*, 2005)

Although I have said I would predominantly look at the journey through the eyes of a passenger, the clarity of mental space (last cloister of un-tethered thought), is perhaps more intense for the lone driver. As a passenger you are afforded quite a different space to imagine, contemplate or let your mind wander, *'at the end of hours of train dreaming, we may feel we have been returned to ourselves – that is, brought back into contact with emotions and ideas of importance to us. It is not necessarily at home that we encounter our true selves.'* (De Botton 2002:59)

In the Introduction to *Non-Places* Augé describes the beginning of a journey by aeroplane *'...expressions of the system, its wealth and ostentatious assertiveness.'* (Augé 2008: XVI) Is to travel, be in transit to submit to the system? Let go of responsibility for the duration? In the Prologue of *Non-Places* he speaks of *'... the feeling that all there is to do is to 'see what happens.'*' (Augé 2008: 2) How do we use this time, this in-between time? How to represent the passing of 'neutral' time? While physically timetabled and linear the duration can seem stretched or squashed. Our experience of duration being altered whilst day dreaming or otherwise being lost in thought *when 'Everything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time.'* (Augé 2008: 84)

Daydreaming, remembering, planning and anticipating possible futures in what Augé calls the real non-places of super modernity, *'the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through a supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge [that] have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us; their 'instructions for use''* (Augé 2008:79).

Agnes Denes' *Wheatfield: A Confrontation* offers *'a kind of utopian counterpoint'* to the concrete horizons and sign written vistas of super modernity. *'[...] Denes grew two acres of wheat on a landfill site in lower Manhattan [...] As Denes writes, 'Wheatfield ... was an intrusion into the Citadel, a confrontation with High Civilization. Then again, it was also Shangri-La, a small paradise, one's*

childhood, a hot summer afternoon in the country, peace, forgotten values, simple pleasures.” (Noble 2009:16)

In her article *The I in Dreaming* Emma Young also points to daydreaming: *‘During dreaming is certainly not the only time our brain consolidates memories. For example, when we daydream certain areas of the brain, called the default network, become active. We now know this network is involved in memory processing and many of the same brain regions are active during REM sleep. What’s more, day dreaming, like REM dreaming, can improve our ability to extract meaning from information and to have creative insights.*

[...]“*While you are dreaming your brain is literally reshaping itself, so dreams play a key role in making you who you are.*” (Young 2011: 38) so it follows that the same is (partially) true of daydreaming.

So my practice will be exploring capture/encounter/representation/cognition/ recognition/ projection and reflection. As vehicles for exploring these ideas and spaces (physical and psychological) I intend to use predominantly time-based media and see the consideration of and engagement with the processes therein as being an integral aspect of my research as well as my practice. Contrasting the speed and nature of workflow in contemporary digital media with non digital photographic processes (moving image/photography and in printmaking such as photolithography). To consider the nature of time in relation to process and how this might have changed and continues to change our collective psyche/perspective in relation to distribution and consumption. Time is obviously an element in both photography and moving image and very pertinent to my line of enquiry regarding memory framed within spaces of transit and waiting. I have been looking at spaces of transit/ transport, where you are often still (standing or seated) while in motion, perpetually shifting contextually, but not disregarding *any* space that involves waiting. Any enforced pause *‘.... non-places are there to be passed through, they are measured in units of time.’* (Auge 2008: 83)

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