Showing and Telling Sweet Lies

Peter Sickert

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By

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Abstract

Throughout this paper, I will lay out some of the underpinnings of my practice. My practice is multivalent; it ranges widely, draws from many sources and employs a multitude of media. It reflects my explorations in using the parafiction as a narrative device to investigate memories and history. It relies on research to explore backgrounds and linkages. It is about collections of objects as allegorical devices and the play with the archive, the *Wunderkammer* and museological tropes. My practice is an examination of the potential of the narrative and its narrator(s) to reveal the wonders of the everyday.

This paper traces my investigation and analysis of the narrative as a means to understand fictions that deal with possibles and plausibles, specifically through the works of Mieke Bal, Manfred Jahn and Carrie Lambert Beatty. Referencing the films of Patrick Keiller and works by Rodney Graham I examine the role of the narrator, as a not always reliable guide, for uncovering forgotten, misplaced and speculative memories and histories. I reveal the narrator as "trickster" whose disclosure of information offers only clues and trace elements.

The evolution of my own work, from just prior to and during the MFA, illustrates my material and theoretical explorations that have led to the body of work called *Remote Viewer*, presented in the 2018 MFA Graduate Exhibition. By referencing the practices of artists Susan Hiller, Mark Dion and Cornelia Parker, I illustrate how my play with everyday objects as allegorical devices operates in support of my speculative narratives. Similar to the practices of Tom Sachs and Richard E Prince, I employ models and dioramas to highlight the inherent magic of the sometimes futile attempt to replicate memories and events.

This paper is also about the struggle to define and "own" my art practice. A practice that over the course of my MFA, through playful exploration and experimentation has developed faster than my theoretical "understanding" of how it operates. This "final" version is the next step in catching up and closing the gap.

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Photo credits: Peter Sickert (PCS); Ross Kelly (RK); Wade Comer (WC) & ECUAD

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my father, Kurt.

*"Nennt mich die Männer and Frauen und Kinder, die mich suchen werden, mich, ihren Erzähler, Vorsänger und Tonangeber, weil sie mich brauchen wie sonst nichts auf der Welt. Nous sommes embarqués." ***

Peter Handke – Der Himmel Über Berlin

"There is something interesting to be said for everything around us".

Linus van Pelt – The Peanuts by Charles M Schultz

*"Name me the men and women and children that will seek me out, me, their narrator, cantor and spiritual guide, because they need me unlike anything else in the world. Nous sommes embarqués.…"

PROLOGUE: Evolutionary Theories

Throughout this paper, I will lay out some of the underpinnings of my practice. My practice is multivalent; it ranges widely, draws from many sources and employs a multitude of media. It reflects my explorations in using the parafiction as a narrative device to investigate memories and history. It relies on research to explore backgrounds and linkages. It is about collections of objects as allegorical devices and the play with the archive, the *Wunderkammer*[1] and museological tropes. My practice is an examination of the potential of the narrator to reveal the wonders of the everyday.

This paper is also about the struggle to define and "own" my art practice. A practice that over the course of my MFA, through playful exploration and experimentation has developed faster than my theoretical "understanding" of how it operates. This "final" version is the next step in catching up and closing the gaps.

I am a listener and an observer. I was fortunate that while growing up I had immense freedom to shape my own time, to wander and explore places and to pore through my father's collection of books and music. This liberty to absorb sights, sounds and moods and to collect experiences, memories and artifacts has shaped how I engage with the world. We moved a great deal as a family. Not just from house to house but from town to town, continent to continent, country to country, culture to culture. My life as a child was one of continual adaption to shifting languages, cultural-social settings and physical environments. With these constant changes I found myself confronted with things that didn't align or make sense. It shaped my curiosity about the subjectivity and slipperiness of memory, meaning and even history. It is the source of my interest in remembering as a creative act, as a way of thinking-through, processing and conveying my experiences with this strange world.

My practice uses the narrative as a way to uncover the phenomena we call the everyday. The French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre wrote that to engage with the everyday is an act of critique[2] for to expose the uncommon, the magical within the supposedly mundane offers up alternate ways of perceiving ourselves and the world around us. I am attracted to his writings, for they offer ways of thinking through the phenomena of the everyday as a way to uncover our relationships to each other and society. I employ narratives as a strategy to overlay the day to day with the vagaries of memory and the potential for marvelous fictions. The tools are research, speculation and collected ephemera to create (para)fictions for investigating plausibles.

As a narrative device, the power of the parafiction is that it considers the subjective and changing nature of what we call history, the slipperiness of meaning and the fallibility of memory. Art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty defines the 'parafiction' as artwork that plays with plausibility. It is a dialogue between

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[1] *Wunderkammer: cabinets of curiosity* or more literally *cabinets of wonder*. A type of private collection of objects, artifacts and ephemera, often unrelated other than it represented the odd, unusual and wondrous. It is a phenomenon that emerged in the Renaissance. These collections often formed the basis of the holdings and archives of public museums.

[2] Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life.* (150)

truth and fiction, but always "… with one foot in the field of the real."[3] Parafictions play with expectancies, longings for things not found and the possibility for speculative histories of what might be.

Story telling is an important way of slowing down time, allowing time for reflection and pause to reset the mind. Time set aside breaks the rhythms of the consciously productive day to day. In his book *A Philosophy of Walking,* French philosopher Frédéric Gros says this about slowness:

"Hurrying means doing several things at a once, and quickly: this; then that; and then something else…Slowness means cleaving perfectly to time…This stretching of time deepens space."[4]

Slowing down allows time for curiosity by encouraging attentiveness. Paying attention creates openings to discover what lies beyond the surface. These openings are the things and events that break with routine and the expected.

Narration is an integral part of being. We can call it storytelling, history, memories, research, fiction or any number of terms. All these names have specific connotations, meanings and underlying theoretical stances, and can be seen as attempts to describe how and why we are. Stories employ tools for communicating their prospect over the landscape of human activity, whether it is archival material, artifacts, images, sound, evidence, experiments and aural recollections.

Here, in these grey areas and unstable zones is where the raw materials for my narratives are drawn from. Hidden in the everyday there lies wonder[5].

My practice was originally that of painting and assemblage, through which I explored personal and familial histories. I was particularly interested in the gaps and inconsistencies and what they said about meaning making. However, I started to feel that my focus was too narrow and too specific and I understood that my practice needed to broaden. The previous autobiographical focus of my work has evolved towards an autoethnographic use of the self within a wider narrative context.

Over the course of the past few years I've made the shift towards a multidisciplinary practice that ranges widely and draws from many sources. Perhaps I can consider myself to be an *autodidact.* Research is a key component of my practice. It allows me to explore backgrounds, contexts and connections. My research is both directed and shambolic, wherein I allow for chance discoveries to alter the direction and tone of a work. This creates potential thickets and entanglements that generate new opportunities. Though my basic conceptual ideas have remained fairly consistent, it is how I've begun to express these ideas that have evolved, both physically and conceptually.

Thinking about and using parafiction as a narrative device has contributed to my decision to make a shift in my art practice. It is a shift from work that was mostly about image / object relationships, to work

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[3] Lambert, Beatty, Carrie. Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility. (85)
[4] Gros, Frédéric. *A Philosophy of Walking.* (37).
[5] Throughout this paper I use the word wonder. It is a word that was applied to my practice during my thesis defense and in retrospect an apt description. My use of the word is that of a place holder. Discussion of the idea of wonder and how it applies to my practice will only be alluded to. Investigating wonder as phenomena and method will form the basis future investigations.

that have begun to more fully consider the spatial and experiential potential of the installation as an architectural place of encounter. The installation was a way of pulling apart and untethering my assemblages and to start inhabiting and making space. This has allowed for the creation of narrative places, in which successions of related tableaus are in dialogue with each other. Engaging with space has spurred my exploration into the potentials of new materials, methods and processes. Each of these materials and media bring with them their own particular meanings and language and have allowed me expand my narrative palette.

For example the inclusion of sound and video into my practice has allowed for new ways to engage the senses. The transition from wall based works to work that inhabits space offers the potential for an individual's engagement with the work to change from a passive to a more active and ideally empowered point of view. I am interested fostering more active encounters, by deploying strategies such as playing with shifting perspectives, by encouraging the engagement of the body through movement by peering around, crouching and glancing are ways of rewarding curiosity.

The first manifestation of this change was the installation *"…Shit Happens"* presented during the first Summer Intensive of my MFA, which can be considered a transitional work. It functioned as an archive and introduced sound and video and the first manifestation of a narrative as "Parafiction". In the second Summer intensive the installation *La Mer*, took the idea of the archive a step further by playing with museological tropes. I again employed, sound and video as components to play off artifacts, ephemera and sculptural elements. The video, in which I could be seen floating in the ocean, was the main narrative component. The denseness of this work was seen as problematic, with too many elements competing for attention within a small space. This learning experience spurred further exploration into the idea of "how much is enough?" during my 2017 Independent Studies term. The installation *Remote Viewer* in which the elements became more dispersed, simpler and more cryptic was the result. With *Remote Viewer* the untethering from the wall as support, and the dispersal of the components, to occupy space within the galley, was a significant step forward. The borders between actual and fictional elements have become much less clear and the narratives more elusive and open ended. There is a complex haunting starting to emerge in my work.

ACCOUNT: Memory

The word for memory is derived from the ancient Greek myth of Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses who was "said to know everything, past, present, and future."[6]

Memory is essential to our existence. Without memory, basic daily intellectual functions or abstract thought would be impossible to perform. It is through our concept of the past, of lived experience, that we create and shape our own and other's identities. Memory forms the foundation of language and allows us to communicate with others learned and shared experience. Memory is not exact, but mere interpretation, an exercise in subjectivity.

In my own body of work I investigate memory, primarily my own struggles to recall and make sense. Having moved many times during my childhood, there was a constant state of being uprooted. Early works relating to my family history bear this out. For example the series *Familie,* in *Mutter / Mother (1997)* was a piecing together a particular memory I had of my mother, who had passed away when I was 16. (Fig 01)

My art is an act of recovery. Acts of recovery are often futile. This is not a limitation, but an opening. The memory gaps are filled by speculative narratives that are free to allow for seepage and cross contamination from unrelated sources. The narrative scaffolding allows for fact and fiction to comingle. Though I am not interested in having my work operate as / or represent loss nor read as a nostalgia for the past, I do play with these ideas.

These choices are ways to ground my work with what I call knowables.[7] Knowables are a way to draw in the viewer by impersonating the familiar. This is manifested in my object and material choices, whether it is my colour palette that alludes to the patina of use and wear or objects and devices that suggest the analogue and the bygone. Knowables can be things such as the iron and lead shirt used in the assemblage *Mutter / Mother (1997)*, which evoke familiar ideas of domesticity, gender roles and have inherent narrative potentials, which when juxtaposed with the unexpected lead to more complex readings.

In his book *Narrative, Memory, and Slavery*, the American art historian W.J.T. Mitchell problematizes the notion of memory as a direct representation of the past. He argues "representation… not only 'mediates' our knowledge…but obstructs, fragments, and negates that knowledge… (memory) provide(s) something more like a site of cultural labor…". For Mitchell, memory is not interesting for what it tells us, but rather what it hides from us. Calling memory a "medium", he posits it as a process of meaning creation that is both selective and akin to a facade. In describing memory as "a technology for

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[6] Kelland, Lara. *Theories of Media: Keywords Glossary: Memory* Retrieved from
http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/memory.htm
[7] I use the word knowables to describe not only past events, but also past technologies characterized by single functionality such as when a phone was a phone and a camera was a camera, as opposed to a smart phone, which is multi-functional.

Fig. 01   *Familie: Die Mutter / The Mother* (1997)
                           Mixed Media: Acrylic Paints and Media, Photocopies,
                           Orange Shellac, Wood Bread Board, Iron, Lead, Buttons, Wire on Wood Panel.
                           460x610x150 (18"x24"x6")

gaining freedom of movement in and mastery over the subjective temporality of consciousness and the objective temporality of discursive performance" [8] The idea of memory as a façade, is interesting in an installation context, by acting as a scaffold which obscures but also supports and alludes to that which lies behind. The unseen behind the façade can be seen as that which is beyond recallable memory. The tie in with architectural concepts of setting as a field for memory containment and also memory (re)construction is an interesting idea.

I suggest one revision to Mitchell's statement. I prefer the term *device* rather than *technology*, a term I see as offering more space for interpretation.

The online Merriam Webster Dictionary offers a number of definitions for the word *device.* I am most drawn to its, now archaic, meaning of desire, intention, inclination as in the expression *"left to my own devices"*, as well as *device* as a piece of equipment or a mechanism designed to serve a special purpose or perform a special function. [9] As a device, memory therefore acts not just as a true record of events, but also as an expression of intention, bias and a desire for an ideal, which is supported through the use of objects, sounds and images.

Victor Shklovsky offers another way of thinking about device as an artistic and narrative tool. He defines art as a device. As a device the purpose of art is to attempt to disrupt passivity and to reveal hidden desires and intents. Art can act to trouble easy readings and to impede immediate understanding; art's greatest possible effect is produced when it is able to slow down perception."[10]

A compelling aspect of art as a narrative device is that it can play with the elusiveness of memory. Any recounting of memory is by necessity also a chronicle of forgetting, a record of gaps. These gaps are the openings and opportunities for the artist as narrator. From recent research by psychologist and researcher Julia Shaw, I have gained a better understanding on how memory is fallible. In her 2016 book *The Memory Illusion*, she was able to show how it was possible (and easy) to implant false memories and recollections. She was able to convince subjects that certain reminiscences were actual and part of their own history.[11] This reminded me about how I have started to play with possible alternate pasts as a way of reclaiming and re-contextualizing the gaps in recall, a play with what could have been and what might be plausible.

Shaw writes about the American psychologist Joseph Hart's "feeling we know". [12] It is the sensation that we know something but cannot access it from our memory. It is when the information can be recognized, but not recalled. Interestingly, the recognition often occurs via a trigger that activates the recall, importantly the recall cannot be created from nothing. Hart was interested in how we differentiate between understanding that a memory is authentic or not, as well as how we deal with memories that are remembered but not retrievable. My series *Terre des Hommes* explores with this idea in a playful manner.

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[8] Mitchell, W.J.T. *On Narrative*.
[9] Merriam Webster Online Dictionary. *Device*. Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/device
[10] Shklovsky, Victor. *Theory of Prose: Chapter One "Art as Device"*. (19)
[11] Shaw, Julia. *The Memory Illusion: Remembering, Forgetting, and the Science of False Memory*.
[12] Ibid. (242-243).

On a recent visit to Montreal, I visited the site of the World Fair - EXPO '67. I had vague memories of visiting Expo '67 as a child with my parents. As I walked the site memories of particular pavilions, the monorail and the crowds ghosting in my mind became stronger. However, I was unable to confirm my memories. My parents having passed away some time ago were not here to corroborate. I also did not find any hard evidence, there are no photos, brochures or souvenirs, other than what one could have picked up incidentally during Canada's Centennial. I started to wonder whether my memories were completely my own or were they merely the residue from the flickering images on television? Perhaps it didn't matter. This shift in thinking opened up the potential in viewing the gaps and slippages as the zones for recovery and re-contextualization. (Fig 02)

Terre des Hommes explores the narrative potential of archival material, my own photographic records, text and found objects. This series is an investigation of the subjective nature of memory and history as filtered through my longing for the memory to appear true. Events, places, buildings and artifacts are re-contextualized in ways that say more about a feeling of time and place than reality. It opened up the possibility for me to use replicas, stand-ins and fakes to fill in the voids.

Terre des Hommes raises questions of what is truth[13], and what is reality? I believe truth and reality are narratives that are accepted by the majority via tradition, habit and with some luck "evidence". We need the idea of truth to be able to function as a society in a more or less cohesive manner. Shared ethics and aspirations are the result. And yet, we know that there are gaps and unexplained omissions. I see these grey areas as spaces of dreams, possibles[14] and utopias. I believe we all have experienced that longing for something that can't be found, experienced or remembered. There is a psychological term for the need, even compulsion for sense making, it is known as *apophenia*[15]. In its extreme *apophenia* manifests itself as a disordered delusional state, often manifested in the belief in conspiracy theories, which though they operate with an internal narrative coherence, do so well beyond expected logic and facts.

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[13] According to Nietzsche: "…the truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation, Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions." *The Viking Portable Nietzsche* (46,47).

[14] I deliberately use possibles as the plural of possible. I prefer this term over possibilities as a more direct term. Possibilities is the state or fact of being possible. The suffix 'ities' seems to be suggestive of ideas of "ableness" a more factual articulation of openness. Possibles is not burdened by fact.

[15] Apophenia is the tendency to perceive connections and meaning between unrelated things. It come from the German *Apophänie* and was identified by the psychiatrist Klaus Conrad. He defined it as "unmotivated seeing of connections, accompanied by a specific feeling of abnormal meaningfulness". Wikipedia entry for *Apophenia.* Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apophenia

Fig. 02   *Terre Des Hommes Pt. 18: At the Gates of Dawn* (2013)
                 Mixed Media: Acrylic Paints and Media, Photo Transfers,
                 Plant Material (Seed Pods) on Cradled Wood Panels.
                 760x610 (30"x24")

STORY: Narratives

I spent quite some time researching what a narrative is, how it functions and how it is structured. How does it operate as a device for communication? What is the difference between story and narrative? Manfred Jahn defines the terms in the following way:

> Narrative: anything that tells or presents a story.
> Story: a sequence of events involving characters.
> Narrator: the teller of the narrative; the person who articulates ("speaks") the narrative text.[16]

Collectively we humans seem to have an innate sense of what a narrative is and how it operates. From a fairly young age we are able to understand and follow narrative structures and expectancies. Deviations from the basic rules are immediately recognized.

Dino Felluga, who teaches cultural theory at Purdue University, points out the cross cultural nature of narrative. "…far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted"[17] By understanding narrative structures there is the potential to tap into a language whose form is widely legible and understood, which provides opening and entry points for communication.

Delving more deeply into the complexities of narrative as construct and device, I investigated *narratology*, which is the formal study of the narrative. In her book *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, the Dutch cultural theorist and artist Mieke Bal*,* deconstructs the narrative into its component parts and functions. She shows that narratives subscribe to foundational "deep structures." Bal's structuralist analysis shows how recurrent elements, themes, and patterns yield a set of universals that determine what comprises a story. The goal of such analysis is to move from a taxonomy of elements, to an understanding of how these elements are arranged in actual narratives, both fictional and nonfictional.[18] For Bal this is particularly important since the ordering of time and space in narrative forms constitutes one of the primary ways we construct and communicate meaning. Though I found Bal's work foundationally useful, it did not fully help my understanding of the narrative forms I am drawn to, ones which function outside of and counter to traditional narrative tropes.

In an attempt to expand on what is seen as the limits of Mieke Bal's analysis*,* professor Jan Alber has coined the term "*Unnatural Narratives*" to define narratives that function by violating the parameters of traditional realism, and move beyond the conventions of natural narratives, in his words "beyond story".[19] *Unnatural Narratives* operate outside of the narrow mimetic model proposed by traditional

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[16]Jahn, Manfred. *Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative.* Retrieved from
http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppn.htm
[17]Felluga, Dino. *Introduction to Narratology.* Retrieved from
https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/narratology/modules/introduction.html
[18] Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative (Third Edition).*
[19] Alber, Jan, Iversen, Stefan, Nielson, Henrick Skov, Richardson, Brian. *Unnatural Narratives, Unnatural Narratology: Beyond Mimetic Models.*

narratology. It makes space for narratives that operate beyond the bounds of everyday knowledge, where the common is made strange and de-familiarized. It is a way of acknowledging that not all stories operate in conventional terms. For example, experimental and anti-realist work operate counter to traditional narrative conventions and logic.

The *parafiction* is a type of *Unnatural Narrative*, which operates within the realm of the visual arts. It stakes out a position in which there is no obligation of truthfulness, rather it is an experiment with the perception of truth. I see my work also residing in this realm that playfully oscillates between the real and the imaginary. The artist's use of the parafiction is less self-conscious within the work itself, and allows the viewer openings to read something as true or real, the materiality of the objects and devices employed act to reinforce this.

Explained a different way, parafiction is the production of possibility by way of creating plausible alternatives to accepted truths, beliefs, discourses, and ideologies through disruption and subversion.[20] Lambert-Beatty states:

"…a parafiction is related to but not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art. It remains a bit outside… but has one foot in the field of the real. Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived…"[21]

The narratives I employ in my art practice operate in similar ways. Whether it is through my fictional organizations such as the *Temporal Displacement Investigative Unit (T.D.I.U)* or in the body of work, that comprises *La Mer,* I play with plausible alternatives within the construct of fairly mundane frame works. Unnatural Narratives allow for plausible disruptions of the expected, whether it is my fictitious group of lay scientists of the T.D.I.U. investigating the phenomena of *shape-shifting* beings amongst us or the retracing of the epic journey of a lifeboat from Alaska to the Kootenays as in the series *La Mer.*

"This is precisely the territory of parafiction, which at once reveals the way things are and makes sensible the way we want them to be; and which offers experiences of both skepticism and belief." [22]

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[20] *The New Elastic Infinite*. Retrieved from https://eventualepisteme.wordpress.com/2014/01/24/what-is-parafiction/
[21] Lambert, Beatty, Carrie. *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*. (85)
[22] Ibid. (82)

TALE: Autoethnography

An artist's work often reflects the self. We draw on our personal experiences and memories. It reflects how we view ourselves in relation to people we know, society and the world in general. Narration about the self is termed autobiographical. The reader or viewer becomes a witness to the narrator's thoughts, feelings and experiences. In contrast *Autoethnographic* narrative uses one's own life and experiences as a way of uncovering broader perspectives that create openings for others not only to identify with the artist and their work, but also to uncover their own situatedness in the world. Contrary to autobiography, autoethnography uses personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences. It employs a deep and careful self-reflection, typically referred to as "reflexivity", to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political.[23] The authors of *Autoethnography: An Overview* provide this definition.

"…Autoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience…In doing autoethnography, we confront the tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between social practice and social constraint." [24]

In my own work I have shifted from an autobiographic stance to more of an autoethnographic use of the self. From the work being mostly about my own experiences to work that uses my experiences to draw out broader issues and narratives

My installation *"…Shit Happens!"* was the first step in experimenting with the use of autoethnography. It was set up as an archive of ephemera from my youth in the Vancouver of the late 1980's. The collection contained actual artifacts, stand-ins, replicas as well as fictional evidence. The installation's conceit was that I had been a "skate" punk. I was a Punker, but never a "skate punk"; I can't skateboard but was always envious of the freedom it seemed to symbolize. The installation afforded the opportunity to explore an alternate past; it was also a way of recreating a sense of a particular time and milieu. It is an incomplete and elusive image. (Fig 03) The play between true and false objects and narratives proved to draw viewers in. Careful examination reveals what might be genuine and what is a stand-in, what seems plausible and what does not. *"…Shit Happens!"* was the beginning of a more deliberate play with the idea of the "unreliable" narrator.

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[23] Ellis, Carolyn, Adams, Tony E, Bochner, Arthur P. *Autoethnography: An Overview*
[24] Ibid.

Fig. 03   *"…Shit Happens!" (*2016)
Mixed Media Installation: Photos, Shelves, Prepared Telephone, Audio Cassette Player,
LED Monitors, Clothing, Shoes, Boots, Music 'Zines and Collected Ephemera.
Dimension Varies

FABLE: The Narrator

The use of autoethnography in my work raised questions of how I function as a narrator. As the story teller I seek to convey things recalled, recovered and imagined. I use the narrative as a device for toying with meanings, memories, expectancies, facts and time itself. The narrator can feed our need to believe and to imagine. I wish to evoke in the viewer the same sense of wonder and excitement that my speculations invoke in me.

I started to more fully explore my role as a narrator while developing the series *Temporal Displacement Investigative Unit (TDIU)*. In this ongoing project, I use multiple perspectives to tell the story: the citizen and lay scientists, the "shape shifters" being investigated, even the city itself becomes a persona. The *TDIU* seeks reveal the city as a setting for the wondrous. Through the lens of the *TDIU* the common and everyday are made strange. It flirts with the supernatural and otherworldly all the while firmly planted in the mundane tasks and activities of the day to day.

In the *TDIU m*y characters and alter-ego(s), operate with the license to displace the expected logic of things for the sake of the skewed perspective, of a not completely unreasonable parallel existence. In my parafictions these characters are free to play with intent, setting and meaning. They engage with Freud's ideas about the "Unheimlich" (the uncanny), in which what is initially thought of as familiar and common, gives way to the unfamiliar, fantastic and unsettling. Freud's ideas operate nicely with Berthold Brecht's concept of "Verfremdung" (estrangement), a theatrical device in which the expected and customary is presented removed from its familiar contexts, thus creating a shift in meaning and perception. For Brecht it was a means to analyze and challenge societal structures, norms, conventions. My narrators operate as interpreters and guides, revealing the hidden wonders of things and places.

Artists often act as provocateurs not unlike the trickster.[25] Through my characters I play with the idea of the trickster. Not the trickster of nefarious purpose, the hard lessons or the practical joke. It is the trickster who with gentle humour, judicious lies and with few words acts as an interpreter, transformer and interlocutor to direct the story. It is another way to engage with the fallibility of memory, the subjectivity of reality and the slipperiness of truth. It is deceiving without deception. The trickster, sitting just outside of the norm, has license to make apparent the strangeness of things we take to be stable and certain. The role of the trickster in culture is an important one that functions cross culturally. Lewis Hyde describes the paradox that myths as narratives assert "…that the origins, liveliness, and durability of cultures require that there be space for figures whose function is to uncover and disrupt the very things that cultures are based on…"[26]

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[25] Tricksters are archetypal characters who appear in the myths of many different cultures. Lewis Hyde describes the trickster as a "boundary-crosser". The trickster crosses and often breaks both physical and societal rules. Tricksters "...violate principles of social and natural order, playfully disrupting normal life and then re-establishing it on a new basis." Often, the bending/breaking of rules takes the form of tricks or thievery. Tricksters can be cunning or foolish or both. The trickster openly questions and mocks authority. They are usually male characters, and are fond of breaking rules, boasting, and playing tricks on both humans and gods. All cultures have tales of the trickster, a crafty creature who uses cunning to get food, steal precious possessions, or simply cause mischief. Furthermore Hyde says this: "For a Trickster, lies aim to provoke doubt, by drawing you into (his) uncanny territory." (71).

[26] Lewis Hyde. *Trickster Makes the World: Mischief, Myth and Art.* (9)

The work of the British filmmaker Patrick Keiller has been influential in how I view the role of the narrator, in particular the films that comprise *The London Trilogy* (*London, Robinson in Space and Robinson in Ruins*). These films follow the wanderings of the main character Robinson and his loyal yet somewhat skeptical and nameless companion. They walk the English countryside in a quest to uncover and understand history, thereby drawing inferences about the present and possibly the future. Robinson's memories, views and theories are conveyed (via voice over) by Robinson's companion. We never see either character. The dialogue is wry and suspicious, the humour suitably dry. As the films progress, there is a dawning realization that all that is left of Robinson's memories and ideals is a trail of dissolute way markers, fragments and historical trace elements. Keiller uses Robinson and his companion to represent two aspects of his own persona; Robinson the myopic idealist and the skeptical, effete leftist narrator who conveys Robinson's theories and thoughts.

It is the brilliant yet subtle way of playing with the idea of the "trickster" as the unreliable narrator in Keiller's films that has influenced my narratives and how I see myself operating as a narrator.

The power of speaking through and in character(s) opens the possibilities to express and explore ideas more freely. The character decouples the viewer's association with the artist as an individual. In Keiller's words *"Robinson is handy…glib and ill-informed he may be, but he allows me to float ideas"*[27]

This floating of ideas is what is so compelling in Keiller's work and informs how I approach my art. Robinson delivers a seemingly coherent worldview, it takes work on our part to interrogate when and where he crosses the line from the real, to the interpreted and the made-up. *"…Keiller transforms the city is by "reimagining" places. Which means giving us the pictures while the narrator tells pleasant lies."*[28]

It is the sweet lies[29], the offering of potentially fantastical possibilities, odd connections and blatantly absurd theories, which creates such a mesmerizingly dense narrative in Keiller's work. Keiller's use of the *unreliable narrator* heavily informs the structure of *TDIU.*

Whereas *"…Shit Happens!"* was a fairly contained story based on personal memories, the *TDIU* opened up the narrative through the use of characters, alter egos that allowed me to explore alternate viewpoints. The *TDIU* is a fictitious organization through which I, in the guise of its citizen scientists, explore, discover, evaluate and explain strange phenomena encountered in Vancouver's Mount Pleasant Neighborhood. Each citizen scientist scours the city equipped with their Field Kits looking for clues (Fig 04). Their investigations revolve around the discovery and recovery of abandoned clothing found in fringe areas of the city (Fig 05) and the theory that they are the traces of shapeshifting beings, such as have accompanied humans through the ages.

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[27] Patrick Keiller in conversation with Robert Yates. Patrick Keiller on London. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/nov/30/patrick-keiller-london-original-interview
[28] Patrick Keiller in conversation with Nina Power. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/695309/Ghost_of_the_Fields_An_Interview_with_Patrick_Keiller
[29] Lewis Hyde discusses the idea of the *Lie* in relationship to semiotics that speaks of its value as a revelatory device: "Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else…Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all." (60)

The steady erosion of their agency and importance, which is a direct result of late capitalist society's preoccupations, resulting in their gradual fading dissolution and disappearance from our consciousness. The *TDIU* is a record of their last manifestations. This project playfully deploys mundane objects, images and text as evidence of this fiction. The work of this organization is sometimes presented as "incident boards" (Fig 06). The *TDIU* functions as an open-ended project that allows room for further exploration.

My practice draws widely on histories and backstories that weave narratives from the loosely related. I have found that an audience is willing to give the narrator the benefit of the doubt. It is a trusting relationship that depends on the story teller understanding and reading an audience. A delicate navigation takes place. As the artist and narrator I try to create work that rewards this trust. For example, in my piece "*At the Hang-Out",* part of the installation *"…Shit Happens!",* I created evidence in developing the backstory for my "skate-punk" narrative. "*At the Hang-Out",* depicts my friends and I hanging out together. The image is a recreation. The various images of me in disguise were assembled into a photo diorama, which highlights the staged nature of the image. Hardly anyone noticed that I was playing all the characters, it was read as genuine. For me this was a lesson in audience trust and their willingness to allow the narrative to hold its own. (Fig 07)

I see the work of Rodney Graham operating within the realm of the shape shifter and trickster.[30] He takes on the guise of any number of mostly hapless characters, allegories for ideas which range widely across history and theory. In works such as *City Self, Country Self*[31] he places himself in the action as both protagonist and antagonist. His characters play out social morality plays with the broadest of vaudevillian flair and with a self-deprecating, yet healthy ego. Graham's often broad humour offers the entry point, a zone of mischievousness that quickly leads to the darker, shadowy areas of the "playground". (Fig 08) Graham's trick is that there is an immediate obviousness to his work the deeper meanings only revealed after the second or third look. For me he seems to be trying to lull the viewer into thinking that his work is all surface, a one liner. His often deadpan or befuddled characters inhabit carefully (re)created and choreographed spaces, yet the clues are all there, in the details, the tiny things that give away the references to the back stories, and the allegories he alludes to.

Another example in which I take on the role of the narrator as trickster is in the video, *La Mer: The Stars are so Beautiful,* which I presented at the 2017 Summer interim exhibition. In the video, I am drifting in the sea, carried away by the current, a voice over muses about the origins of life, the nature of the universe and the meaning of existence. Logs washing ashore suddenly interrupt the mood, all the while a distorted recording of Charles Trenet's *La Mer*, which I had heard on the radio as a child, plays in the background. The pondering over the meaning of life is suddenly subverted by the overly sentimental chanson. The video raises questions, is the floating body alive or dead? Why is the body floating in the ocean? The tension of anticipating the body finally washing ashore, but never does, is central to the film loop. There is a certain humour in subverting the quest for meaning and expectation. (Fig 09).

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[30] Arnold, Grant, Bradley, Jessica, et al. Rodney Graham: A little Thought.
[31] Ibid.

There is a certain freedom that developed in my narratives that became less self-conscious and more self-reflexive. This can be seen in how I as the skate punker in *"…Shit Happens"* evolved into the citizen scientists and the "shape shifters" of the *TDIU* (Fig 10) and the floating body in *La Mer: The Stars are so Beautiful.*

I see other elements starting to operate as characters, such as the tailed-pants in *TDIU: Clothing Artifact* (Fig 11) or the tri-pedal *Remote Viewers,* which as anthropomorphic objects are starting to become narrative actors themselves. (Fig 12)

Fig. 04   *Temporal Displacement Investigative Unit: Field Kit* (2016)
                 Note Books, Chalk Board, Chalk, Pens, Pencil, Rulers, Numbered Markers
                 in Water Tight Plastic Container (not shown).
                 Dimensions Vary.

Fig. 05   *Temporal Displacement Investigative Unit: Retrieval 2016.09.18 S3 Zone4 10:40am*
(2016)
Chalk Board, Numbered Marker, Found (and Retrieved) Artifact.
Dimensions Vary.

Fig. 06   *Temporal Displacement Investigative Unit: Incident Board (2016)*
Archival Boxes, Clothing Article, Photocopies, Newspaper Clippings, Pins, Thread, Post-It Notes and
Ephemera in sealed Plastic Bags.
Dimensions Vary.

Fig. 07   *"…Shit Happens!" At the Hang-Out* (2016)
                 Mixed Media: Shadow Box, Photos Framed.
                 200x305x35mm (8"x12"x1.5")

Fig. 08   *Untitled…After - City Self, Country Self by Rodney Graham.* (2017)
Mixed Media: Foam Board, Photocopies, Digital Prints, Wood Support Structure.
420x900x130mm (15.5"x36"x5")

Links to artist and works referenced:

http://www.drainmag.com/index_psy.htm?http://www.drainmag.com/ContentPSYCHOGEOGRAPHY/Essays/Fitzpatrick/Fitzpatrick.html

http://bordercrossingsmag.com/article/graham-cracklings-rodney-grahams-conceptual-energy

https://www.phillips.com/detail/RODNEY-GRAHAM/UK010817/180

Fig. 9   *The Sea / La Mer: The Stars Are So Beautiful* (2017)
                 Video, Colour, Sound, 8.25 minutes (shown as continuous loop)
                 Video Still.
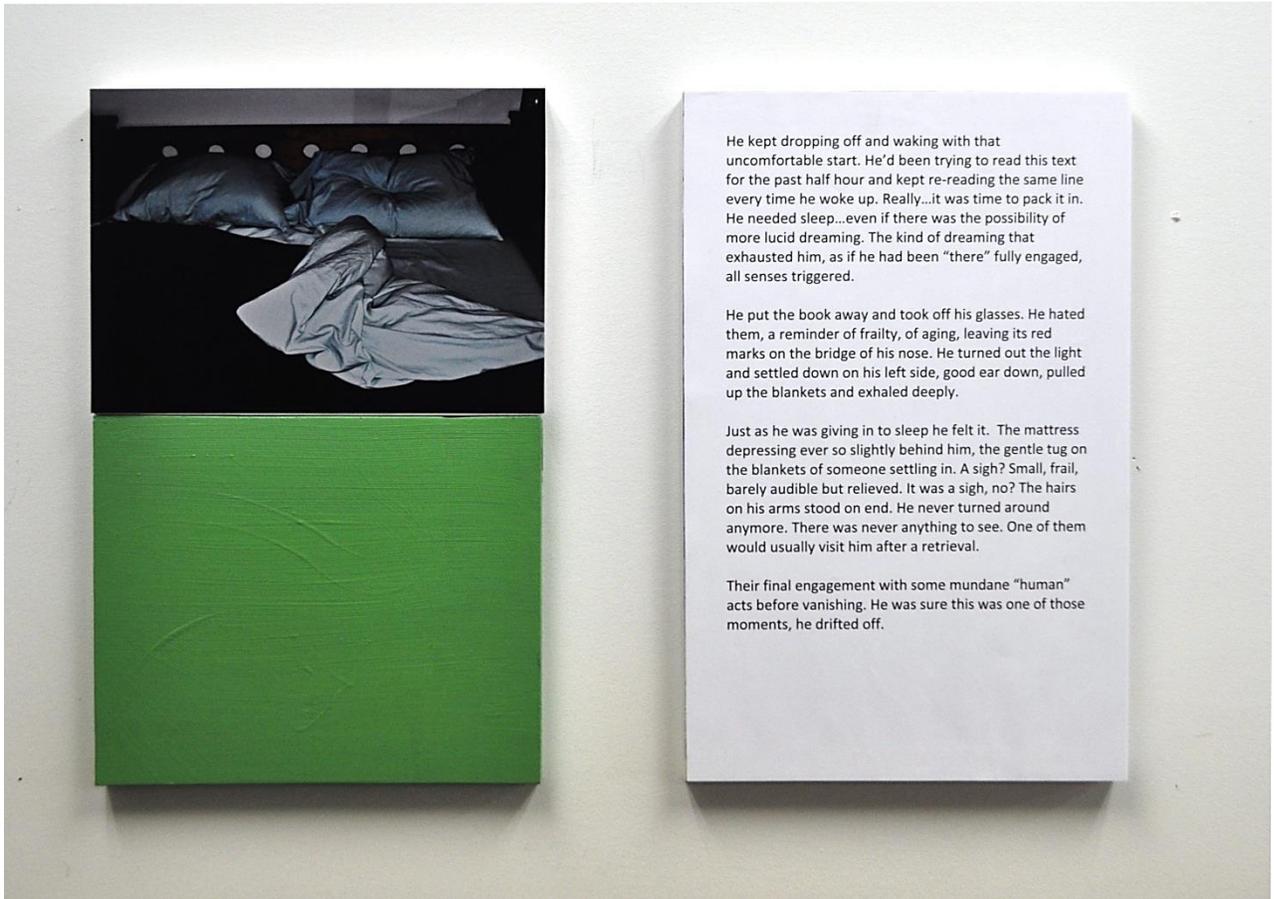
Fig. 10   *T.D.I.U. He kept Dropping off…* (2017)
Mixed Media: Photo, Coloured Card Stock, Text on Bond on Two Wood Cradled Panels.
430x600x19mm (17"x12"x.75")

Fig. 11   *Temporal Displacement Investigative Unit: Clothing Artifact* (2016)
                     Clothing Article: Pants, Modified, Painted Twig on MDF Mini Plinth on Platform
                     305x1200x1200mm (12"x48"x48")

Fig. 12   *Remote Viewer: Prototype DS02b* (2017)
MDF Container, Coloured Glass, Yellow Acrylic Sheet,
Rock Samples on Photography Tripod.
500 x 500 x 1700mm (19.7"x19.7"x67")

ALLEGORY[32]: Devices in Play…Playful Devices

Narrators often employ props to add emphasis, something akin to *"show and tell"*. When the Royal Society was established in the Sixteenth Century, the meetings were characterized by *"show and tell"* like events. Ideas, objects and ephemera were presented for discussion and this characterized much of the discourse well into the era of Charles Darwin.[33] When I was in grade school in the 1970's I was an ardent participant in the elementary ritual of *"show and tell"*. I was not averse to embellishing the stories of my objects, not out of a sense of trying to deceive, but because the story had so much more potential that the actual artifact. Valuable lessons were learned about the telling of tales and an audience's eagerness to be carried away.

An important aspect of my practice is collecting objects, ephemera, text, images and materials. Collecting things is similar to collecting one's thoughts. Collecting is a form of equipping yourself for possibles. Objects can become signifiers, which can be employed as mnemonic devices to trigger memories and emotional responses. My archive contains boxes of objects, ephemera, images and text, and though each of these "things" has its own inherent meaning and history, they will eventually be re-contextualized and be imbued with additional meanings and intentions. In re-contextualizing there is an opportunity for the viewer to decipher meanings by bringing out what is within the object and what is within themselves.

Wunderkammer, museological and archival tropes is something I have employed in my practice for a number of years; they can be seen as variations of "show and tell". For example in *"…Shit Happens!"* and the *T.D.I.U.* it is the troubling of the act of display that offers new ways of creating a revised context for speculative narratives. Hal Foster argues that the artist's use of collections and by extension archives and display tropes such as the *Wunderkammer* can be seen as allegorical devices, which serve to create "…'alternative knowledge' and 'counter-memory', through vernacular exchanges, narrative asides and entropic gaps." [34]

Collecting for possibles is an aspect of the practices of Susan Hiller and Mark Dion that I find parallels my own body of work. They investigate the tensions between intuitive, imaginative and scientific, rational knowledge. In her 1994 installation at the Freud Museum in London, Hiller deploys her objects in archeological boxes in dialogue with Sigmund Freud's carefully collected and catalogued ephemera in his study. She asks that her objects merit the same consideration as those that are carefully preserved in Freud's "Home Shrine". By confining her objects to a centrally located vitrine she forces focus. The tension between her everyday objects and Freud's collection creates a fraught dynamic. The proximity of the two narratives to each other's gravitational pull is what produces a temporal distortion in their meanings; this is where new dialogues emerge. (Fig 13)

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[32] I use Allegory as the narrative or pictorial representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures or material manifestations.
[33] The Royal Society - The President, Council and Fellows of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge was established in London 1660. Wikipedia entry *The Royal Society.* Retrieved from *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society*
[34] Hal Foster. *Archives of Modern Art.* From *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)*

Fig. 13   *Untitled…After - From the Freud Museum by Susan Hiller.* (2018)
Mixed Media: Archival Boxes, Ephemera, Text.
700x2200x550mm (27.5"x86.5"x21.5")

Link to artist and works referenced:

https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hiller-from-the-freud-museum-t07438

Echoing Marcel Duchamp[35], Hiller points out that:

"… the narrative that collections or assemblages of things make… there are always at least two possible stories: one is the story that the narrator, in this case the artist, thinks she is telling…and the other is the story that the listener is understanding or hearing or imagining on the basis of the same objects."[36]

Similarly to Hiller, in his project *Thames Dig (1999)* American artist Mark Dion's acts of collecting function as a type of archeology that retrieves, cleans, catalogues, archives and displays the detritus of the everyday. The objects become elevated in both meaning and value by the attention accorded to them by the museological display tropes he employs.[37] (Fig 14) This opens up a discussion as to what merits attention and how we assign value to the objects left behind by society.

For both Hiller and Dion the act of collecting, categorizing and displaying relies on research to contextualize and make sense of the collected. Research forms the framing device for how the ephemera is situated in the world.

My practice also relies on research. My need to research has the traits of being an *autodidact.* I research for the pleasure and wonder of discovery. By poring through books and images, by physically exploring the world, I can unlock the potentials of all that is ready to be discovered. Understanding and being open to potentials opens ever more avenues. Research creates a marvelous loop that feeds on itself. In my practice I collect far more material than needed, but this is important. It is from a position of overabundance that I am able to parse out the essential distillates that will inform my narratives.

In my own work, *La Mer*, presented during the MFA Interim Exhibition (2017), continued my exploration of archival and museological tropes. *La Mer* was comprised of a number of elements. The video *La Mer: The Stars are so Beautiful,* acted as the starting off point. I had created some purpose built white gessoed display assemblages as armatures for the display of objects. There were also some cast plaster topographies that related to possible locales in the narrative. A freestanding sculptural element bearing the sweater I wore in the video stood in the centre. Within the sweater, a speaker (playing an incantation of memories) and lights configured in the shape of the big dipper. A series of bundled whited washed books were resting at its feet. The remnants of a wooden lifeboat, a chance discovery in a marsh on Kootenay Lake (far from the coast) took up a prominent hinge point. (Fig 15, 16)

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[35] Marcel Duchamp in *The Creative Act* stressed that no art work is complete without a viewer's engagement.

[36] Farr, Ian (Editor). *Memory: Documents of Contemporary Art. Susan Hiller "Working Through Objects"*. (41-48).

[37] Erickson, Ruth. Mark Dion: Misadventures of a 21st Century Naturalist. (27)

My own impressions and from the critiques I received, were that the installation contained too many elements for the space given. As a result the pieces competed for attention creating an overload of visuals and information. In response I made some adjustments, such as removing the images and objects from the display assemblages. The addition of a small sheet of pink wax in one of the assemblages created an unexpected frisson. It made me realize that there was a sculptural potential in the play with shape and colour that could carry the piece. I carried the lessons forward to the Independent Studies Term Micro Exhibits in the Fall of 2017, in particular the installation called *Remote Viewer.*[38] The Spring 2018 term offered further opportunities to test and refine how the *Remote Viewers* could be employed and what other elements could be introduced in dialogue. The question that emerged was what holds the narrative together in the space of the gallery?

Remote Viewer includes tripod mounted works that suggest surveying, surveillance and viewing. These devices attempt to reveal lost histories, memories and dreams. They attempt to record and preserve. These devices often offer more than the one perspective, further exploration allows for the potential to discover the not readily apparent. They are speculative and are to be seen as prototypes as they might offer the promise of full functionality in some near future. It is about plausible potential and the desire to create devices to expand our senses and if possible our extra-senses In *Remote Viewer t*he elements were reduced to suggestions, in particular redacted pages from my own diaries, in which the remaining text yielded the fragmentary records of half remembered dreams.

My now empty assemblages take on the role of supports and framing devices that act to trouble the display strategies of museological and archival tropes, they do this by either revealing or withholding information. *Remote Viewer* begins to create spatial encounters between structures, text and objects. The cues are not always reliable; there are anomalies, things that are enigmatic and not necessarily legible on first encounter. The components operate like a code that if deciphered might offer some clues. (Fig 17, 18, 19)

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[38] Remote Viewer draws its name from research work conducted by the Stanford Research Institute for the United States Government between 1975 and 1990. The premise was to test the military intelligence potential of the psychic ability to "remote view" enemy installations and documents. This type of research belongs to the category of Psy-Ops (Psychic Operations). Remote Viewer plays with the idea that it is possible to create devices that can tap into psychic powers to see remotely, to recover memories and to see dreams. Wikipedia entry for *Remote Viewing.* Retrieved from *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remote_viewing*

Fig. 14   *Untitled…After - Thames Dig by Mark Dion.* (2018)
Installation View: Display Cabinet, Ephemera, Text, Archive Boxes.
1950x1420x1070mm (76.75"x56"x42")

Link to artist and works referenced:

https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dion-tate-thames-dig-t07669

Fig. 15   *La Mer* (2017)
                                 Installation: Wooden Lifeboat Artifact, Video, Sound, LED Lights, Sweater,
                                 Post Cards, Plaster Cast Objects, Books, Wood Display Assemblages.
                                 Dimensions Vary

Fig. 16   *La Me:* Detail View – Lifeboat Artifact (2017)
Wooden Lifeboat Artifact on Wood Base.
670x1200x1200mm (26.5"x48"x48")

The work of Tom Sachs and Richard E Prince are analogous to *Remote Viewer.*

Tom Sachs plays with the devices and tools of science. He creates small or life-size models, which haphazardly try to replicate real life machines. In his ongoing project *Apollo* (2007) for example, he recreated the Lunar Excursion Module (LEM), of NASA's Apollo Lunar mission, in full scale. This model is then used to produce a live broadcast simulation of the Lunar Mission. Sachs' Space Program is a critical reframing, though humorously inaccurate, of a seminal historic moment. (Fig 20)

In works such as *Remote Viewer,* the devices toy with the purposeful language of surveying and surveillance equipment. It is only on closer inspection that their inherent technological incapability are revealed. Small dioramas and objects act as stand-ins for the expected real-time information displays. The pieces oscillate between the perception of functionality and the provisional. Materials on hand are adapted and repurposed. This operates similarly to the installations of Tom Sachs, who characterizes his practice as one of bricolage. For Sachs, a *bricoleur* is one "who hobbles together functional contraptions out of already given or collected materials," which he re-tools and re-signifies into new objects with novel uses, but more importantly, which he regenerates into a new, oscillating syntax: one of loss, gain, and more than anything, one of play.[39]

Richard E Prince is the opposite of Tom Sachs. Prince is also playful, but very seriously so. His objects are as finely crafted, as are his narratives. In Richard E Prince's exhibition *As I was Reading….* the sculptures function as allegorical devices and memory triggers for events depicted in the novels he had read as a child. (Fig 21)

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[39] Wikipedia: Tom Sachs. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Sachs_(artist)

Fig. 17   *Remote Viewer:* Installation View (2017)
                            Installation: Diaries, MDF Boxes, Coloured Glass, Acrylic Sheet,
                            Rock samples on tripods.
                            Dimensions Vary

Fig. 18   *Remote Viewer: Prototype DS02b* - Detail View (2017)
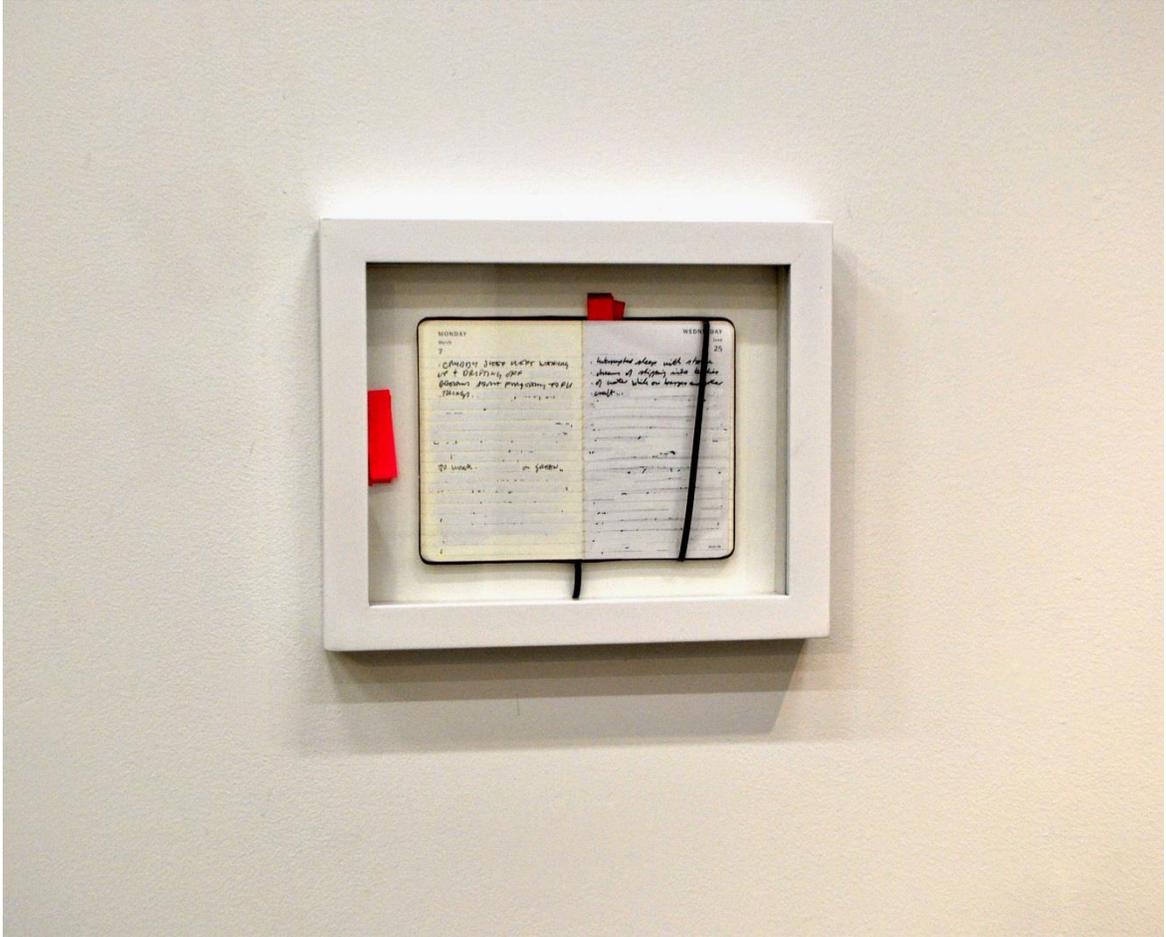
Fig. 19   *Remote Viewer: 0808/0809* Detail (2017)
                 Diary, audio tape, coloured self-adhesive tags, framed.
                 200x250x25mm (8"x10"x1")
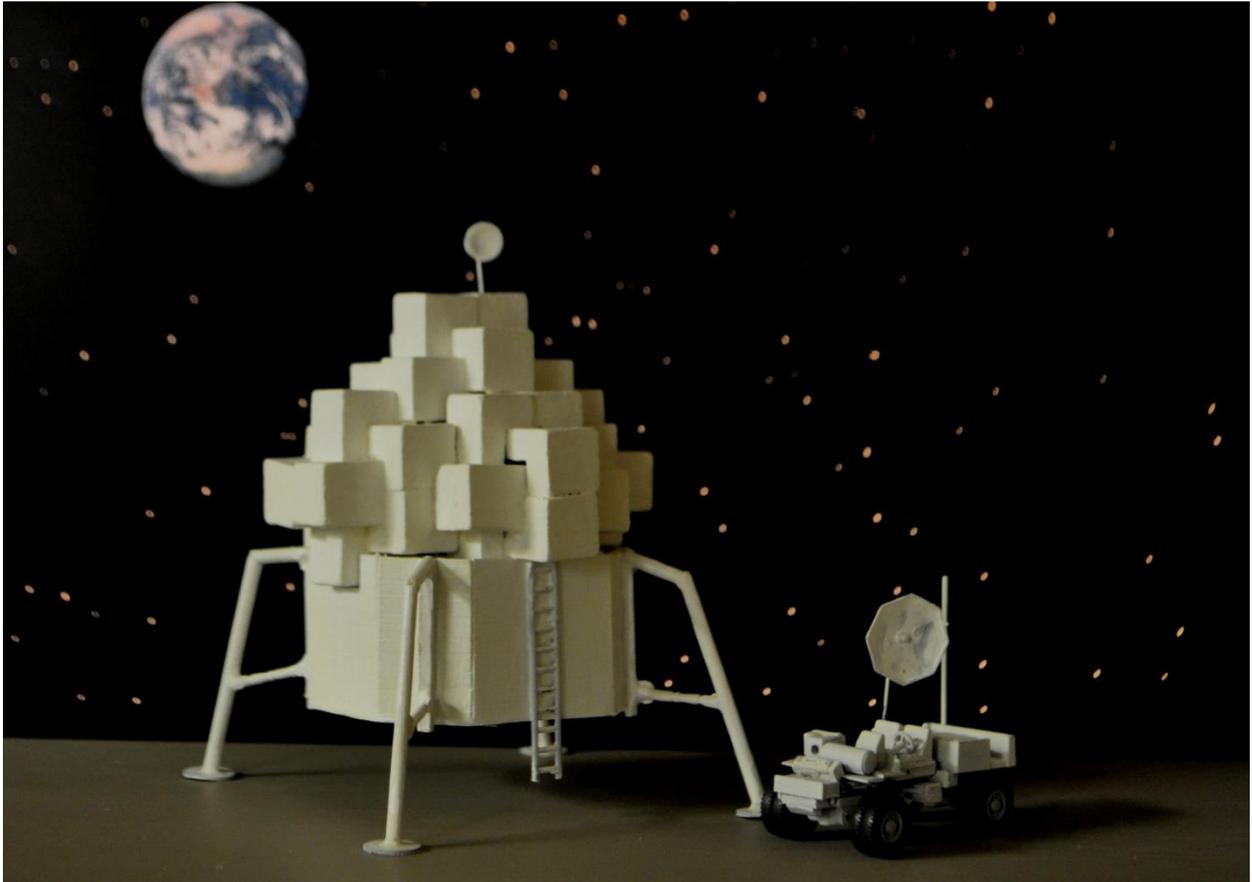
Fig. 20   *Untitled…After - Apollo: Lunar Excursion Module(LEM) by Tom Sachs* (2018)
Mixed Media: Wood Puzzle Game, Cardboard, Bamboo, Plastic Model Parts, Mylar, LED Lighting.
200x305x200mm (8"x12"x8")

Link to artist and works referenced:

https://www.tomsachs.org/work/apollo-lem

Fig. 21   *Untitled…After - Africa in Flames by Richard E Prince.* (2018)
Mixed Media: Perforated Metal, Wood, Cardboard, Wire, Plastic Model Parts.
170x320x270mm (6.7"x12.5"x10.5")

Links to artist and works referenced:

https://richardeprince.com/

https://richardeprince.com/2017/02/11/1980s/#jp-carousel-180

Wylie, Liz. *Richard E. Prince: Telling Stories* Kelowna: Kelowna Art Gallery. 2012. Exhibition Catalogue.

The highly finished sculptures attest to Prince's fascination with craftsmanship. This can be explained by his early interest in architecture and his emplo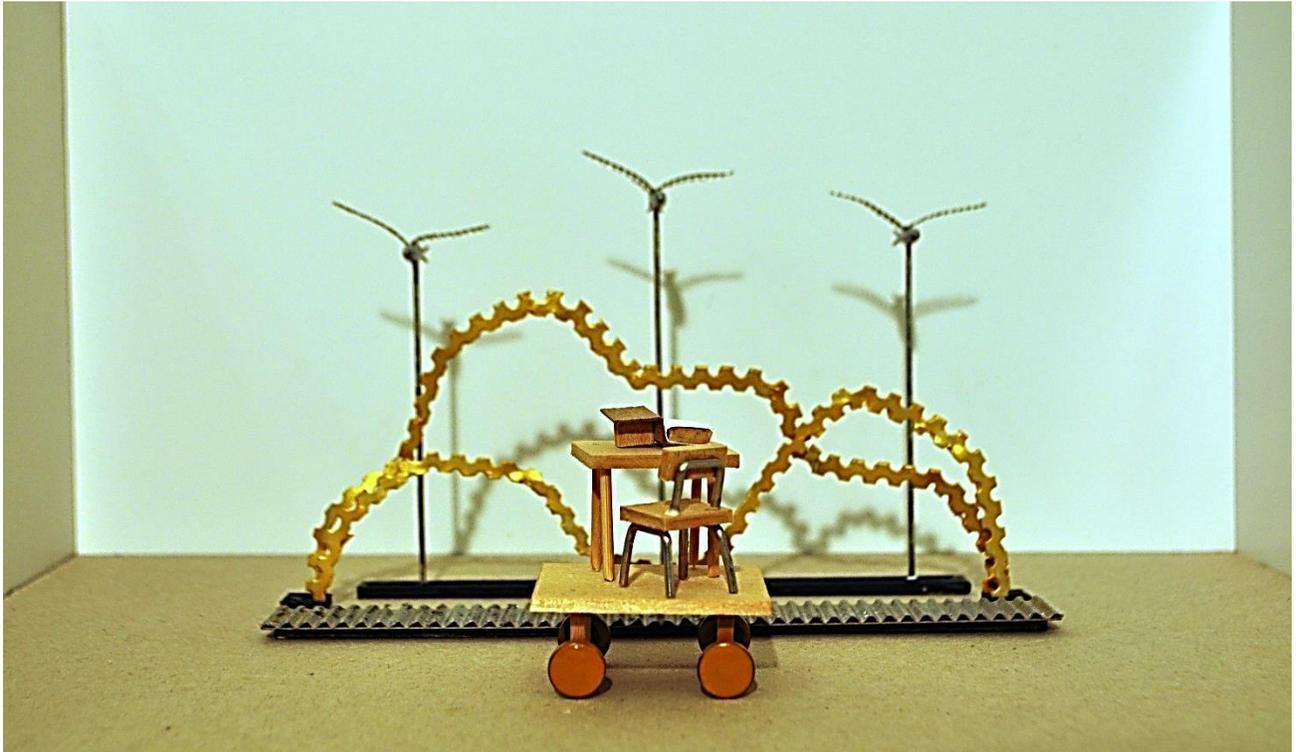yment in an architectural model making shop at the beginning of his artistic career, something that resonates with my own experiences. His totemic pieces make complex inferences, linkages and associations. The dialogue that is created between the vagaries of memory and his purposeful, machine like memory objects elicit both curiosity and unease; they are beguiling and threatening at the same time, useful lessons for my own work.

Remote Viewers is situated between these two practices. My work plays with the dodgyness and humour of Sachs, but also the earnestness of Prince's memory objects. It is the creation of an infrastructure, a scaffold of objects, text, images, sound and video that through engagement with a space, generates narratives. The play between allowing interpretive openness and more didactic strategies creates entry points for viewer's engagement.

Similarly to Sachs, I find myself constantly trying out new materials and methods; figuring out how to make any given technique work. For example for my *T.D.I.U.* project, I created a video demonstrating how to isolate DNA strands using common household products, (Fig 24) or having to learn how to work with electronics to produce the sound and light effects for *Appliance Phenomena: Aurora Borealis*. (Fig 25)

I sometimes succeed, but just as often fail. At times, the failure is better than what was hoped for and more useful. There are also those moments when something just cannot be made to work. There is satisfaction in finding a work around especially if, in the end, it still remains true to the original intent. Different materials, methods and means open up different potentialities. The play with these potentials is where the slippages of meaning reside. Mastery is not important, not the goal. Keeping it within the realm of trial and error maintains a sketch like vagueness, a disarming and perhaps even naïve point of entry. It is the trial run, the test that is important, it keeps the result slightly untethered and in the realm of the prototype, which oscillates between the potential for failure and the promise of success.

I admire British artist Cornelia Parker's willingness to play and experiment. She will research histories, materials and methods, often collaborating with specialists and experts, to realize her concepts. A recent work of hers involved collecting the graphite dust from the sketchbooks of several famous artists, such as William Blake. It was then processed into *graphene*, which is a super thin, incredibly strong and highly conductive material. The graphene was integrated into a circuit which when activated, triggered a fireworks spectacle.[40] (Fig 23) I see Parker's fearlessness and openness as a great inspiration for my own practice. I am drawn to her ethic of curiosity and experimentation. It is an ethic that seeks to suss out how to achieve an imagined outcome, and to either "figure it out" yourself or collaborate with those who have the expertise.

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[40] *Graphene art to reopen Manchester's Whitworth gallery* Reported by Ian Youngs, BBC News, 2014-03-07. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-26482062

Fig. 22   *TDIU: Educational Video 02: How to Isolate DNA using Household Products* (2016)
Video, Colour, Sound, 5:39 minutes (shown as continuous loop)
Video Still.

Fig. 23   *Appliance Phenomena: Aurora Borealis* (2017)
Stainless Steel Electric Kettle, Led Lights, Electronics, Plaster, Plastic Model Structures and Wire Mesh.
240x215mmØ (9.5"x8.5"Ø)

Fig. 22   *Untitled…After - Blakean Abstract by Cornelia Parker.* (2018)
Mixed Media: Digital Print, Cardboard, Mylar, LED Lights, Sparkler, Plastic Storage Boxes, Lexan and Acrylic Media.
350x305x180 (13.75"x12"x7")

Links to artist and works referenced:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzJ9QkgcBcw

CONCLUSION: Cartomancy and Divination

Over the past terms, I have continued to play with different materials, video and sound. I have also accepted that writing and photography play a significant role in my practice, though this is a discussion beyond the purpose of the thesis. At this point, I feel that my practice has developed a level of proficiency with exploring and employing various techniques, media and materials. It has expanded the breadth of concepts and ideas that my narratives can draw from.

The installation as a device has proven to be a productive avenue of exploration and has resulted in more immersive ways of presenting my ideas. By inhabiting and creating space and place my work shifts closer to a more architectural response, which is starting to draw from my experience as an architect. As in my art practice architectural space can a stage that embodies the distillation of various often conflicting narratives, which range from the desires of the users to the pragmatic concerns of the building code, space planning or budget constraints. These narratives need to be woven together into what needs to be a cohesive environment. It is an environment that acts as a stage set with props and prompts. My installations are similar to buildings in that they are environments reflecting an amalgamation of memory, experience and pragmatics. It draws on the past to function in the present and attempts to anticipate the future. At its best these constructed environments function as setting, stage, refuge and a space that becomes place. These are lessons that I adapt to my art practice.

My fictions are acts of recovery. I approach them with sincerity Perhaps this is a naïve stance in an era of post truth, "truthiness" and fake news. However, I believe that the playful employ of parafictions fulfill a longing for narratives that offer more nuanced views of how we are situated in the world and the possibility and belief in elusive horizons. An acceptance that meaning is wavering and that there is a constant and necessary oscillation between facts and fictions that the simple act of storytelling can reveal. It is a way for creating openings to re-engage with the sense of wonder.

I do not employ irony, detachment and humour as primary stances, stances that aim to set apart, to remain aloof or to avoid commitment, but rather they are an incidental, welcome byproduct of my process. I wish to seek out a playful and critical reengagement with the actual, with mystery, sublime, beauty and the desire of wanting to believe. It is all about the joy of dropping one's guard, even if just for a moment, to enjoy an experience in a state of sincere naivety. The works of the artists I have cited such as Susan Hiller, Cornelia Parker, Mark Dion and Richard E Prince seem to approach their work with a sincere belief in the power of playfulness, storytelling and the inherent wonder in the strangeness of our world.

POST SCRIPT: Post-Partum Reflections

For my final installation I had decided to experiment with a more deliberate spatial intervention in the gallery space. This was a continuation of my explorations with the first iterations of *Remote Viewer* in the Grad Gallery over the Spring Term.

I was interested in the potential dialogue between my art, my own built interventions and the gallery architecture. I saw my narrative unfolding over a series of tableaus that were linked by text, landscape references, video and sound and a deliberate strategy of using white display assemblages and apparatus in contrast with more materially invested objects such as the *Remote Viewers*.

Though the final version of my installation *Remote Viewer* followed closely the plans presented in my exhibition proposal there were some decisions made in situ. I laid out a few possible configurations with masking tape in the gallery, which informed my decision on the width, length and height of the walls, while also acknowledging standard sizes of building materials. Once the built walls were in place I fine-tuned their final locations settling on the proportions of the "room" and the relationship to the existing walls that felt best.

In an earlier discussion with visiting artist Deanna Bowen we worked through some strategies for claiming the gallery space as my own. The result was that I chose to paint the inside of the room black and to black out the lighting to create a darker more mysterious space that sat in contrast to the language of the white box.

This room, containing my piece *…of Hours: Compline*, separated the installation into "front house" with the pieces *(De) Accession Cart* and plinth mounted *Singularity Reliquary* and "back house" containing some wall hung works as well as *Display Assemblage: VP-w-SS-LB*. The tripod *Remote Viewers* operated as satellites in the gallery, surveying and surveilling. (Fig 23, 24, 25, 26, 27)

I chose to make the passage ways into the room slightly narrower than a standard door to draw attention to the experience of transitioning from outside to inside via a constricted threshold. I knew that this violation of accessibility standards would be a provocation, but decided to push the boundaries regardless. This decision generated a fruitful discussion during my thesis defense that questioned the accessibility of my work beyond mere interpretation to consider how the body physically accesses work. This is something that I had hoped to achieve. Stepping back, I need to think through how I encourage and discourage the viewer's movement and engagement with the work as a strategy. (Fig28, 29)

For me these were important experiments in creating a spatial encounter that played with procession, opening and closing, revealing and obscuring. This raised the issue as to whether the room and the separation were productive interventions. In retrospect though it didn't work as intended, however the discussion generated on the nature of space, the ideal sequence of experiencing the installation, movement through space in time and the play with private and public experiences was very productive. I will need to continue my experiments to discover how to maintain the cohesiveness and legibility of the installation while at the same time playing with strategies of intervention.

The "front house" seemed to have worked better than the "back house", the difference being the cohesiveness and spatial separation of the objects in the "front house" side versus the objects that

operated on a different register and density in the "back house" (where some editing would have helped). The room containing *…of Hours: Compline* operated somewhere in between. Its feeling of compression seemed to create unease and discouraged prolonged engagement by the viewer. That said, the responses generated were a good lesson on the effect and affect of intentional space on the viewer. The configuration also raised the issue of whether there was too little space for the elements to breathe or whether the installation was too dense in some areas. It was also observed that Installation operated more as Allegory than Parafiction, which was interesting. I take this to mean that the legibility of the backstory was in this case quite minimal. Admittedly I was interested in exploring how far I could allow the installation to sit from the origin story, I am still not sure how I feel about the degree of decoupling that this version of *Remote Viewer* achieved.

I am still of mixed mind whether the spatial separation of one of the *Remote Viewers* to the front of the gallery was a successful strategy. Responses were mixed, with the piece not fully registering as an integral component, but (when working) successfully drawing in the curious

Overall the readings I received on the individual works were thoughtful and indicated interest and engagement and reflected my intentions. As a group, though the narrative threads were legible, the cues and clues I provided were not always deliberately reliable; there were anomalies, things that were enigmatic and not necessarily legible on first encounter, which added to the discussion of what is too much and too little information. The installation operated on the threshold of decipherability, (the comment of "teasing" the viewer came up), which was a welcome reaction when compared to my earlier work which came across as quite didactic.

Overall I was pleased with the feedback I received on my presentation and the installation. It was an experiment and a work in progress. The discussion was generous and thought provoking and is providing a good basis for further exploration and experimentation. I feel that I am on a good and generative course.

My biggest take away was Jesse Birch's comment as to whether my practice is an investigation into "wonder". This is interesting, though I did not write about wonder specifically in my thesis; I did allude to it in my thesis defense. I intend to investigate this idea further since it seems to characterize my motivations for acts of recovery and the essence of my narratives. I have since started on a new round of research looking into the nature of wonder as a device for art making.

Jesse Birch had mentioned *Resonance and Wonder* by Stephen Greenblatt, which was a great introduction. This has led me to other texts that appear promising *Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice* edited by Christian Mieves and Irene Brown. Barbara Maria Safford and Frances Terpack's *Devices of Wonder* and Lisa Corrin's *A natural History of Wonder.* I have also looked into a series of exhibitions that take on the topic of wonder in art of which *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* curated by Brian Dillon is of particular interest. At this point I am excited about this new avenue for research and creative production, and am eager to see where it might lead.
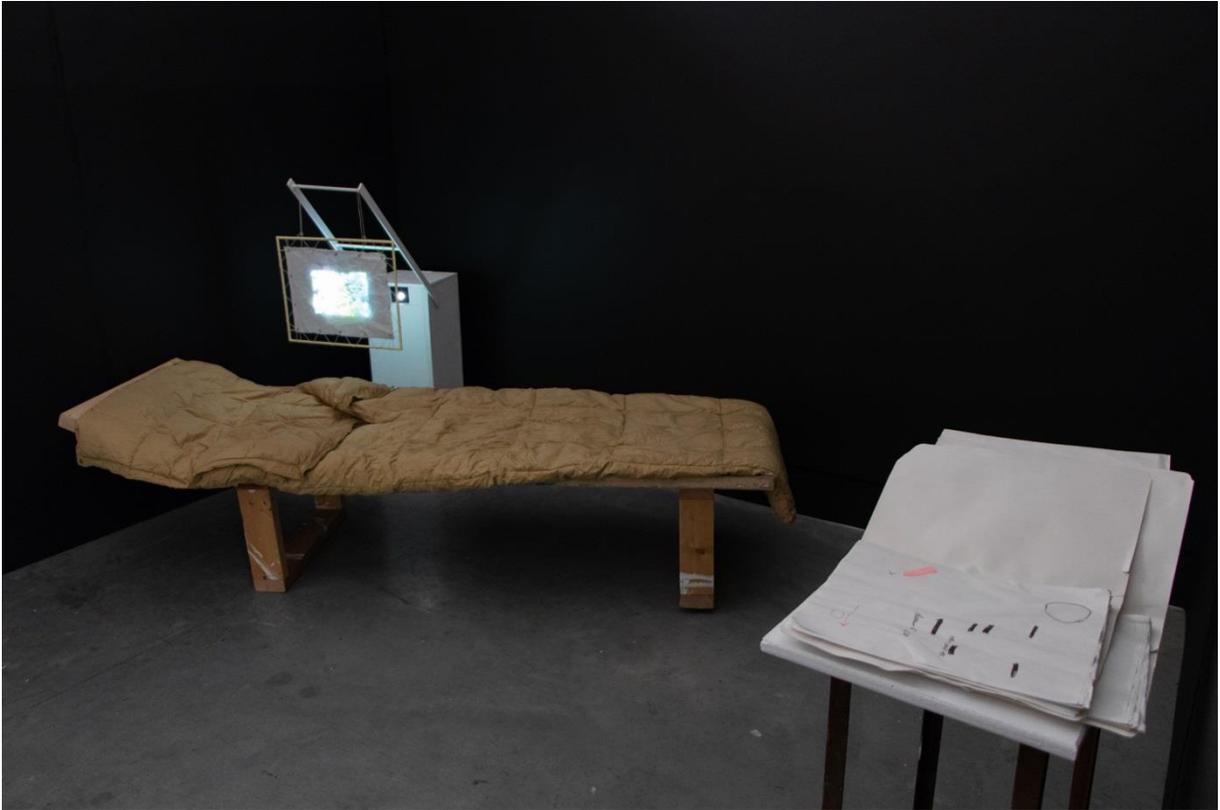
Fig. 23   *Remote Viewer: Compline* (2018)
                    Mixed Media: Plywood and Wood Stud Framed Walls, Wood Cot, Sleeping Bag,
                    Plywood Plinth with Cloth and Wood Dowel Screen.
                    Video 10:02" played as continuous loop.
                    2440x3050x3455mm (96"x120"x136")

Fig. 24   *(De) Accession Cart* (2018)
                                 Mixed Media: Wood Cart with Steel Handle and Casters, Cotton Drop Sheet, Cotton
                                 Cord, Wrapped Objects.
                                 1120x1950x700mm (44"x76.75"x27.5")

Fig. 25   *Singularity Reliquary* (2018)
Mixed Media: Oxford Complete Dictionary 1936 Edition, Acrylic Medium, Metal
Objects within Metal Container painted in Singularity Black® on MDF Dias.
200x550x340mm (8"x21.5"x13.4")

Fig. 26   *Remote Viewer: Installation View.* (2017-2018)
From Left:
Remote Viewer: 0808/0809; Things are Further than They Appear No 04 and Display Assemblage: VP-w-SS-LB
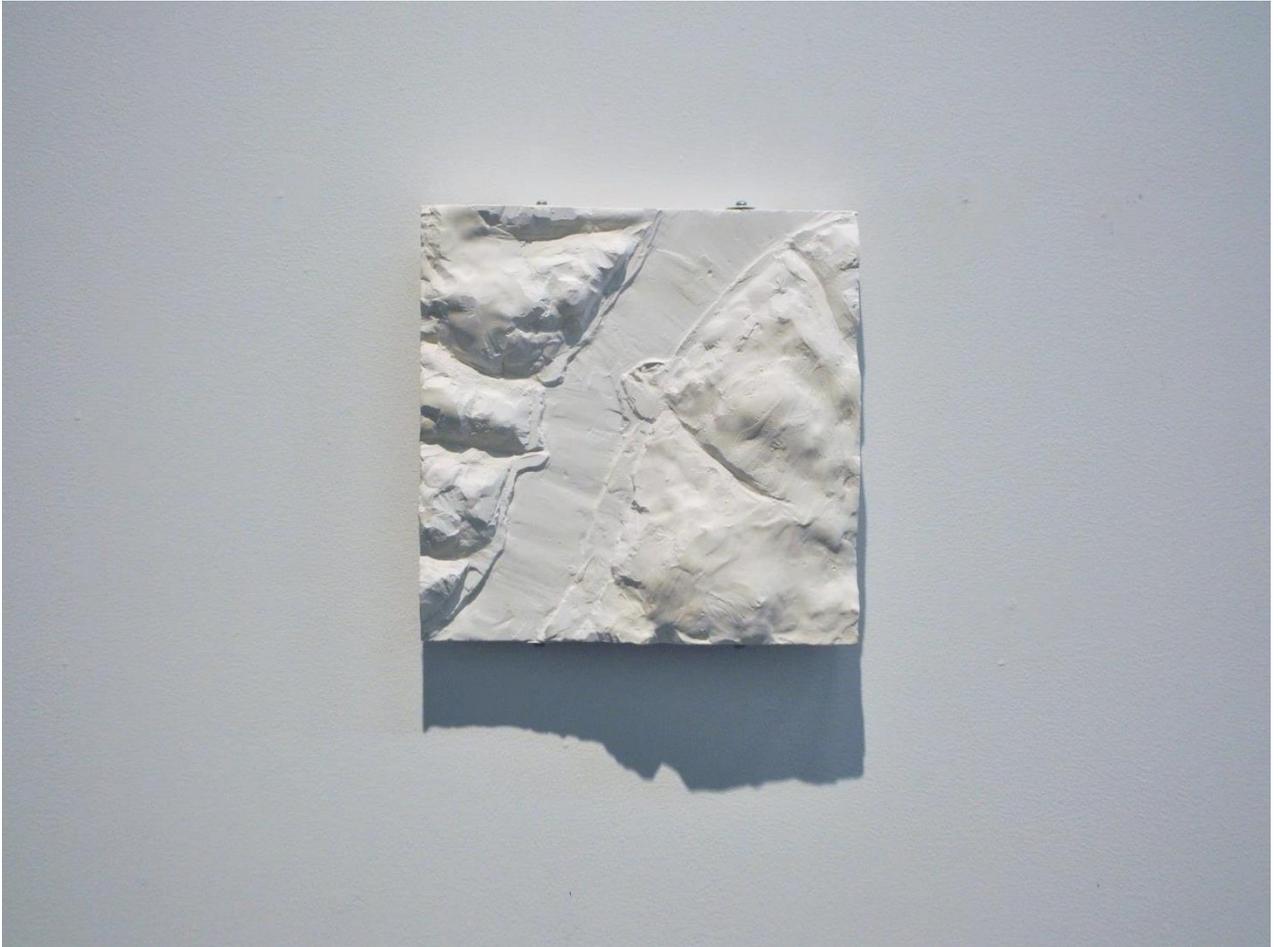Mixed Media
Dimensions Vary

Fig. 27   *Remote Viewer: Topography 04* (2017)
Plaster on Support Frame
250x250x25mm (10"x10"x1")

Fig. 27   *Remote Viewer: Prototype DS02b*-v.2 (2017-2018)
MDF Carcass, Coloured Glass, Yellow Acrylic Sheet, Wire Mesh,
Rock Samples on Photography Tripod.
500x500x1700mm (19.7"x19.7"x67")

Fig. 27   *Geistige Maschine: T.S.Zs Prototyp 01* (2018)
                 Plywood and Sheet Metal Carcass, LED Screen, Projector, Welding Safety Goggles,
                 Video on Surveyor Tripod with Plywood and Wood Stud Bench.
                 Dimension Varies

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