A Walk of 20 Steps: Representing Memory of Place
Elizabeth Kealy-Morris, Art & Design
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Introduction

Thesis title:
The Artist Book: making as embodied knowledge of practice & the self

This interdisciplinary practice-based doctoral research project aims to develop unique knowledge in the areas of experiential, tacit, representational learning through the embodied and material making of artefacts representing personal memory and a study of a culture lived by the author and producer of the project.

The project considers the relationship between personal memory and embodied knowledge of place utilising practice-based visual output as both material and metaphoric representations of knowledge. This investigation will engage with theories of personal memory, human geography, visual culture and material culture. Applying the overarching methodologies of autoethnography and pedagogy, this study considers whether, through the making of handmade artefacts, it might be possible to develop a more confident, self-conscious creative voice able to articulate one's identity more clearly. This project has emerged from my curiosity of whether new knowledge of practice, creativity, expression and the self might emerge from the embodied practice of making with one's hands.

Through developing visual strategies in hand bookbinding, documentary photography and photographic collage this study will explore how the handmade artefact might support the representation of embodied knowledge of place. Central to this investigation will be the development of embodied, theoretical and material knowledge through learning new craft-based skills and how the development of this knowledge/skills base might influence my teaching of design theory and practice in degree and postgraduate study.

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Place of Memory, Site of Memory

As my autoethnographic study is centred not on an event but the place I spent the formative years of my childhood these are memories of place rather than events which require an interdisciplinary study between the theories of cultural memory and human geography. Nora (1989) and Halbwachs (1992) were both interested in how memories that groups and cultures held were at once different from historical fact and endured through time. Nora delineated between 'sites of memory' and 'sites of history' and notes that "Memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events" (Nora,1989, p.22). Halbwachs (1992, p.204) notes that when groups have a 'place in space' that is shared and are able to attach their collective memories to, these memories persist for longer. Nora's (1989) work documenting the diverse range of French national sites of memory[1] demonstrates that the "where" of memory changes over time and that official memory can be challenged by alternative forms of cultural memory. Just like memory, then, place is also unstable and open to shifting social perceptions about its function and use.

Karen E. Till's (2003) analysis of Halbwachs' and Nora's work has influenced my study of cultural attachment to place. An ethno-geographer, Till is particularly interested in the way in which groups create meaning and identity through places. She considers sites of memory[2] to be more than simply monuments of national

[1] Nora's project includes in the list of national sites of memory architecture, public festivals, books and monuments (Till, 2003: 291).

[2] In her conclusion to her book chapter "Places of Memory" Till argues that "Places of memory include museums, monuments, cemeteries, statuary, public buildings and squares, streets, historic preservation projects, plaques and memorials as well as the rituals, images and practices associated with them" (Till, 2003: 297).

events but also places of historical meaning and power relations. Till suggests

that social groups establish places of memory for many reasons, perhaps to

challenge dominant power relations or to contribute to the group's politics of

everyday life (Till, 2003, p.297).

The practice of meaningful place-making becomes all the more important in the

postmodern epoch of time-space compression and spatial volatility according to

David Harvey (2003) and Andreas Huyssen (2003). Harvey's argument is that in

the face of the spatial and temporal shifts since the 1970s the expansion of place-

bound identities has become more important today. There has been a rediscovery

of place within culture as part of the search for alternative securities due to

spatial instability. What Huyssen suggests is at stake in today's 'culture of

memory' is the desire to slow the time-space compression defining this epoch by

securing some continuity and "to provide some extension of lived space within

which we can breathe and move" (Huyssen, 2003, p.24). My previous

postgraduate study (Kealy-Morris, 2008) considered the way groups might attach

meanings to places in an urban environment, with this study I shift to considering

the spaces and places within middle-class American suburbs, the place of my

youth.

Suburbia

Before the age of factory mass production, work and home hadn't been separate.

Schaeffer & Sclar (1980) note,

> The walking city, in all its varied forms, was designed to minimize the
> requirement for transportation through collocation. At least as long as small
> household-sized workshops could manufacture as cheaply as large plants,
> these designs were a success as far as work trips and goods movement
> were concerned (p.16).

Schaeffer & Sclar (1980) write that with the technical, social and economic
development of the factory system of production introduced by the Industrial
Revolution, the urban design which prioritized ease of association and connection
for reasons of trade and transport was no longer useful and, in essence, pushed
the walking city to near collapse. Workers could no longer live near their
workplace as owners built increasingly larger sized factories to cover the cost of
major capital investment into machinery. A complex division of labour needed to
develop to support the production of specialized goods in these factories from
deliveries of parts and materials to distribution of produced commodities. As
Shaeffer and Sclar (1980) note, "All these activities required transportation, and
transportation that was more efficient than a pair of sturdy legs or a team of
horses in front of a cart"(p.16). The walking city was becoming ever increasingly
an overcrowded, unsanitary private and public dystopia. Schaeffer and Sclar
(1980) suggest that the social legacy of the walking city is uneven: while living
'cheek to jowl' offered equanimity on the streets, there was no privacy, no space
and a very unsanitary environment to live in from coal smoke to horse dung to
raw sewerage. When leisure activity was possible, people escaped the city to walk
in the countryside surrounding the cities for fresh air and peace. Once other
forms of transportation became safe, reliable and affordable, those who could

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escaped the city to set up their households where cleaner air and privacy were

available (Schaeffer & Sclar, 1980, p.17).

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Wellesley Massachusetts: The American Dream

Founded in 1880, Wellesley was little more than a village of few shops and some

farms at the turn of the 20th Century. Schaeffer and Sclar (1980) reprinted maps

from the Massachusetts Transportation Commission's (MTC) surveys of Boston's

urban growth from 1885 to 1960 carried out in the early 1960s. The 1885 map

(p.80) shows what little population was living in Wellesley is close to the east-

west local access road "Worcester Street" (Route 9). The 1900 map (p.81) shows

a population upsurge along the east-west local inter-town road "Washington

Street" (Route 16, which runs northwest to Southwest of Boston through Boston's

western suburbs. Dorin (2014) notes that the Natick and Cochituate Street

Railway Company opened a trolley line in Wellesley along Central Street (Route

135) in 1896. My visual research into Wellesley centres on the merging of both

Route 135 and Route 16 where Central Street meets Washington Street.

Schaeffer & Sclar (1980) write extensively about the growth of the suburbs

around Boston, Massachusetts, a market city at its origins, due to the increase is

automobile ownership in the inter-war years. Unlike post World War Two

expansion, dominated by the automobile and which brought new highways to

rural farm communities, the town planning during the interwar years depended on

access to public transportation for residents. The authors note,

> All houses had driveways and frequently garages to provide off-street
> parking, and one-family homes became the rule rather than duplexes and
> triplexes; still the suburbanization occurred only where there was good
> access to Boston by public transit. (p.86)

Schaeffer & Sclar (1980) note that the communities which experienced the

greatest inter-war residential growth were the suburbs on the northwest, west

and southwest of Boston's outer ring which developed through the setting down

of rail lines in the previous decades. During the 1920s there was a population

explosion in these towns, with Wellesley itself growing by 80% during that time

(p.86). With the 1970 U.S. census map, reprinted by Schaeffer and Sclar

(1980,p.83), all but the southwestern tip of Wellesley has been suburbanized.

This is the Wellesley I moved to in 1973 with my two brothers and working-class

parents who had recently entered the middle-class through graft, determination

and a strong aspirational drive for their children. This is the place of my memory

studies and enquiry, and my autoethnographic narrative. This is a place with

visual culture signifying comfort, security and safety; I felt uncomfortable,

insecure and rejected. I have roamed the world looking for a place and space I

feel at home in; it is time I understood why. With this practice-based doctorate I

aim to develop visual skills that will support my pedagogical practice as a design

lecturer and to make explicit the tacit reasons I am driven to teach: to support

students in finding 'home' within their own voices, creative explorations and

representations of their way of expressing themselves, their way of being.

Development as a Suburb

Wellesley's attraction as a suburb of Boston was evidence prior to the Civil War.

There became a subtle influx of convalescing consumption patients who indicated

the community's healthy climate.

Accessibility to Boston and surrounding communities via rail and the Worcester

Turnpike was key to Wellesley's development as a Boston suburb. The Worcester

Turnpike, a toll road, was completed in 1809 and served as a key artery from

Boston to Western Massachusetts's villages and towns towards the mill and

factory town of Worcester, where my older brother and I were born. At the time of

incorporation there were five rail stations in Wellesley with suburban

developments within walking distance from the stations. Accessibility to good

transportation links; quality education; good soil/terrain; neighbourhoods of

similar class of resident; and building restrictions, for example minimum pricing of

each house (Broomer, 1990, p.8) contributed to the demand for real estate by

middle-class families.

New Suburban Development 1882-1920

According to Broom (1990) the first burst of large-scale residential development

took place in the decades surrounding the turn of the 20th Century with the town's

population more than doubling in this period from 3,013 in 1885 to 5,072 in

1900.

Wellesley was becoming increasingly attractive to wealthy and upper-middle-class

families from Boston and surrounding communities, however the town's working-

class population was also acquiring a solid ethnic base. The majority of foreign-

born Irish settled in the Lower Falls area close to the industrial section of town.

Italians arrived 1890 and worked as estate gardeners & factory hands (Broom,

1990, p.9).

Wellesley College

A prestigious female-only American higher educational institution, Wellesley

College is one of the internationally renowned Seven Sisters women's colleges in

Northeastern United States which include Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College,

Mount Holyoke College, Radcliffe College, Smith College and Vassar College. The

colleges were given the title "Seven Sisters" in 1927 as their quality of education

paralleled the men's Ivy League colleges. Not all remain female-only institutions:

Radcliffe has since merged with Harvard and Vassar is now co-educational.

On March 17, 1870 the governor of Massachusetts signed the charter for the

Wellesley Female Seminary, a school founded by Henry Fowle Durant, a

prominent lawyer and Wellesley resident who, according to Jorvin (2008, p.68),

"recognised the importance of women's education" and, according to Fiske (1917) became devoted to Christian service after the death of his eight year old son. The institution was renamed Wellesley College in 1873.

Fiske reports that "On September 8, 1875, the main building was opened with about three hundred students, and twenty-nine professors and teachers" (p.38). By the time of Fiske's writings in 1917 there were over fifteen hundred students and nearly three hundred professors and administrators.

Wellesley Square Commercial District

In 1900 Washington and Central Streets were widened and rebuilt (Fiske, 1917, p.xii) which laid the groundwork for the commercial district which I frequented as a child and had my first job at the age of 16 and which is the focal point of my visual practice.

Representing Place

The visual practice element to this doctoral study is a direct consequence of

postmodern cultural development since the 1960s.

> "The idea that all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own
> voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimates is essential
> to the pluralistic stance of postmodernism." (Harvey, 1990, p.48)

Condemning meta-narratives (broad interpretive schemas like those deployed by

Marx or Freud) as 'totalizing' they insist upon the plurality of 'power-discourse'

formations (Foucault) or of 'language games' (Lyotard). Lyotard in fact defines the

postmodern simply as 'disbelief of meta-narratives (Harvey, p.45).

> "Whatever else we do with the concept, we should not read postmodernism
> as some autonomous artistic current. Its rootedness in daily life is one of its
> most patently transparent features" (Harvey, 1990, p.63).

Joe Moran (2005, p.13) examines how representations of the everyday have

influenced the ideas surrounding the relationship between public and private

spheres. Moran argues that everyday, "quotidian", culture is ignored, side-lined

and discounted as a source of meaning for wider cultural developments. Moran

notes that this overlooked aspect of everyday culture allows it to be a source of

resistance for Antonio Gramci's "spontaneous philosophy" (Moran, p.12) and

Michel Foucault's "subordinate and unofficial knowledge" (Foucault,

Power/Knowledge). Both cultural critics are analysing here those forms of

informal, unsanctioned knowledge that obscure resistant and robust power

relationships due to being "embedded in specific social contexts" (Moran, 2005,

p.12). Moran suggests that, as such,

> "...'the everyday' is a space where practice and representation are complexly
> interrelated, where the lived reality of the quotidian co-exists with clichés,
> mythologies, stereotypes and unsourced quotations" (p.13).

The everyday culture this doctoral visual practice analyses, gazes upon and

questions is the suburban landscape of my hometown, Wellesley Massachusetts,

fifteen miles west of Boston, the state's capital. While the photographs of Central Street naturalise the assumptions and myths of conspicuous consumption, the act of photographing and decoding these signifiers of everyday upper-middle class life offers this researcher space to question the legitimacy of this dominant culture of commodity fetishism.

Practice of Representing Place

My practice evidences interest in the culture of the everyday, the main street of my hometown as the subject of representation. My photographs capture daily shopping life in the tradition of deadpan photography depicting the local vernacular which emerged from America in the 1960s and 1970s through the work of Ed Ruscha (Figs 1-5), Stephen Shore (Figs 6-8), William Eggleston (Figs 9 & 10), Lewis Baltz (Fig 11), Robert Adams (Fig 12) and Dan Graham (Figs 13-15) (Moran, p.124-5). This aesthetic emerged from the pop and conceptual art of the 1960s. Of particular importance, reference and inspiration to this doctoral practice are Ed Ruscha's photobooks including *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963), *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966, Figs 1-3) *and Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967). Moran (2005) describes the photobooks as "…(containing) cheaply reproduced images of the mundane environment, grouped together by type with no commentary except for brief identifying captions" (p.124).

My interest in "deadpan" documentary photography was inspired by the photographc work of Hilla and Bernd Becher. The pair began systematically documenting industrial sites around Germany in the late 1950s. Worked at the same crossroads between man and machine that had differently concerned Steichen, Steinert, Frank and many others at the time.

The idea,' they said once, 'is to make families of objects,' or, on another occasion, 'to create families of motifs'

"Their ethic: a dogmatic commitment to a form of representation that is somehow free of ideology, free of a 'socialistic view' or the view of any other doctrine or ism." (Stimpson, Blake, Tate Modern Website)

Typologies of vernacular architecture displayed in grids to emphasise the differences as much as the similarities.

Stimson (2004) notes that their photographic method was driven by the desire to return to the 'straight' aesthetic and social concerns of German practice in the 1920s and 1930s and a rejection of the contemporary leanings towards sentimentality. They were interested in the work of August Sander:

> "…Whose life-project making sociological portraits of Germans from all classes and occupations provided the methodological and affective structure for the Bechers' own typological procedure and a logical alternative to the affective load given alternately in the sentimental identification and scornful disidentification adopted by their humanist predecessors (Stimson).

- **August Sander** (German, 1876–1964)

My American roots are itching at me and I turn my inward eye to reflect upon this while I point the eye of my camera lens to document those roots. As my American roots are planted in suburban soil it is here I begin to dig.

As noted elsewhere (Kealy-Morris, 2013) my working-class parents were not suburbanites by birth but through the American post-war economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s, their hard work, intelligence and savvy career planning they set down new roots in suburban New England by 1970.

By 1973, when I was six, the family was living in Wellesley. It was a picturesque and safe choice for my parents and all their three children had a safe childhood with the best education public (state) schools offer in the States. It is here I lived until I left for college (university) at the age of 18.

I never felt 'at home' in suburbia; I left as fast as I could and embraced the chaos, anonymity and transience of various cities until leaving the States in 1996 to settle in the UK. I was an odd-ball working-class Catholic girl with roots in the factories of Northern Massachusetts living in a community of wealthy Protestant and Jewish upper-middle class professionals and their families. I was odd to my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, and I was odd to my classmates. I felt "Other", different, "not right" in any situation.

Feeling "Other" was solidified when I was diagnosed with scoliosis and had to wear an orthopedic brace 23 hours a day to straighten my spine from the age of 11 to 14 for which I felt deep shame and self-loathing. My family was in crisis due to many factors and I began to hate the expected perfection of middle-class suburban life, knowing the darkness that hides behind the manicured lawns and secure solid oak front doors.

As I began to consider my own sense of place and belonging in my previous writing (Kealy-Morris, 2013) regarding my adoption of Manchester UK as 'home', I have become interested in the roots to my elusive search for home. I am curious: why doesn't the place of my childhood feel like 'home'? Through my interest in exploring this I attempt to make peace with the place and recognise my footprints on the concrete sidewalks – as Iyer (in Neumann, 1996) notes, the place made me and who I am reflects something of the place. I don't need to hide in the shadows and peer around corners under the cover of darkness; this was my town too.

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The Photoshoot

Nervously I put on my snowboots, hat, coat, gloves, warm winter coat to walk the main street of Wellesley, from the top of Central Street near the beginning of Wellesley College's campus to the Public Library on Washington Street where Wellesley Avenue and Brook Street converge. Inspired by the work of the Bechers my aim is to capture through photography the typology of a wealthy middle-class suburban main street with an objective eye. I decide that after each 20 paces I will take a photograph of the buildings on the opposite side of the road. One day I did one side, another day I did another side.

The first day on my own I felt nervous, unsafe, exposed, freakish; the second shoot was safer as my British husband joined me; he's not intimidated by the place as the signifiers don't connote social power and dominance to him. This was the place that had rejected me and I was creating a portrait of it. Did the place deserve such attention? Would the public capture of its image post 9/11 land me in legal trouble? I put all that to the back of my head and acted as if I had the right to do what I was doing. Immediately it became clear that my biggest obstacle to carrying out this study was the car, everywhere in my way. I couldn't keep to 20 paces because a huge 4x4 would inevitably be parked in my view or on the road in traffic blocking my view. Or someone was sitting in a parked car and I felt intimidated to take a picture of them while capturing the buildings across the road.

It should have been no surprise that my view of the main street in my hometown was either through or over the roofs of cars; but it did surprise me as this is not my view in England – after 16 years living elsewhere my expectations of the everyday street view had shifted.

The Photos

In the guise of a window shopping *passante* I join the rich tradition of the modernist urban *flanerie* as Parsons (2000, p.41) notes,"The motion of *flanerie* reflects the fleeting aspect of the modern yet this motion is one of walking of human as opposed to technological movement… In this respect *flanerie* parallels the idea of the search, and in the abstract wandering in the city this search would seem not for place but for self or identity".

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As noted previously the first photo shoot took place over two non-consecutive days over the Christmas week in 2012 on my hand-held Fuji FinePix compact digital camera on the 'normal' setting. I have chosen to document a public retail space for reasons that are not clear to me as I write this; I feel safe in my anonymity. Woodham (1997) reminds us of the key role the deparment store played in selling mass-produced goods promoted by the new advertising agencies in Philadelphia and New York City by the mid 19ᵗʰ century. Woodham (1997, p.8) notes that the stores, "…soon became socially acceptable venues for unaccompanied women to meet as well as shop without damaging their reputations". Parsons (2000) describes the escapist aesthetic experience of indulgence and pampering that women experienced in the new department stores,

> "A palace of glass and artificial light, the store is a commercial temple of which woman is both the goddess and worshipper. It provides relief from the confinement of the domestic arena and is a place where woman is afforded all the signs of authority" (p.47).

The signifiers of Wellesley's canvas canopies over shop doors connote homogeny of classic style and good taste. The shops are on the ground floor of buildings that span several shops and create a sense of community and security. While there are a few franchises (CVS Pharmacy, Gap, Starbucks) most shops are boutiques suggesting one can purchase the one-off individual unique item here. The franchises must conform their street voice to the tone and accent of their boutique neighbours: no neon or plastic store signs are permitted here except the town's first department store, E.A. Davis, whose neon sign now feels like nostalgic novelty. This is a main street that has been tightly planned, designed and branded. The lower end of the main street by the library has shops that are more transient, with looser purposes. Today this is where the high school students hang out in the pizzeria & the ice cream parlor…they are kept away from the boutiques up the hill.

The book(s)

At the moment this section will be deliberately non-committal, for which I apologise, as I've only just begun sketching the book's structure and I've not researched into the possible performative meanings in the concertina binding I <u>think </u>I'll be folding.

The purpose of the book is to place myself into the topology of Wellesley's main street: my life, my body, my memories of this place, my use of the spaces represented in these photographs. As noted before I am inspired by Ed Ruscha's artist book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966, where he mounted a tripod on the back of a pickup truck and took photos of every building on Los Angeles' Sunset Boulevard. He then collaged them together into a concertina folded artist book, rejecting the glossy coffee table tome fine art is so often disseminated in. Both sides of the street are collaged on opposite sides of the book and each building is labeled with its corresponding street address.

Rather than list the street addresses of each store (most of which are different than those I frequented as a girl) I will focus rather on what I did or what milestone in my life occurred at that place. The insurance company is where I first encountered, at 7 years old, an author whose books I would later devour; the bakery is where I bought some of my first albums and singles; the posh Thai restaurant is where my beloved best friend Heather and I shoplifted candy at the age of 8 (maybe I should leave that out??); the pharmacy is where I had my first job; E.A. Davis is where I bought my first Christmas presents for my family; The condo being built has replaced the hotel my family stayed in when moving to the town in 1973.

Unlike Iyer (Neumann, 1996) I am not searching for a nostalgic home through this project, instead this has a subversive intention, as like Pratt's view of autoethnographic practice, of challenging the homogeny which is on the surface of the photographs to reveal that the current spaces are places where repositories of memory reside. To quote Pratt again, this autoethnographic narrative in the form of a handmade book of my photographs attempts to

> "…consciously confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim – through a self-conscious, individual, political response – representation spaces that marginalize individuals and others" (Neumann, p.189).

The performance of this work is important. Like a *flaneuse* and *passante* I walked the streets with the intention of looking, watching and collecting images around and above the cars that blocked my view. I walked, I stopped, I gathered and I analysed. With the current binding presented here I attempt to encourage the viewer to follow my walks from the western end of Central Street to its merging with Washington street in the east; this causes difficulties with the walk on the north side of the street as one must open the book in an intuitively incorrect way.

Now I will measure and fold and print and fold and glue and press and unfold and show and demonstrate and refold again this visual narrative of the life I lived in the place I never called home. I am holding the hand of my 12 year old self as she tries to hide her body which is trapped in her brace while shopping for a dress that might make her look normal. We walk with our heads held high certain that, no matter what the gaze of others' suggest, we are ok.

> "Performative auto ethnographic writing is about the continual questioning, the naming and renaming and unnaming of experience through craft, through heart, through the fluent body"(Spry, 2011, p.509).

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