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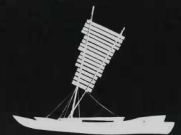


# MEMORY CONNECTION

Volume 2, Number 1, May 2016

The Cultures of Memory

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THE MEMORY WAKA



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*Memory Connection* is an international, peer-reviewed journal project of The Memory Waka Research Group (Massey University, NZ). *Memory Connection* provides a meeting place for multidisciplinary perspectives, discourses, and expressions of memory. The journal aims to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue that may lead to different ways of “seeing” and the creation of new knowledge.

Articles are subjected to a double, blind peer review process.

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The Memory Waka  
As a means of conveyance a waka is a Māori canoe. Waka has other meanings such as a receptacle or a chief’s carved treasure box (waka huia) containing valuable possessions including prized feathers. Waka also refers to a body of people such as a kinship group. Metaphorically, The Memory Waka is a vessel of humanity, ideas, and culture. It is also (literally) a means of travel for people allied in a common cause (paddling in the same direction!). The Waka initiates and supports projects concerned with memory including the *Memory Connection* online journal.

The Cultures of Memory  
*Memory Connection* Volume 2, Number 1 is called *The Cultures of Memory*. Published in association with Syracuse University (US) and York St John University (UK), it comprises 7 selected articles developed from papers presented at *The Cultures of Memory Symposium* (London, UK, 2013) and *The Cultures of Memory II Symposium* (York, UK, 2014). Both symposia were presented in partnership by Massey University (NZ), Syracuse University (U.S.), and York St John University (UK).

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This volume is dedicated to former board members, Professor Tony Whincup (deceased), Massey University (NZ) and Professor Ross Hemera (retired), Massey University (NZ).

# The Cultures of Memory

General Editors

Kingsley Baird

Kendall R. Phillips

Gary Peters

Editor

Ekaterina Haskins

The Memory Waka  
Massey University  
Wellington



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## Introduction

Ekaterina Haskins

Editor, Memory Connection Journal  
Volume 2, Number 1, "The Cultures of Memory"

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## Introduction

Ekaterina Haskins

Our culture is preoccupied with memory. Various forms of memory—anniversaries, museums, monuments, and memoirs—clamour for our attention in both physical and virtual spaces and receive a lion’s share of publicity in mainstream media and academic discourse. From George Santayana’s admonition, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” to Milan Kundera’s pronouncement, “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”, we are encouraged to think of remembering as our civic and moral responsibility.

Forgetting, on the other hand, is almost always seen as memory’s dark ‘other’, as an unfortunate withering away of memory or a deliberate erasure of past traces. However, the valourisation of memory blinds us to the affinity between memory and forgetting and compels us to put our faith into comforting forms and formulas of remembrance. As a result, we often develop habitual ways of relating to the past and lose sight of the past as a resource for acting in the present.

The essays and artists’ statements collected in this special issue explore what it is like to break away from ready-made templates for remembering and to examine the intimate link between memory and forgetting. In a provocative critique of ‘a culture of memory’, Gary Peters draws on Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze, and Heidegger to argue that “we need to remember how to forget in order to create new habits of remembering”. A necessary step in this direction, suggests Peters, is to realize that we have been habituated into certain (socially sanctioned) ways of remembrance, that “we’ve been had”. If we appreciate how our habits constitute us, we would be in a better position to ponder “what can we *do* with our memories”?

While Peters offers philosophical reflection on a culture of memory and its discontents, the other essays illustrate how artistic interventions and performances can question and shake up habits and clichés of remembrance. In his contribution, Kendall Phillips observes “a kind of existential violence” conventional monuments and museums perpetrate on what he calls “excesses of memory” or “the surplus of memory that cannot be entirely contained or controlled by the disciplines of recollection or the public forms of remembrance”. Phillips turns to the works of three contemporary artists—Carrie Mae Weems, Anna Schuleit and Shimon Attie—as “exemplars and provocations for thinking about the forms by which memory is made public and the simultaneous preservations/loss and

permanence/transience these forms enact”. Phillips’s case studies showcase how artistic interventions can provide an “experience of memory that gestures toward its excess – that which lies beyond discursive facticity and within the realm of the visceral and affective”.

Essays by Kingsley Baird and Sally Morgan describe their respective works, both temporary war memorials that interrogate the process of memorialisation and highlight the relationship between the artist, the memorial, and the audience. Baird built his temporary memorial in 2014 in the German Armed Forces’ Military History Museum in Dresden. Titled *Stela*, it was a stainless steel ‘cenotaph’ surrounded by 18,000 biscuits in the shape of soldiers of different nationalities who fought in the First World War. Inspired by the artist’s experience of military cemeteries, personal memories of his grandfather, and Kurt Vonnegut’s depiction of the bombing of Dresden in World War II, *Stela* was a rather unique war memorial, especially in the way it deliberately juxtaposed the sacred and the profane. Baird certainly unsettled visitors’ expectations by inviting them to take a biscuit from the memorial. His hope was that “the ‘Eucharistic’ ritual would be interpreted as revealing society’s responsibility in sacrificing others in war, as well as being an act of commemoration. Simultaneously a gesture of forgetting *and* remembering”. The artist’s essay vividly documents how different visitors encountered the memorial and in so doing provides a rare glimpse into eventfulness and ethical challenges of memory and forgetting for both the artist and the audience.

Sally Morgan’s account of *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer’s Daughter* similarly highlights the evolving and interactive character of the installation. The performance unfolded over time through discrete ‘chapters’. It commenced in November 2012 when Morgan fashioned 500 small planes in the shape of the WWII Liberator Bomber out of a stone compound mix. In mid-February 2013, she “took the planes to war” by parading them on a movable rack through the streets of Wellington and pausing, in an ironic display of ‘martial optimism’, in front of the National War Memorial. The following several chapters of the performance took place near the city’s waterfront, where Morgan was allocated a freight container to show her work under the aegis of Wellington’s International Live Art festival. There, Morgan transferred the planes into a wheelbarrow and proceeded to throw them, one by one, onto the floor of the container. She had planned to smash the planes herself in front of passers-by, but a surprising number of onlookers wanted to join in the destruction. Realising that her work could serve as an exploration of social complicity, she began to offer planes to all passers-by. Morgan witnessed a range of responses – from reluctance and sadness to exhilaration followed by a sense of guilt. Next, the artist turned the container into an “archaeological site” by sorting the debris into bins. The container then became a museum where the finds were arranged by typology and accompanied by a notice that dispassionately documented the ‘deployment’ of Liberator Bomber planes and the participation of passers-by in their destruction. Morgan observed that the audience of this display “came and went easily, did not feel complicit, felt able to judge the process as though it were finished”. In the following chapter, the

artist placed the sorted debris along with a tube of glue in front of the container “to indicate the impossibility and futility of trying to mend the outcomes of war”. She was surprised by the outcome of this gesture when a group of students set about the task of repairing the planes, changing the bleakness of the artist’s conception. The final chapters, the disposal of the debris and the peregrination of a few disfigured Liberator Bombers through the back streets of Wellington, enacted “the deliberate forgetting and obscuring of inconvenient truths of war”. In its entirety, then, *Travails* raised uncomfortable questions about conventional modes of memorialisation and demonstrated that interactive temporary installations can stimulate public reflection about war, patriotism, and responsibility. Such reflection can on occasion result in a salutary kind of forgetting, in a desire to restore the shattered past and move on, as can be seen in the young students’ determination to mend the broken planes.

The remaining contributions dramatise the psychological and ethical aspects of remembering and forgetting in regard to personal and familial past. Emily Rowan’s piece, *Witness*, is an autobiographical performance in which the artist is restaging her appearance as a witness in a court case. The author’s singing and music are juxtaposed with the power point slides displayed in a Pecha Kucha format (20 slides, each shown for 20 seconds.) While the slides represent the voice of authority and recorded ‘facts’, the artist’s voice and music convey “how it feels to have your private memories of a traumatic event interrogated and the truthfulness of your words brought into question”. In contrast with the steady mechanical progression of the slides, the lyrics and music are repeated in a continuous loop, conveying the witness’s struggle to take charge of her traumatic memories and to defend herself against the court’s questioning. This haunting performance constitutes the art’s capacity to transform shapeless memory fragments into a story that the witness can call her own and share with an audience. As Rowan puts it in her statement, “art is retelling — not reliving — and reduces that which is formless and overwhelming in the mind into a solid reality, communicated to and accessible by a community that listens”. The publicity of this artistic gesture implicates audience members as *witnesses* who must come to terms with the narrated past by sifting through their own archive of experience and its potentially unsettling fragmentary contents.

What if the past you are trying to stitch together exists mainly in the form of archival bits and pieces? This is the theme of Matthew Reason’s essay in which he depicts his attempted “resurrection” of his great aunt Joyce Reason (whom the author describes as “a writer, an idealist, an evangelist, a bluestocking, a spinster, a crank, and a missionary”.) Two interlocking questions guide Reason’s inquiry: “What is the articulacy, or otherwise, of the archival trace? And how can we know the life of another, without subsuming it into our own preoccupations and perspectives”? In a series of evocative vignettes, the author documents his ‘pilgrimage’ in search of his great aunt’s traces. In the course of his travels and research, he realises that the relationship between the archive and its interpreter flows both ways — that “the archivist is not effaced, but rather becomes a player within an overt performance of cultural memory”. As distinct from much academic

writing, Reason's essay models this sort of self-reflective (and highly engaging) performance by shuttling between the narration about Joyce Reason and the author's rumination on the nature of archival traces and the ethics of archival research.

Jules Dorey Richmond and David Richmond are also concerned with archival traces as aides to memory. However, their installation and artists' pages shine the light on their own archive as a married couple of 28 years and showcase the dangers and rewards of recollection without a safety net. Their installation (represented by a selection of five boards containing images and parallel texts) is a product of what may be seen as an exercise in radical trust. The artists took turns picking objects, each emblematic of a shared memory, and independently composed a narrative about memories they evoked. By agreeing not to interfere in each other's composition process, the authors accomplished the most daring act of memory/forgetting—they decided to rely on their own imperfect recollection and to trust each other as partners by not policing the other's account. To use Kendall Phillips' phrase, they gave themselves and each other permission to unleash the "excess of memory" without any guarantee of a safe outcome. Not until the narratives were combined did they realise "how each of us had truly felt about events in our lives whose memories were manifested by these objects and the stories attached to them". This, they admit, "had an unexpected destabilising effect on our sense of selfhood and coupledness". At the same time, they understood that "the very gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions—which the parallel texts exposed—held a promise of 'truth' that no unified and/or refined account of our past, 'the past', could possibly deliver".

Together, the artists and scholars featured in this issue present an eloquent dissertation on the virtues of personal and collective remembrance without the crutches of conventional formulas, of embracing excesses of memory, of trusting one's own and the other's ability and desire to remember, to forget, and to make something new.

## Biographical Note

Ekaterina Haskins is Professor of Rhetoric in the Department of Communication and Media at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy, NY, USA). Her research contributes to three distinct yet related areas of scholarship: the history of rhetoric, public memory, and rhetorics of display. She is the author of two books, [Logos and Power in Isocrates and Aristotle](#) (2004; paperback 2009) and [Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship](#) (2015), both published by the University of South Carolina Press in its Studies in Rhetoric/Communication series. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on the history of rhetoric, public memory, and visual culture. Her current projects include studies of immersion and visibility in Greek rhetoric and philosophy, a book-in-progress on the rhetoric and politics of public memory in post-Communist Russia, and an investigation of the role of place and sensation in public life.

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# Fragments of/on Memory

Gary Peters

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## Fragments of/on Memory

Gary Peters

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### Abstract

Cultures of memory cultivate our memory by encouraging the displacement of exterior historical events by the interiority of singular memory, rendered collective through an ethics and politics of empathic communicability. The assumption being that, while we are the *products of* history, we are the *producers of* memory, and thus can be held responsible for what we produce. The assumption is that historically we are within time while, memorially, time is *within us*. As such, cultures of memory cultivate to the extent that they establish a collective and systematic exchange of interiorities in the name of a shared responsibility for the past, present and future: a caring community of retention/recollection, intention/attention and protention/expectation.

But, outside of the exigency to cultivate our memories and memorialise our cultures, is it possible to emancipate memory from the cultural *concept of* memory? Would this be irresponsible?

Keywords: memory, forgetting, empathy, responsibility, obligation, habit, sensation.



*The man with a good memory does not remember anything, because he does not forget anything.*<sup>1</sup>

In a culture of memory we are in danger of forgetting how to forget. And as the narrator of Borges's *Funes, the Memorious* reminds us, forgetting how to forget is tantamount to forgetting how to think: "to think is to *forget* a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes, there were only details, almost contiguous details".<sup>2</sup> And remember, Funes was paralyzed just as Nietzsche's 'historical man' is crushed by the past:

*Man...braces himself against the great and ever greater pressure of what is past: it pushes him down or bends him sideways, it encumbers his steps as a dark, invisible burden.*<sup>3</sup>

For Nietzsche, it is not so much thinking, but creating that requires 'active forgetfulness:' the most powerful creative act being the creation of a future, one that is worthy of becoming our past, and, thus, worthy of returning eternally. Something of a challenge!

\*

In a culture of memory 'Lest we forget' reverberates and resonates as an incessant cultural cliché, one that threatens to rob us of memory in the name of memory. And, lest we forget, this is indeed a threat:

*Lest is a very rare word and quite old fashioned. Most people in Britain know it because we see it written very often in the same place—on war memorials...It's a warning. It's introducing a danger to be avoided.*<sup>4</sup>

Dangers, threats, warnings! The forgotten underside of a culture of memory: fear, coercion, control. Lest we forget.

\*

In a culture of memory 'We will remember them' reverberates and resonates as an incessant cultural cliché, one that threatens to rob us of hope in the name of memory.

*But where our desires are and our hopes profound,  
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,  
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known  
As the stars are known to the Night.*<sup>5</sup>

How are the stars known to the night? As light in the darkness? The darkness of forgetting illuminated by remembrance? But it is from out of the dark well-spring of our innermost hearts that our hopes and desires emerge in ignorance of their forgotten origin. Yes, 'we will remember them' but only in their own forgetfulness of their own innermost hopes and desires that, now extinguished, make them worthy of our remembering. The remembrance of a past future that never came to be: a remembered forgetfulness.

\*

*All the people of all the nations which had fought in the First World War were silent during the eleventh minute of the eleventh hour of Armistice Day, which was the eleventh day of the eleventh month. It was during that minute in nineteen hundred and eighteen, that millions upon millions of human beings stopped butchering one another. I have talked to old men who were on battlefields during that minute. They have told me in one way or another that the sudden silence was the Voice of God. So we still have among us some men who can remember when God spoke clearly to mankind.<sup>6</sup>*

In a culture of memory ‘the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month’ eternally returns, at the 11th hour, as an incessant, cultural cliché, one that threatens to rob us of the difference that only such repetition can and should bring, but only if emancipated from a hegemonic concept of memory that wills the return of the same sameness, ‘lest we forget:’ memory as ritualised mnemonics, mnemonic rituals, where the noise of the world momentarily ceases and the voice of God is heard. Give thanks to the Almighty!!

But seriously, after the ‘death of God’ the Nietzschean eternal return insists upon the recurrence of a moment of forgetfulness, a moment of hope and desire, where possibility returns as the willing of a future worthy of becoming a past. The eternal recurrence of the same should be understood as the eternal recurrence of the same difference: this is what repetitive memorialization forgets.

\*

*If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory...Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself...all this has its origin in the instinct that realised that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics.<sup>7</sup>*

The cultivation of memory takes many forms, all and every one hopelessly resisting the inevitable dissolution of time into an amorphous oblivion of forgetfulness. All and every one branding-irons burning into the forgetful flesh. The memorialization of memory quickly and too easily blurs into the moralization of memory, the stigmatization of forgetting as evil. ‘Beyond good and evil’, Nietzsche, as always, sees the cruelty at the heart of the moral-moralising-memorialising majority. ‘Forgive me, for I have sinned:’ thus spoke the forgetful one.

\*

A culture cultivates by ‘inviting’ us to become responsible; responsible for ourselves and our own actions and inactions; responsible for others, and, indeed, for the irreducible and inviolable otherness of the other. Responsibility is an empathic concept, demanding that we learn how to become responsive to the

claims of a singular and collective alterity. It is also a communicative concept, where empathic intersubjectivity grounds a communicative community of mutual understanding able to inform responsive and responsible acts. Irresponsibility is not an active category: it is the failure or refusal to respond to the stimuli offered by the many and various cultural majorities (moral or otherwise).

Cultures of memory cultivate our memory by encouraging the displacement of exterior historical events by the interiority of singular memory, rendered collective through an ethics and politics of empathic communicability. The assumption being that, while we are the *products of history*, we are the *producers of memory*, and thus can be held responsible for what we produce. The assumption is that historically we are within time while, memorially, time is within us. As such, cultures of memory cultivate to the extent that they establish a collective and systematic exchange of interiorities in the name of a shared responsibility for the past, present and future: a caring community of retention/recollection, intention/attention and protention/expectation.

But, outside of the exigency to cultivate our memories and memorialise our cultures, is it possible to emancipate memory from the cultural *concept of memory*? Would this be irresponsible?

\*

‘Sensation’ (a central concept for Gilles Deleuze) is a form of memory, albeit of a peculiar type: let us call it sensorial memory. Rather than being the *active* re-collection of past experiences (individual and/or collective) or the *passive* acceptance of a past-ness that is doubly imposed as culture and nature (or, worse, the ideology of culture *as nature*), sensation is here understood as a form of ‘passive creativity’ where the transition from activity to passivity—memory to habit—is remembered, reversed and re-activated *within* the given of habit. The question no longer being: what *should* we remember but what can we *do* with our memories, how can we transform the passive reception of ‘it was’ into (to use Nietzsche’s words) ‘thus I willed it’. Nietzsche’s *amor fati* is Deleuze’s ‘passive creativity’.

\*

As Henri Bergson observes, habits are memories that have become acts and thereby forgotten, a transition from the mind to the body, from thinking to living, from imagining to repeating, and from the personal to the impersonal:

*Spontaneous recollection is perfect from the outset; time can add nothing to its image without disfiguring it; it retains in memory its place and date. On the contrary, a learnt recollection [habit] passes out of time in the measure that the lesson is better known; it becomes more and more impersonal, more and more foreign to our past life...Indeed, this habit could not be called remembrance, were it not that I remember that I have acquired it; and I remember its acquisition only because I appeal to that memory which is spontaneous, which dates events and records them but once.*<sup>8</sup>

Denying the title of remembrance to habit, unless aided by the ‘perfection’ of spontaneous memory, threatens to deny us the very sensation of passing ‘out of time’ into the anonymity and impersonality of a ‘foreign’ life. The cinematography of spontaneous memory, the freeze-framing of moments, lost and found, recovered and shared as the building blocks of a memorial culture are in danger of creating a space for remembrance that obscures the originary act of channeling the aleatoric swarming of the event of time and fate into the active forgetfulness of habitual gestures.

\*

In a culture of memory we are, all of us, expected, indeed *obliged* to get into the habit of remembering, thanks to the indefatigable labor of the ever-swelling ranks of memorialisers, whose responsibility it is to generate the heat necessary for the memorial brand to leave its mark on the flesh of the forgetful. But could we also try and recall how the habitual forges links between the singular and the universal, the owned and the unowned, and between memory and forgetting rather than (or as well as) memory and history? Would it be possible to spontaneously remember that which makes such spontaneity possible: habit? Not, as with Bergson, in order to draw the anonymity of habit back into the “perfect” moments of acquisition and ipseity—“*I* remember that *I* have acquired it; and *I* remember its acquisition only because *I* appeal to that memory which is spontaneous”—but as a way of acknowledging the fact that it acquires *us*, and that, to repeat, we have habits to the extent habits have us. We remember acquiring and having, but forget having *been had*: inevitably, as that is precisely where the possessive ipseity of the *I* is dispossessed. Here, where repetition no longer serves the mnemonic but, rather, drills ever more deeply into the obliviousness of the acting body or the bodily act, here we can no longer speak of here or there, of mine or yours, of self/other, subject/object, singular/universal that have us all. Nor are we talking of the in-between that exercises so many in their faddish desire for the liminal; the between is not a vestigial space that can be described and explained, but a transition that must be sensed, enacted and re-enacted repetitively and eternally.

\*

Sensorial memory while actualized in the habituated and forgetful body, cannot be in-habited. Sensorial memory possesses without being possessed, providing a *habitus* that is not a home but rather a dwelling that offers not a place of rest but, more essentially, a place to *wait* (to dwell): and there is nothing more restless than waiting. Sensorial memory (a form of Kantian *sensus communis*?) is shared but incommunicable, enacted but not as individual or collective action, a remembering without re-collection where the eternal return of the same always repeats the same restless moment of waiting: what happens now? What happens next?

\*

Perhaps, as Nietzsche proclaimed, we need to remember how to forget in order to create new habits of remembering, whereby the crushing weight of the “it was” —the “spirit of gravity” — is transformed into a bearable lightness of being, and where a sense of the past or the affect of the past engulfs us as a fate to be loved (*amor fati*). Something like this:

*...it is a whole temporal ‘panorama’, an unstable set of floating memories, images of a past in general which move past at dizzying speed, as if time were achieving a profound freedom. It is as if total and anarchic mobilizing of the past now responds to the character’s motor powerlessness.*<sup>9</sup>

This is to remember memory as an outside, not a Levinasian absolute alterity grounding a communicative ethics, but a lived exteriority capable of witnessing and sensing the *event* of memory in the incommunicable and irresponsible an-archy of the given.

\*

To will the past as if it would eternally return — pure Nietzsche — is not to take possession of the past as interiorised memory, but is, on the contrary, to liberate the past from the proprietorial imperative of a memorialising culture quite capable of naming and even shaming its forgetful citizens. It is to recognise, to repeat, that we are within memory rather than memory being within us. Deleuze again:

*The only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way round. ...Time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interior in which we are, in which we move, live and change.*<sup>10</sup>

Such a view, an apparently simple reversal, has profound implications for any conceptualisation of a culture of memory rooted in a posited communicative community of rememberers, all co-responsible for sustaining an empathic sharing of diverse interiorities in the face of an ever-encroaching forgetfulness and barbarism. Such a reversal takes us to Heidegger. His notion of Being-with (*Mitsein*) assumes a remembering-with, not as an empathic intermingling of singular interiorities, but as a radical ‘unsociability’ that neither faces the inside nor an exteriority mediated by the ‘face’ of the other, for whom we are responsible (Levinas). For Heidegger, being unsociable or (better) Being’s unsociability, are not positions within the social (coldness, distance, diffidence, solitariness, etc.) but ontologically *prior* to socialisation, acculturation and cultivation. Being-with is no more the intermingling of subjectivities than remembering-with is the sharing of unique and personal strands of duration. Being interior to time, subjectivity is not, ontologically, in a position to subject time to its own measure, on the contrary, subjectivity is here conceived as subjection, as being subject-to time present and time past. All we share is this subjection, and it is the extent to which we forget this prior subjection that we, as a culture, strive to achieve (through empathy) what has always already been achieved as our original and originary foundation. This is precisely the gist of Heidegger’s rejection of empathy:

*‘Empathy’ does not first constitute Being-with; only on the basis of Being-with does ‘empathy’ become possible: it gets its motivation from the unsociability of the dominant modes of Being-with.<sup>11</sup>*

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Ironically, cultures of memory are dependent upon the very forgetfulness of habit, producing and promoting, as they do, the habitualised rituals of collective remorse and shame that are constitutive, controlling and often coercive. But such forgetfulness forgets (in the name of memory) the originary moment of habit as a transformative event. So, it is not a question of escaping the habitual but, following Nietzsche, of creating “a new habit” which, as habit, is inseparable from the re-origination of and re-subjection to the past.

*The best we can do is to confront our inherited...nature with our knowledge of it, and...inplant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away. It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were a posteriori, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate.<sup>12</sup>*

Obviously, such a statement, such a desire, for all of its radicalism, can itself only come from within a culture of memory, a culture that Nietzsche and his self-proclaimed “untimeliness” is committed to escaping. He, like us, can only confront his/our inherited nature with a “*knowledge* of it”. He, like us, is inescapably a product of the very knowledge economy that he both despises and wishes to forget. Culture-nature; memory-forgetting; knowledge-ignorance; having and being-had; the will to power – the power not to will, these are not dialectical binaries but the chiasmus of co-existence, our co-existence with ourselves, our co-existence with the other, the endless crisscrossing of being-with and remembering-with. The restlessness of memory work is chiasmal not dialectical, there is no memorial absolute transcending the conflicting and conflicted narratives of culture and its ever-proliferating cultural histories, only the endless unconcealment and concealment of an origin that has never ceased originating the memorial site that is both within and without us.

To “inplant in ourselves a new habit” requires, then, the double recognition of the habitus as both the dwelling that we own, and the habits which own us; the place from where we know ourselves and our past, and the place from where we give ourselves a past. Both knowing and giving are collective, indeed universal acts, but where knowledge is a shared exchange economy, giving has nothing to do with exchange and, indeed, is the most infinitely unsociable gesture imaginable. Here the past is given as a gift; not the gift as social gesture but as the ontological grounding offered up for us to inhabit and become habitualised to.

\*

While time, as Kant recognised, is an “inner sense, that is, of the intuition of ourselves and of inner states”,<sup>13</sup> this should not be confused with self-

consciousness in any simple or naïve sense, not least because it is precisely such a sensation of time that *constitutes* the self as an intuited *object* rather than conscious subject: “time is therefore to be regarded...as the mode of representation of myself as object”.<sup>14</sup> This explains why Deleuze is able to say of Kant that he “defined time as the form of interiority, in the sense that we are internal to time:”<sup>15</sup> the ‘form’ and the ‘we’ are constituted simultaneously.

So what?

Such thinking takes us away from a conception of cultural memory that valorises the interiority of a *given* subjectivity as an increasingly privileged moment within a stable memorial exchange economy, structured around a *given* empathic mutuality. Instead, subjectivity and objectivity, interiority and exteriority are displaced by the endless chiasmal reversal of actuality and virtuality; where, as with Heidegger’s notion of truth as unconcealment-concealment, memory-work is an event that far exceeds the “allure” of consciousness. Deleuze:

*The virtual image (pure recollection) is not a psychological state or consciousness: it exists outside of consciousness, in time...What causes our mistake is that recollection-images...haunt a consciousness which necessarily accords them a capricious or intermittent allure, since they are actualised according to the momentary needs of this consciousness. But, if you ask where consciousness is going to look for these recollection-images...we are led back to pure virtual images of which the latter are only modes or degrees of actualisation.*<sup>16</sup>

In a culture of memory we are in danger of succumbing to the allure of the moment and the needs of the singular consciousness confronted with a collective historical guilt. Yes, no doubt, ‘we will remember them’, but again, the ‘we’, the ‘them’ and the ‘remembering’ are all constituted together *within* a temporality of “pure recollection” that is forgotten in the very name of a cultural memory that it founds or originates. This “pure recollection”—the event of memory rather than the memory of events—is forgotten because it is “outside of consciousness”, as is the affectivity of sensation and the sensorial memory that we are grasping for here.

\*

Returning to our epigraph, where forgetting is understood to be essential to memory, could we try and imagine not a memory consequent to a forgetting but, rather, a forgetful memory or, put another way, an unconscious memory: such, perhaps, is sensorial memory. Even when, to paraphrase Samuel Beckett’s famous words: there is nothing from which to remember, nothing with which to remember, no power to remember, no desire to remember;<sup>17</sup> the event of memory remains, and the sense of this event—the evental sense—remains as the felt or intuited obligation to remember.

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*It remains questionable when we are in such a way that our being is song, and indeed a song whose singing does not just resound anywhere but is truly a singing, a song whose sound does not cling to something that is eventually attained, but which has already shattered itself even in the sounding.*<sup>18</sup>

***“Put me in your box and I’ll tell you what I know”***<sup>19</sup>

A young woman is singing of terrible things. Things that have happened, happened to her, happened to others, happened to so many others who can be heard, yet not heard, singing (*sotto voce*), not within, but alongside or on the outside of this singular but universal song, this shattering sound.

***“I solemnly, sincerely, truly declare”***

According to Heidegger, all being is being-with (*Mitsein*): the other is always proximal, the voice is always double-tracked, the song is always overdubbed, the lyrics are always co-written, the composition is always a *com-position*, a collaboration.

***“I’ll stand and declare my most shame-filled memories”***

According to Heidegger, being-with is not the same as being-alongside, just as, ontologically, proximity has nothing to do with the existential sociality of an empathic space. I do not ‘feel-for’ her as she sings of such terrible things, I feel-with her. Being-with and feeling-with create no social bond, on the contrary, they reveal—eventually—what Heidegger describes as the essential “unsociability of being”.

***“Take possession of what I have lived through”***

Care (I do care, why?) is not an empathic interpersonal relation but an ontological compartment, one that caring communities don’t care about, one that our culture of memory is in danger of forgetting.

***“My memories are malleable in timing and chronology”***

Does she sing to remember or forget? Both? Her use of repetition, of looping and delay are a reminder of what Kant calls the “apperceptive” nature of the self, where the self only becomes a self to the extent that it “*accompanies*” itself. But this self-accompaniment also creates a song—a harrowing yet beautiful song—that fills the space with a re-sonance, a re-sounding that, while existentially both singular and collective (she sings, we listen), is ontologically unowned: no more she, we, I, me, mine, just the remembrance that there is nothing from which to remember, nothing with which to remember, no power to remember, no desire to remember, together with the obligation to remember. She is obliged to sing, we are obliged to listen, but sometimes it is necessary to stop caring why in order to remember why we care.

***“...but of some things I am sure”***



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19. The lyrics in bold here are taken from the song performed by Emily Rowan at the 'Cultures of Memory' conference, York St John University, October 2014. A video of her performing the piece forms part of the current edition of this journal.

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## Biographical Note

Gary Peters is currently Professor of Critical and Cultural Theory at York St John University, UK. He has published widely in the area of continental philosophy, critical theory and aesthetics from Kant to the present. This work often overlaps with certain areas of pedagogical research as well as a range of art practices (from music and the performing arts to visual art and literature). He is also a musician and composer, working across a wide range of genres. His first book was published in 2005 by Ashgate and is entitled: *Irony and Singularity: Aesthetic Education from Kant to Levinas*. His second book published in 2009 by the University of Chicago Press is entitled: 'The Philosophy of Improvisation'. A third book, edited with his wife Fiona Peters, is entitled *Thoughts of Love*, and was published in 2013.

His current work in progress is a second book on improvisation for the University of Chicago Press entitled *Improvising Improvisation: From out of Philosophy, Music, Dance and Literature*. This is due to be published in late 2016.

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# The Excess of Memory: Rhetorical Interventions of Weems, Schuleit and Attie

Kendall R. Phillips

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## The Excess of Memory: Rhetorical Interventions of Weems, Schuleit and Attie

Kendall R. Phillips

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### Abstract

Rhetorical scholars interested in public memory have typically attended to permanent displays such as monuments or museums. This essay examines the rhetorical texture of installation artists who engage memory. These installations are found to engage aspects of the nonrepresentational dimensions of the experience of memory in ways markedly different from more permanent memorial displays.

Keywords: memory, art, installation, trauma, archive.

Scholars of rhetoric have become important participants in the interdisciplinary study of public memory, joining with philosophers, sociologists and art historians in exploring the dynamic processes through which the past is brought to bear on the present. Over the past few decades, rhetoric scholars have produced a prodigious body of work in the area of memory studies and the ‘rhetoric of memory’ has become a recognisable part of rhetorical studies. The conjoining of rhetoric and memory seems to have created a system of mutual influence whereby concepts within rhetorical studies have become increasingly familiar to scholars of memory and, in turn, the concerns surrounding issues of public memory have penetrated into the wider discussions of rhetoric.<sup>1</sup>

Given this growing system of mutual influence, it is interesting to observe certain tendencies that have emerged within rhetorical studies of memory. For instance, while there have been some important explorations of public memory in terms of public speeches, the majority of memory studies have focused on more material manifestations like monuments and museums.<sup>2</sup> Seen historically this tendency makes sense. Carole Blair, Martha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr.’s landmark exploration of the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in 1991 not only helped to inaugurate the rhetoric of memory but also helped to spur the germinating interests in visual, material and spatial rhetorics.<sup>3</sup> In the intervening years since that 1991 study, a remarkable number of articles concerning memorials, monuments and museums have appeared in journals devoted to rhetoric. A quick glance through Ebsco’s Communication and Mass Media Complete database reveals some 170 essays attending to ‘monuments’, almost 1,000 with keyword ‘memorial’ and more than 2,500 examining ‘museums’.

Beyond the historical circumstances of the introduction of public memory into rhetorical studies, there are other explanations of the attention to monuments, memorials and museums. One explanation is the sources from which public memory studies entered into wider circulation within the academy, namely from scholars like James Young who were struggling to understand the complex ways in which the trauma of the Holocaust is remembered.<sup>4</sup> Attention to the Holocaust and other cultural traumas drew scholars toward the material efforts to commemorate tragedy and concretise an unsettling past. Another potential reason for the focus on monuments within rhetorical studies may be a sense that the construction of a monument or museum is one of the more gross displays of rhetoric’s potential to shape popular opinion and, in the case of memory studies, a public’s relation to events of the past and, in that way, the nature of that public itself. There can be little doubt that one of the reasons nation-states have invested so much energy into the careful stewardship of their history through museums, archives, official historical accounts, and monuments is the assumption that whoever controls the story of the nation’s past has great power over its future.

Here I want to move into the modest ambition of the present essay. Over the next few pages, I want to suggest that our attention to the formal and official work of monuments might be productively counterpointed by attention to other kinds of aesthetic interventions into public remembrance—mainly through an attention

to installation artists whose work presents, I will contend, a different formal sense of public memory. Casting this argument in terms I have used elsewhere, I will argue that official monuments function as public remembrance — which I have defined as “the kind of dominant, reified and calcified forms of remembrance that serve to establish broader frameworks within which the fantasies of public memory are contained and proscribed”.<sup>5</sup> By this, I do not mean to condemn the work of monuments and museums so much as to observe a kind of existential violence they commit to the excesses of memory or the “surplus of memory that cannot be entirely contained or controlled by the disciplines of recollection or the public forms of remembrance; an unpredictable and fractious collection of images, fantasies and emotions”.<sup>6</sup> In this way, I sense that the work of the kinds of artists I will attend to resonates with the observation by Bradford Vivian and Anne T. Demo that visual representations of memory exhibit the “simultaneous preservation and loss of memory that can occur” in part through the “simultaneous permanence and transience of images that assist personal and collective recollection alike”.<sup>7</sup> The experience of visual representations of memories may, indeed, evoke aspects of memory that are themselves nonrepresentational. It is this aspect of the artistic intervention into memory that interests me here. The artistic interventions I will explore in this essay are not more “true” to memory or in any way more “authentic” than “official” monuments but, rather, engage us in a nonrepresentational experience of memory. By this I mean that each of these artistic interventions, and undoubtedly many others, invite an experience of memory that gestures toward its excess — that which lies beyond discursive facticity and within the realm of the visceral and affective.

The unique qualities of artistic interventions have been observed by others. Richard Marback, for instance, has examined the rhetorical qualities of Robert Graham’s “Monument to Joe Louis”, a large bronze statue of a forearm and closed fist in downtown Detroit. This public art installation, in Marback’s reading, “evokes experiences and materialises conditions of contemporary struggles for meaning and value in city life” and intersects in complex ways with the history of Detroit, the Civil Rights movement, and the bodies of those passing by it.<sup>8</sup> The movement of bodies plays an important role in the work of Greg Dickinson, Brian Ott and Eric Aoki who note that museums and art galleries “engage visitors not only on a symbolic level through the practices of collection, exhibition, and display, but also on a material level by locating visitors’ bodies in particular spaces”.<sup>9</sup> As suggested earlier, this bodily experience of moving through space and our engagement with physical objects is an experience that is beyond representational and engages us on a visceral and affective level. Works of art and, indeed, the galleries that display them are often attentive to this basic physical experience as Dickinson, Ott & Aoki observe. Not all art is designed to remain on permanent display; indeed, the works considered here are all temporary installations. Anne Demo, in her study of the work of the art collective the Guerilla Girls, notes the ways that their performances and interventions create a “perspective by incongruity” by unsettling the institutional spaces of art galleries

and museums.<sup>10</sup> Building upon the work of these and other scholars, I want here to attend to the way artistic interventions unsettle and disorient the material and affective experience of spaces, in particular spaces of memory.

While numerous artists work with broad notions of memory, I have chosen three who provide a provocative opening to a wider exploration: Carrie Mae Weems, Anna Schuleit and Shimon Attie. Before turning to some specific examples of their work, it is worthwhile to justify their selection by citing their credentials within the broader art world. Weems is arguably one of the most influential contemporary photographers. Her work includes portraits of contemporary African Americans in her Kitchen Table series as well as interventions into the archival past of African Americans in her use of slave photographs in “From here I saw what happened and I cried”. She has won numerous awards and fellowships, including a MacArthur award, and her work appears in such venues as the Whitney and the Museum of Modern Art. In 2014 she became the first African American female to have a retrospective at the Guggenheim. *The New York Times* has contended about Weems that “No American photographer of the last quarter century... has turned out a more probing, varied and moving body of work” and called her “one of our most effective visual and verbal rhetoricians”. As well, her work has received considerable academic attention. bell hooks, for instance, has stated that “more than any contemporary photographer creating representations of blackness, [Weems’s] work evokes the exilic nature of black people”.<sup>11</sup>

While Anna Schuleit is a newer voice on the contemporary art scene, her work has already received remarkable attention. Her installations have focused on institutional spaces as in her first major work, “Habeas Corpus”, in which a large, abandoned psychiatric hospital in Massachusetts was transformed into musical instrument through which J.S. Bach’s Magnificat was performed. Of this early work, Susan Bell has observed, “this careful, extended, multilayered work of art brought/embodied patients/people into view, honored, educated, and mourned with them”.<sup>12</sup> Schuleit’s work has garnered accolades including a 2006 MacArthur Fellowship. In awarding her this honour, the MacArthur Foundation noted, “Employing such ephemeral elements as choral pieces and seas of flowers, her powerful public works are designed to endure not as objects, but as vivid memories for those who experience the multisensory events she orchestrates”.<sup>13</sup>

In the final section of this essay, I will spend some time with a project from Shimon Attie. Attie rose to prominence after a daring projection of archival photos of the pre-Holocaust Jewish community onto the walls of contemporary Berlin. Of “The Writing on the Wall: Projections in Berlin’s Jewish Quarter”, James Young notes, “even though the images may have disappeared from sight as soon as Attie turned off the high-intensity projector, their after-image lived on in the minds of those who had seen them once... [these neighborhoods] are now haunted not by the Jews who had once lived here, or even by their absence, but by the images of Jews haunting the artist”.<sup>14</sup>

In numerous other projects, Attie has used images to evoke the past—hand written notes etched by lasers onto tenement buildings in New York, video installations portraying the Israeli Palestinian conflict—and, like Weems and

Schuleit, he has received numerous honors including the Rome Prize, and fellowships from Harvard's Radcliff institute and the Guggenheim Foundation.<sup>15</sup> I chose these three artists not only because of their success and prominence in the contemporary art world, but also because while all working on the issue of memory each employs diverse media and highlights different formal dimensions of artistic interventions into memorial space: Weems with photography, Schuleit with multi-modal installation, and Attie with video. I see these artists as exemplars and provocations for thinking about the forms by which memory is made public and the simultaneous preservations/loss and permanence/transience these forms enact.

### Carrie Mae Weems' *The Hampton Project* as Visual Palimpsest

*The Hampton Project* debuted in March of 2000 at Williams College Museum of Art. The installation used photographs by Weems as well as word art crafted by her in combination with archival photographs from the collection of Frances Benjamin Johnston, a photographer from the 1800s who catalogued life at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, later Hampton University. Hampton's original mission focused on educating African Americans and Native Americans and it is this legacy that lies at the heart of Weems' artistic intervention. [The project can be viewed here.](#)

Weems draws upon a variety of archival images including those of Johnston, which, as Holland Carter notes in the *New York Times*, exist "in a state of suspended animation. Whether in the classrooms or workshops, impeccably dressed students seem frozen in place, as if holding their breath". Intermingled with the archival images of Hampton are other images like a KKK parade and images of 'uncivilised' vernacular cultures, through which Weems lays bare the complex legacy of an institution that simultaneously effected the work of education and domestication. Indeed this provocation proved too much for Hampton University, which in spite of commissioning the project in the end chose to cancel it due to what it considered Weems' "interpretive misjudgments of the school's history and goals".<sup>16</sup> While the controversy surrounding *The Hampton Project* is interesting, here I want to attend briefly to the formal qualities of Weems' installation and contend that Weems creates a visual palimpsest that provokes rather than subdues the excess of memory embedded into Hampton University's complex past. In addition to contemporary and archival photographs, Weems uses free hanging strips of semi-transparent fabric upon which some of the photographic images are printed. The artist thus crafts a complex visual layering of images; past overwriting present, present overwriting past. Surrounding this complex visual layering is the audio of Weems reading a "collage-like text about violence and loss".<sup>17</sup> The visual layering and the accompanying audio creates a complex viewing experience in which various images of Hampton's (and by association America's) racial past overwrite and underwrite each other in what becomes a literal visual palimpsest.



In its literal definition, a palimpsest is “a very old document on which the original writing has been erased and replaced with new writing”.<sup>18</sup> Importantly, the introduction of the new writing does not entirely replace the older writing but, rather, a trace of the old remains evident. Andreas Huyssen employs the metaphor of palimpsest in his thinking of urban memoryscapes and argues that the trope of the palimpsest is a means not of avoiding the material reality of spaces but of respecting “the fundamental materiality and formal traditions of the different media of memory”.<sup>19</sup> In her combination of photographic, audio, and verbal texts as well as her careful layering, Weems employs the palimpsest to complicate and unsettle the material and formal traditions through which Hampton’s past has been transmitted. It is telling that this work draws much of its power through her use of the archive.

Derrida insists that the archive crafts the order of both the origin and the command and, in this way, imposes upon us the centrality of the question of the “there”: “There, we said, and in this place. How are we to think of there? And this taking place or this having a place, this taking the place one has of the *arkhe*”?<sup>20</sup> The archive, in Derrida’s conception, constitutes the identity of a location and the rule of law that governs what takes place within this site. But, the archive is always already constituted by obscuring or submerging other archives and with them other identities and other means of engagement. Thought of in this way, the archive is constituted not only by its existence but by its relationship to those other archives that it displaces—the “here” is constituted in part by the “not here” and, at times, the “no longer here”. The archive, like other forms of palimpsest, seeks to erase the traces of other archives and so present itself as the only place, or at least the only intelligible place.

By visualising the palimpsest of the archive, the layers of meanings and memories inscribed and reinscribed as well as those erased and ignored, Weems’ photographic installation challenges not just the archive but its originary and commanding orders as well. By bringing the images of the official archive into contact with those other, displaced archives whose traces faintly remain, Weems questions whether an institution made as a response to racism can effectively remove itself from institutionalised racism. This is, at least in my reading, not so much a critique of Hampton but recognition of the displacement that such an institution must, by necessity, enact. “How do we think of there”? in terms of Hampton is, in many ways, precisely the question Weems’ project seeks to reinscribe—written over the origins and authority of the official remembrance—and in this way her work can be seen as unsettling the archival discipline of recollection and gesturing to the excess of memories lying barely visible beneath the images of the past presented.

## Anna Schuleit's *Bloom* and Ephemeral Presence

*Bloom* was installed into the recently decommissioned Massachusetts Mental Health Center (MMHC) in November of 2003. Continuing her earlier work in former mental health facilities, Schuleit chose in this instance to create a complex installation in which the hospital's spaces were filled with flowers and with the ambient sounds of normal institutional activities recorded in the hospital during its last weeks. Accompanying the four-day installation was a symposium about mental health, an open forum of "memories, stories, wishes, questions, musings, hopes, victories, reflections and descriptions" concerning MMHC, and an artist talk by Schuleit.<sup>21</sup> [The project can be viewed here.](#)

The most visually stunning aspect of the project is the use of flowers. Schuleit began with the sense that, while flowers fill most hospitals, they are almost entirely absent in psychiatric facilities. Calculating the total number of patients passing through MMHC, Schuleit used one flower for each past patient—a total of 28,000 flowers. These flowers then filled the office, examining rooms, patient rooms, exercise facilities and all the other spaces in which the work of MMHC was conducted. Susan Bell observes that in *Bloom*, "the flowers, the controlled yet wildly extravagant blooms, are 'out of place' and displace the order of the hospital".<sup>22</sup> One can imagine here the almost overwhelming effect of the presence of the flowers, not only the vibrant visual experience but also the olfactory experience of the many, diverse fragrances; experiences that must have seemed out of place in the usually sterile and antiseptic hospital environs. After the installation the carefully preserved flowers were delivered to psychiatric institutions throughout the area so that *Bloom* could continue to provoke different ways of thinking about mental illness and the institutions in which it is treated.

What I want to highlight here is the ways in which Schuleit's installation crafts a poignant visual marker of the ephemeral presence of memory within space. The vibrant flowers filling now empty halls are surrounded by the echoing sounds of everyday life in the building during the times in which both the flowers and the viewers were absent. This is a carefully crafted visual marker of the trace left by that which is no longer present; an enigma compounded by the fact that the space in which the trace is now so visually striking was one which was for so long concealed and ignored.<sup>23</sup> Flowers are a powerful symbol outlining the contours of the trace of the absent for several reasons. First, as Schuleit notes, psychiatric hospitals are sites in which flowers—markers of care and concern—are noticeable in their absence. Second, the striking colours of the floral displays, as Bell noted, serve to displace the institutional inhumanity (or at least ahumanity) of the hospital spaces through their spectacular display. Third, there is something in the flower as a marker of memory that resonates with the experience of memory. While deeply present flowers are, like all living things, also ephemeral. The living flower—as opposed to the preserved or fabricated—will, like all living things, perish and fade; so too will memories. There is a deep, existential resonance between the presence of the flowers and their capacity to mark the ephemerality of that presence.

Given the essential ephemerality of flowers, Schuleit's installation may, in both existential and institutional ways, speak to the absence in presence and the inevitable loss of memory in its appearance. I think here of Charles Scott's provocative suggestion:

*Perhaps there are ways to speak performatively and presentatively of such loss, to speak of the occurrence of memory's loss in ways that allow its nonimagistic, nonsubstantive bearing to communicate nonmetaphorically in the midst of images, metaphors, and nouns. Speaking in such a way is like speaking of emptiness that preface determined experiences and things in the world or of passage of life in the coming of life.<sup>24</sup>*

This way of thinking is not merely a reframing of our sense of memory but also a way of marking the spaces in which we live in ways that craft a different moral vision for the empty and ignored institutional spaces of MMHC. Scott challenges us to seek ways out of the representation of memory and this is what Schuleit's installation provides. The presence of the multitude of flowers appropriates and even subverts the institutional spaces of the hospital reminding us in a visceral, nonrepresentational way of the lives that have passed through this space. And, like the human beings they stand in for, each flower strikes us simultaneously as part of the collective but also in its individuality. Each type of flower, and indeed each individual flower, is unique in its visual and olfactory quality. In their collective and individual vibrancy the flowers exceed their representational quality—standing in for the human beings who have passed through these halls—and, instead, become things in and of themselves. As Scott notes in his book, *The Lives of Things*: “Things stand out in their singularity. They stand out in their ‘just-so’ quality, their nonreducibility to anything else, in the simultaneous palpability and impalpability to their events”.<sup>25</sup>

Schuleit's flowers-as-living-things mark through their vibrancy and intensity their own nonreducibility. So too the halls of the MMHC, once so clinical and sterile and homogenous, are filled with vibrant sights and intense smells and transformed into a disorienting embodied experience. The “experiential landscape”, as Dickinson, Ott and Aoki call it, of the institutional spaces is unsettled and in this disorientation we are called into engagement not with the collective of those who passed through them but with their intense, vibrant singularity.<sup>26</sup>

### Shimon Attie's *The Attraction of Onlookers* as Traumatic Threshold

In October of 1966 the small Welsh village of Aberfan experienced a tragedy that continues to haunt British collective memory to this day. A coal tip—a pile of waste rock and gravel from one of the coal mines—shifted due to excessive rainfall and created a landslide that buried the village's local school. Twenty-eight adults and 116 children, nearly the entire youth population of Aberfan, died that day. While perhaps not known in the US, the tragedy shocked Great Britain

and marked the village deeply into the national psyche—perhaps in ways not dissimilar to the way Columbine, Colorado is marked in America’s memory.<sup>27</sup>

For the fortieth anniversary of the tragedy, citizens of the village along with BBC Wales invited American artist Shimon Attie to craft an artistic response to memories of the tragedy. What resulted was a 5-channel HD video installation in which the viewer is surrounded by a series of images displayed on large monitors on the gallery walls. [The project can be viewed here.](#)

Attie’s approach to the ill-fated village was to begin with the question “What makes a Welsh village”? and in so doing to recruit local villagers to depict the kinds of stereotypical figures prominent in the cultural mythos of the small village in Wales: the school teacher, the bobby, the boxer, the coal miner, the barman, etc. In Attie’s installation, each figure stands rotating against a black abyss and, at first glance, it may appear that these figures are still images that are constructed or digitally made to rotate. Closer inspection, however, reveals that these figures are not still figures. The actors blink and twitch, shift their positions as they rotate slowly before the viewer—an effect created by physically rotating the tableau before a camera that captures each figure or set of figures from all sides. Attie’s approach is designed, in part, to undercut the media obsession with the village; hence the title “The Attraction of Onlookers”. Gaynor Madgwick, one of the survivors of the school disaster and also one of Attie’s subjects, praised the work: “For years I have been portrayed as Gaynor the victim or Gaynor the survivor, but in this project I am pictured in a dress... relaxing on a chaise lounge. I think it is a true reflection on me”.<sup>28</sup> By confounding the expectations surrounding a site so rich in tragic memory, Attie challenges both the viewers and the viewed highlighting that there is, as Kingsley Baird has contended, “an ethical dimension to showing as well as looking”.<sup>29</sup>

Attie is careful not to frame his commemorative intervention into the public memory of Aberfan in terms of tragedy or trauma and, in fairness, he has used a similar visual approach to other projects including a decommissioned racetrack and Palestinian and Israeli communities living in New York. Still, it seems to me that there is a space for considering the visual depiction of trauma within Attie’s Aberfan project. The depiction of the still figures as alone in a vast blackness suggests an element of trauma something akin to being adrift or falling. Eleanor Kaufman observes the parallels between falling and trauma and the sense that trauma has a kind of “abysslike structure”.<sup>30</sup> There is also a subtle parallel between the images of these figures—alone amidst the abyss—and the viewer standing in the darkened gallery surrounded by images of similar floating figures and also surrounded by the nothingness of the visual abyss. Our attention split among the multiple figures floating on the screens surrounding us we may experience a kind of diffused attention or decentred sense of looking. In her analysis of trauma in film Claire Sisco King notes, “This decentred looking can encourage viewers not to create any closed or coherent identification with a single character but instead to create multiple, shifting identifications. The subjectivity of the spectator who is offered almost limitless vision(s) may thus be torn apart

or shattered”.<sup>31</sup> While the experience of Attie’s *Attraction of Onlookers* is nowhere near as violent as the films considered by King, the sense of displacement seems similar as we are also afforded the numerous, competing views with which and through which to identify. The parallel between viewer and viewed continues if we begin to consider the ways in which the floating figures are framed in terms of their shared trauma. It is clear that they are suspended in some ways, and Attie is careful to depict their suspended state in its most mundane, intelligible and stereotypical form: The barman pours a pint, the boxer wraps his hands, the shopkeeper retrieves an item. What is unclear is whether these isolated and suspended moments occur immediately before or after the traumatic event that engulfs them. In this way, these figures can be read as floating at the threshold of trauma—although on which side of this threshold we cannot ascertain. Their positioning defies any attempt to categorise them as victims even as our choice to view them is driven almost solely by that categorisation. They are simultaneously unmarked by the trauma we know awaits them and marked by the trauma we know they have survived. Detached from this flow of traumatic time, they are displaced and fragmented. Kristeva observes trauma as a “shattering of psychic identity”<sup>32</sup> and, along similar lines, Kirby Farrell contends trauma reveals the “ultimate nothingness of the self”.<sup>33</sup>

While this sense of shattered psyches floating near the nothingness of the traumatic abyss may seem hopelessly pessimistic—especially for an artwork that is designed to free the village from its traumatic legacy—there is also an optimism in displacing these individuals from the traumatic threshold that has defined their identities in British public memory. By suspending the moment-before, Attie forces us to reconsider not only the contours of trauma but our relation to it as victim and as viewer. Considering the place of trauma in relation to poetic creation, Gregory Orr observes “the very hopelessness of the shattered self is its hope, because this devastated self possesses a radical freedom”.<sup>34</sup> Aberfan resident and participant Keith Anderson notes a sense of this new hope when claiming, “to me it is a way of helping to draw a line under the media spotlight. It is like we have opened up and told you all we can, now we would just like to be left alone”.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

The modest ambition of this essay has been to suggest ways in which contemporary artistic interventions into public memory operate differently than more traditional monumental and memorial work. This is not to imply that all contemporary artists are engaging memory in the same way but rather to propose that scholars of memory might learn new lessons about memory by attending to the less official and non-monumental interventions of some artists.

These artists, and others like them, gesture towards what I have referred to here as the “excess of memory”, the sense that our efforts at remembrance will always fail to capture the surplus of memories that they seek to contain. Recalling Plato’s simile that memory is like a mark in wax, it seems clear that the marks

made by past experience—particularly the deep and at times violent marks left by traumatic experiences—leave a deep trace that the icons of remembrance cannot fill. At times we imagine, perhaps better presume, that the official objects of remembrance can effectively fill these marks, these cultural wounds. But the space of memory always exceeds the capacity of stone, or buildings or ceremonies and the kinds of artistic efforts explored here seems to serve as reminders of this incapacity.

This sense of memory's excess, of the way the experience of memory outstrips our ability to represent it, may be an important part of the "experiential landscape" evoked by artistic interventions. While it remains to be seen whether other artistic interventions into memorial space exhibit similar qualities, the three examples sketched out here suggest that one function of art is to gesture beyond the memorial and beyond the representational to the surplus of both meaning and experience that occurs during the appearance of memory.

There is hope in thinking that art can intervene differently into our experience of the past. As Geoffrey Harman writes "art as a performative medium—art not reduced to official meaning or information—has a chance to... provide a counterforce to manufactured and monolithic memory".<sup>36</sup> My approach has sought to see these art works not as objects in need of interpretation but as expressing their own theories of memory—of the interplay between erasure and erased, the transience of presence, and the boundaries of trauma. What I hope to have suggested here, then, is the potential of bringing the art of rhetoric into a deeper dialogue with the visual and performative arts as we explore the persistent presence of the past within the spaces of the present.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The number of book length rhetorical studies of memory is indicative of this trend. See, for example: Jane Greer & Laurie Grobman, editors, *Pedagogies of Public Memory: Teaching Writing and Rhetoric at Museums, Archives, and Memorials* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Marouf Hasian, *Restorative Justice, Humanitarian Rhetorics, and Public Memories of Colonial Camp Cultures* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014); Ekaterina V. Haskins, *Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015); Kendall R. Phillips, editor, *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2004); Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes, editors, *Global Memoryscapes: Contesting Remembrance in a Transnational Age* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2011); G. Mitchell Reyes, editor, *Public Memory, Race, and Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010); Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>For example, Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, & Brian Ott, editors, *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of

Alabama Press, 2010).

3. Blair, Carole, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci Jr, "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype". *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 263-288.
4. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).
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6. Kendall Phillips, "The Failure of Memory", 219.
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9. Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, & Eric Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum", *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3 (2006): 29.
10. Anne T. Demo, "The Gurreilla Girls' Comic Politics of Subversion", *Women's Studies in Communication* 23 (2000): 133-156.
11. bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995), 52.
12. Susan E. Bell "Claiming justice: Knowing mental illness in the public art of Anna Schuleit's 'Habeas Corpus' and 'Bloom'". *Health* 15 (2011): 313-334.
13. <http://www.macfound.org/fellows/789/>
14. James E. Young. *At Memory's edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 72.
15. On Attie's earlier work see, Margaret Ewing, "The Unexpected Encounter: Confronting Holocaust Memory in the Streets of Post-Wall Berlin", in *Rhetoric, Remembrance and Visual Form*.
16. Cotter, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/23/arts/art-in-review-carrie-mae-weems-the-hampton-project.html>
17. *ibid.*
18. "Palimpsest", Meriam Webster on-line dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palimpsest>
19. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.
20. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1996), 1.
21. "Bloom Invitation", 2003.
22. Bell, 329.
23. Here I am reminded of Ricoeur's observation about the founding importance of Plato's notion of memory as imprint in *Theaetatus*: "Our entire problematic of the trace, from antiquity to today, is truly the inheritor of this ancient notion of the imprint, which, far from solving the enigma of the presence of absence that encumbers the problematic of the representation of the past, adds to it its own enigma". Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans., Kathleen Blamey &

- David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 415.
- <sup>24</sup> Charles E. Scott. *The Time of Memory* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 4.
- <sup>25</sup> Charles E. Scott, *The Lives of Things* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 182.
- <sup>26</sup> Dickinson, Ott & Aoki, 30.
- <sup>27</sup> McLean, Iain, and Martin Johnes, editors, *Aberfan: Government and Disasters*. (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2000).
- <sup>28</sup> Cathy Owen, "I'm Not a Victim or a Survivor", *South Wales Echo* (9 December 2008), 28.
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- <sup>30</sup> Eleanor Kaufman, "Falling from the Sky: Trauma in Perec's *W* and Caruth's Unclaimed Experience", *Diacritics* 28 (1998): 45.
- <sup>31</sup> Claire Sisco King, *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 34.
- <sup>32</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 222.
- <sup>33</sup> Kirby Farrell, *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 185.
- <sup>34</sup> Gregory Orr, *Poetry as Survival* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 121.
- <sup>35</sup> Owen, 28.
- <sup>36</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 104.

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A Cast of Thousands: *Stela* at  
Militärhistorisches Museum Der  
Bundeswehr, Dresden

Kingsley Baird

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## A Cast of Thousands: *Stela* at Militärhistorisches Museum Der Bundeswehr, Dresden

Kingsley Baird

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### Abstract

In 2014, New Zealand artist, Kingsley Baird, built a temporary memorial in the German Armed Forces' Military History Museum in Dresden. The memorial comprised two elements: a stainless steel 'cenotaph' and 18,000 biscuits in the shape of soldiers of different nationalities who fought in the First World War. On 12 July 2014, almost 100 years after that conflict's beginning, *Stela* was formally presented for public viewing and visitors to the museum were invited to take a biscuit from the memorial. For the previous 10 days, in the heart of the museum, the sculpture evolved as the artist stacked the Anzac recipe biscuits around the cenotaph form until it disappeared from view. During this 'performance', many 'players' — including the city of Dresden, a cemetery, characters from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the museum, staff and visitors — contributed to the artist's experience of *Stela*. This article introduces some of them.

Key words: *Stela*, Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, memory, memorialization, World War I.

## The Cast

Figure 1. “Die Toten leben indem sie uns mahnen” (“The dead live on through the warning they give us”). Carved lettering on a stone bench, Heidefriedhof (forest cemetery), Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.]



## The Cemetery, the City, and Slaughterhouse-Five

Theresienstadt. Sachsenhausen. Ravensbrück. Dachau. Buchenwald. Bergen-Belsen. Dresden. Auschwitz. Coventry. Oradour. Rotterdam. Warsaw. Leningrad. Lidice. Each of these 14 names, in bronze lettering, is fixed to its own sandstone block pillar encircling a patera in Heidefriedhof (forest cemetery) on the northern outskirts of Dresden. The place names of the stone ring (built by the regime of former East Germany) list concentration camps and other sites of barbarity of the Nazi period, as well as bombed cities—including Dresden—in a Communist catalogue of war crimes.

Figure 2. Memorial roundel, Heidefriedhof, Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Proceeding in a north-west direction from the roundel one comes to the path's destination — another memorial from the Soviet era — this time commemorating the inhabitants of Dresden who died during the Allied bombing raids of 13 and 14 February 1945.<sup>1</sup> The carved words, standing proud of the stone block surface, read:

*“Wieviele starben? Wer kennt die Zahl? An deinen Wunden sieht man die Qual; der Namenlosen die hier verbrannt; im Höellenfeuer aus Menschenhand”.*  
(*“How many died? Who knows the count? In your wounds one sees the ordeal; Of the nameless who in here were conflagrated; In the hellfire made by hands of man”.*)

In Kurt Vonnegut's novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the Englishman said to Billy Pilgrim: “You needn't worry about bombs, by the way. Dresden is an open city. It is undefended, and contains no war industries or troop concentrations of any importance”.<sup>2</sup>

Who to believe, Vonnegut — who was on the ground — or The United States Army Airforces who had a bird's eye view.<sup>3</sup>

*“Every other big city in Germany had been bombed and burned ferociously. Dresden had not suffered so much as a cracked windowpane. Sirens went off every day, screamed like hell, and people went down into cellars and listened to radios there. The planes were always bound for someplace else – Leipzig, Chemnitz, Plauen, places like that”.*<sup>4</sup>

*“Billy, with his memories of the future, knew that the city would be smashed to smithereens and then burned—in about thirty more days. He knew, too, that most of the people watching him would soon be dead. So it goes”.*<sup>5</sup>

*“‘It had to be done’, Rumfoord told Billy, speaking of the destruction of Dresden. ‘I know’, said Billy.*

*‘That’s war’.*

*I know. I’m not complaining’.*

*‘It must have been hell on the ground’.*

*‘It was’, said Billy Pilgrim.*

*‘Pity the men who had to do it’.*

*‘I do’.*

*‘You must have had mixed feelings there on the ground’.*

*‘It was all right’, said Billy. ‘Everything is all right, and everybody has to do exactly what he does. I learned that on Tralfamadore’”.*<sup>6</sup>

Today Dresden looks like this.

Figure 3. Dresden Innere  
Altstadt (old town interior),  
2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Once known as the “Florence of the North”, after Allied bombing in February 1945, the *Allegorie der Gute* (Allegory of Goodness) atop the Rathaus looked out over a scene “...like the moon”, according to Billy Pilgrim.<sup>7</sup>

“There was a fire-storm out there. Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn”.<sup>8</sup> The Altstadt was rebuilt after the reunification of Germany, including the Frauenkirche. The Altstadt’s violent past is recorded in the stone patchwork of the Church of Our Lady. The dark stones reveal what remained of the church after the bombing in which between 25,000 and 40,000 people were killed—many burnt to death—in the resulting firestorm.<sup>9</sup> Gruesome photos show Dresden’s dead piled in preparation for cremation, a task undertaken by the SS (Schutzstaffel) because of their expertise in cremating the bodies of concentration camp victims. The sight of baked, soldier-shaped biscuits lying on a tray in the oven would never mean the same again. “‘It’s the sweetest thing there is’, said Lazzaro. ‘People fuck with me’, he said, ‘and Jesus Christ are they ever fucking sorry’”.<sup>10</sup>

Dresden’s violent history during the latter stages of the Second World War, the allusions to the destruction of the city’s inhabitants in Heidefriedhof, physical manifestations of the largely-razed Altstadt in its restored architecture, and Vonnegut’s semi-autobiographical, fatalistic narrative: these and other fragments of my Dresden experience provided the backdrop for the *Stela* artwork I made in Saxony’s capital in 2014.

Figure 4. Restored Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady), Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### The Museum

The stage for the building and performance of *Stela* was the German Armed Forces' Military History Museum (Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr) in Dresden. I was struck by the museum's imposing architecture the first time I visited. This impression is heightened when approaching the main entrance on a road that gently slopes up to the rather grand, neo-classical structure. It looked more like a palace, I thought, than an armory, the purpose for which it was built between 1873–1876, and remained until its transformation into a museum in 1897. From then it served different masters as an army museum for Saxony; the Wehrmacht, during the Nazi years; and later of East Germany before closing in 1989 when the German state was unified.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 5. Militärhistorisches  
Museum der Bundeswehr,  
Dresden, 2013. Photo: Kingsley  
Baird.



When the museum reopened in 2011, the Neo-Classical architecture had been diagonally divided by a Daniel Libeskind-designed steel, chevron-shaped wedge—outside and inside. The interior exhibition spaces were dramatically reformed, intended to “facilitate a reconsideration of the way we think about war”.<sup>12</sup> According to Studio Libeskind:

*“The new façade’s openness and transparency contrasts with the opacity and rigidity of the existing building. The latter represents the severity of the authoritarian past while the former reflects the openness of the democratic society in which it has been re-imagined”.*<sup>13</sup>

Figure 6. Inside the Daniel  
Libeskind-designed ‘wedge’,  
Militärhistorisches Museum der  
Bundeswehr, Dresden, 2013.  
Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Standing inside the wedge one is afforded wide views of the surrounding city and countryside. From the 25-metre high viewing platform another of the architect's intentions is revealed. The wedge points towards the old heart of Dresden, the area of intense firebombing on 13-14 February 1945. Ironically, given the museum's use during the war as military barracks, it was spared the bombing, being located 3 kilometres across the river Elbe from the city's historic centre and, therefore, away from the Allies' main focus. Libeskind's wedge is an apt metaphor for the museum's approach to the complex story of war and, in particular, Germany's history in the 20th century. The museum does not shirk from the nation's difficult past, instead it poses awkward questions that some of Germany's former foes and allies could ask of themselves.

Figure 7. *Stela* exhibition poster, 2014. Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr. Photo: David Brandt.



## The Curator

*“Dear Kingsley Baird,*

*It was a pleasure to have you as our visitor.*

*As you correctly stated in your letter April 12th we are enthusiastic about exhibiting and realizing the stela project. Location and timing is perfect. It will coincide with our big 100th anniversary exhibition about World War I in August 2014.*

*Of course there will be some challenges and I am sure we will overcome them together.*

*The stela project is in perfect alignment with our museum’s philosophy. To give our visitors real food for thought.*

*Best regards”,<sup>14</sup>*

So wrote curator, Dr P., following my visit to the Military History Museum weeks earlier. His email revealed that there would be some opposition; not everyone associated with the museum was as enthusiastic about the project as he was. However, Dr P. would go in to battle on the project’s behalf. He believed in it.

The museum is run by the Bundeswehr, the German Armed Forces. Although he understated the amount of effort it would take to realize the project, Dr P. had his work cut out convincing the military hierarchy that the exhibition was a good idea. Who could blame them? Dr. P’s pun, ‘food for thought’, was both the point and the problem of the exhibition. While he did not elaborate on the challenges he would face, I assumed the project’s deliberate tension between the sacred and the profane, could prove difficult to negotiate. Once the word was out, an article appeared in a local Dresden newspaper questioning the appropriateness of exhibiting an artwork in a military museum — perhaps any museum — that included visitors eating biscuits in the form of soldiers. Fair enough, but I hoped the ‘Eucharistic’ ritual would be interpreted as revealing society’s responsibility in sacrificing others in war, as well as being an act of commemoration. Simultaneously a gesture of forgetting *and* remembering.

Back in the Antipodes, I was awakened after midnight by a telephone call from a Dresden journalist, no doubt oblivious to the time difference. Aware of the potential for controversy, I had to gather my thoughts quickly as I was grilled about the project by my interrogator. Dr P. had cautioned me to be on guard during such media encounters. Apparently, the skills of a diplomat and tactician would be required; loose talk might jeopardise the exhibition.

I think I had heard Dr P. was once in the Army. Compulsory military service or a career soldier, I don’t know. His ponytail is out-of-place in an army environment. Perhaps this mark was essential in drawing a line between military and civilian life. An outward sign of the distinction he must maintain between a critical position and being imbedded in the military apparatus.

Figure 8. Grave of Hans Bogner, Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery, Polygon Wood, Belgium, 2008. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### Hans, Peter and 'Bert'

I concluded my essay on the *Stela* artwork in the catalogue of the Museum's World War I centenary exhibition as follows:

*"Above all, Stela is a work about memory; while I am stacking the soldier-shaped biscuits around the form of the Cenotaph I am certain to think of Hans Bogner, Peter Kollwitz, 'Bert' Grant, and their comrades".<sup>15</sup>*

Hans is the only German buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Polygon Wood in Belgium.<sup>16</sup> Killed on 28 September 1918, if he'd survived another 7 weeks it would all have been over. So it goes.

I was drawn to his headstone whose form is subtly distinguished from those of the mostly New Zealand graves that surround it. While the height and width appears similar to its companions, the top was horizontal instead of radiused, the font sans serif and characteristic symbols of faith such as the Latin Cross or Star of David, are absent. Upon closer inspection, the inscribed language, regiment, and discreet cross pattée or Tatzekreuz indicated that this headstone was that of a German soldier. How Hans Bogner of the 27th Bavarian Infantry Regiment

came to be buried in Polygon Wood Cemetery I don't know, but in common with his former adversaries, he is commemorated with an individual burial marker. What struck me about this grave—and perhaps the reason I had the impulse to photograph it—was the singular humanity and dignity accorded to a former foe; in life he was an enemy to those who now surround him, but in death, he appears as their comrade.<sup>17</sup>

Peter was also a German soldier but buried in a Military Cemetery of his own nation at Vladslo in Belgium. Unlike Hans, Peter's remains are interred with some of his comrades. Karl, Roberts Z and O, Charles (who had a French middle name, "Guillaume"), Johann, Wilhelm (the Emperor's name), Paul, Friedrich, and... Peter! "Peter Kollwitz Musketier + 23.10.1914". He was dead keen; a representative of the *Kriegsbegeisterung* or "war enthusiasm". His mother had encouraged him to go to war; his father not. And did she regret it? For the rest of her life and after life. My knees were sore after the first two days of biscuit stacking despite the pads. Käthe and Karl are destined to kneel for eternity before their son's plaque.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 9. Käthe Kollwitz. Die trauernden Eltern (The Grieving Parents), 1932. Granite. German Military Cemetery, Vladslo, Belgium, 2008. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



A hundred years ago, my maternal grandfather, Albert (Bert) George Grant, had journeyed to Europe "from the uttermost ends of the earth" to make war. "From the uttermost ends of the earth", the inscription on the four New Zealand battlefield monuments on the Western Front, alludes to the physical distance that New Zealand soldiers travelled to take part in World War I, and their position on the margins of Empire and civilisation.

A full body portrait in his 'hospital blues', painted on one of the occasions Bert was wounded, a few service medals, his very succinct army history record, and a rusty bayonet are all that testify to his World War I service.<sup>19</sup> Left arm in a sling; a shoulder wound, I think? Returning to active service he swapped and became just

as proficient with the right. Generic; probably hundreds—maybe 1000s—by the same painter. There were certainly enough subjects. But it's Bert all right.

Figure 10. Albert George Grant  
in 'hospital blues', c. 1916.  
Painter: unknown.



I know those features, I spent hours sculpting them, bending over, or kneeling beside you to capture that perpetual smile as you sat motionless in your armchair, head turned from the spectacular Breaker Bay view towards the telly. Your mind somewhere else. “Unstuck in time”.<sup>20</sup> You didn’t talk about the war. Except for one incident, enough times for it to become my faded memory as well. Something about Mersa Matruh, I think.<sup>21</sup> You’d come across those Scots in the desert. If they’d just killed them it might have been different. But they cut off their balls. There was no way back from that. The first village would do. “‘Anybody ever asks you what the sweetest thing in life is’, said Lazzaro, ‘it’s revenge’”.<sup>22</sup> You were so kind, so gentle to a grandson. It just didn’t square with the story about holding the feral kittens under the water until they stopped struggling.

Figure 11. Kameraden Grab  
(Comrades' Grave), German  
Military Cemetery, Langemark,  
Belgium, 2008. Photo: Kingsley  
Baird.



#### Stela: Biscuits and a Biscuit Tin

*Stela* was a long time in the making, going back to my first visit to the German military cemeteries of Vladslo and Langemark in Belgium in 2008. There I was struck by the contrast between the 'natural forest' aesthetic of mature oak trees and the open, 'English churchyard' design of the Commonwealth War Graves cemeteries. I thought the former were about hiding away the dead of the defeated aggressor. Respect for the fallen, of course, but not in our faces!

The concept and reality of Langemark's mass grave of German soldiers was very affecting. The remains of 25,000 combatants of the Great War buried together—beside and on top of each other.<sup>23</sup> Pragmatic, yes, but the name, Kameraden Grab—Comrades' Grave—suggested another motivation altogether.

*Stela* was inspired by the oak forest, the mass grave, and the surrounding monolithic funeral markers, each with surfaces covered in a texture of hundreds of names.

Figure 12. Commemorative stela, Kameraden Grab, German Military Cemetery, Langemark, Belgium, 2008. Photo: Kingsley Baird



### The Cenotaph

Figure 13. Kingsley Baird. *Cenotaph*, Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, Dresden, 2014. Stainless steel, 1800mm x 1800 mm x 540 mm. Collection: Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr. Photo: David Brandt.



In early July 2014 a stainless steel form 1800 mm high x 1800 mm long x 540 mm wide appeared without explanation or label in a ground floor gallery of the museum, beside the “Militär und Technologie” (Military and Technology) section. The *Cenotaph*—meaning an “empty tomb”—is appropriately, though not intentionally, reminiscent of Lutyens’s quintessential memorial in Whitehall.<sup>24</sup> Its shape is that of 6 human-sized ‘caskets’ stacked on top of each other. At once a mass grave and a biscuit tin. Sacred and profane.



Figure 14. Kingsley Baird.  
*Cenotaph*, Militärlhistorisches  
Museum der Bundeswehr,  
Dresden, 2014. Stainless steel.  
Detail (oak and kawakawa  
leaf pattern). Collection:  
Militärlhistorisches Museum der  
Bundeswehr, Dresden.  
Photo: David Brandt.



The surface, as if in the shadow of Langemark's and Vladlso's foliage, is decorated with a pattern of etched oak leaves. Amongst these symbols of Germany and remembrance are the leaves of the native New Zealand plant, kawakawa, a Māori funerary, commemorative symbol.

On 12 July 2014, almost 100 years after the beginning of the First World War, *Stela* was formally presented for public viewing. For the previous 10 days visitors to the museum had the opportunity to watch the sculpture evolve as I stacked approximately 18,000 Anzac recipe biscuits formed from cookie cutters in the shapes of soldiers from the 1914-18 war around the *Cenotaph*, until it disappeared from view.

Figure 15. Stainless steel cookie cutters for *Stela* biscuits, Akademie Deutsches Bäckerhandwerk Sachsen, Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



## The Biscuits

### Recipe for making 30 biscuits

#### *Ingredients*

*½ cup white sugar*

*1 ½ cups plain flour*

*1 cup rolled oats (finely ground in food processor)*

*¼ cup desiccated coconut (ground in food processor)*

*¼ cup wholemeal flour*

*125 grams butter*

*4 tablespoons golden syrup*

*1 teaspoon baking soda*

*1 egg<sup>25</sup>*

While their combined monetary value was not insignificant—1 and a half Euros each—their real value was symbolic. Or at least that was the perception the museum and the artist wanted to communicate to the visitors.

Eighteen thousand biscuits in columns—3 in line facing out—the soldiers' distinguishing headgear exposed—3 across them at 90 degrees, then 3 facing out again, and so on, until about 38 layers for each of the 6 sections had been stacked. The number of layers varied a little because none of the biscuits—although quite precise in their length and thickness—was exactly the same as the next. Sometimes, I would only use two soldiers in a row when there were two French 'Poilu' lying side by side.<sup>26</sup> Their buttoned-back coats made for a wider profile than the other nationalities. If I ran short of biscuits, rows of two rather than three

would be a saving. Once the stacking was completed, visitors to the museum would be invited to eat a biscuit until finally all were consumed and the *Cenotaph* was completely visible again.

Figure 16. Top view of *Stela* showing stacked biscuits and *Cenotaph* 'lid'. Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### The Attendant

Herr S. was bored. In the land of his birth perhaps he'd had a more stimulating occupation than museum attendant. But here, at least, his tall, thin frame was free to glide through the corridors of the majestic, 19th century Military History Museum. From time to time, during his 'rounds', Herr S. would alight for a talk. On one occasion, fixing his gaze on the sculpture, he observed:

"I heard you describe it [to the visitors] as a *denkmal*.<sup>27</sup> It is not a *denkmal*", he declared matter-of-factly. "A *denkmal* is like a building; it is a permanent place for memory to reside. This is not a *denkmal*". An affable discussion followed and I explained why it was a memorial even though it was made from temporary materials. Being ephemeral, it reflected the nature of memory and the eventual fate of the specific memory ascribed to remembrance forms. Herr S. said nothing; he would need to think about this notion of a memorial which was foreign to his own.

Herr S. and I shared repetitive actions. He walked (glided) around and around while, in public view, I stacked biscuits higher and higher against the four vertical sides of the steel *Cenotaph*. The bottom two horizontal sections, each 300mm high and containing approximately 3,000 soldier-shaped biscuits, had to be constructed while kneeling. As the stacks got taller I could stand upright. This enabled me to work faster, less concerned that the frequent conversations with visitors, museum staff, and the media would compromise my completion date.

Herr S. commented on my kneeling and noted my back would be sore—which indeed it was. He had played classical guitar, practising sometimes for over 6 hours

a day, he disclosed empathetically. Eventually, his tendons could no longer stand the strain and he had to stop. He pulled up his sleeve and revealed a permanently-swollen left forearm.

Although it was apparent he was eager to talk, perhaps a desire to recover his half-lost English was more of a motivation than my project. Fenced in a small enclosure protecting the vulnerable biscuit stacks from the visitors, I was available to both museum attendants and the public alike.

Herr S. had grown tired of the permanent displays: but there are also temporary exhibitions, I offered. That is how we got onto Stauffenberg, the German officer made famous in the outside world by the 2008 “Valkyrie” film, starring Tom Cruise. The museum, located on Stauffenbergallee, was presenting an exhibition about the colonel and his co-conspirators who failed in an attempt to kill Hitler and take over the government in 1944.<sup>28</sup>

Herr S.’s voice lowered. He spoke in German of which he knew I had very limited understanding with my frequent response to enquiring native speaking visitors of the overstated phrase, “Ich spreche ein wenig Deutsch”.<sup>29</sup> I knew from his muted tone that he was confiding something. He glanced around frequently and furtively. He needed to get it out but didn’t want to appear disloyal to the country that had adopted him, and, that he revealed—on another occasion—he loves because of the freedom it offers. In part German, part English he wondered why the high-ranking Wehrmacht and political assassins, some of whom had been plotting against Hitler before the war’s outbreak, had not been successful in this and earlier attempts.

“I hate war”, he had confided, “it is terrible. In my street, there was bombing and killing every day. My daughter, every time she hears a plane...”. He moved his hand around and around over his stomach. I nodded sympathetically.

On the tenth day, when the stacking was almost finished, Herr S. approached me. Obviously, he had been reflecting on our conversations which always returned to the nature of the sculpture I had been building. “You are right”, he said without further explanation, “this is a *denkmal*”. He nodded as though confirming his statement and without waiting—nor apparently wanting—a response, he glided on.

Figure 17. Kingsley Baird. *Stela*.  
Militärhistorisches Museum der  
Bundeswehr, Dresden, 2014.  
Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### The Minister

They were very excited in the museum; especially the military. The Minister of Defence was coming to visit. I was requested to meet the Armed Forces' boss. Wikipedia informed me that she was born in Belgium, had 7 children, and was a member of the centre-right Christian Democratic Union.<sup>30</sup> I stood obediently at my post until the flurry of activity in the adjacent gallery indicated the minister had arrived. And then she appeared; petite, with a shock of brushed back blonde hair, flanked by men in military and civilian uniforms. Today, she was wearing trousers. "What should I wear"? I had asked the curator when I heard of the VIP's visit. "You can wear anything", he replied, "*you* are the artist".

She smiled broadly and exuding a charm that immediately put me at ease, commented, "I've read about you". "And I about you", I replied thoughtlessly, regretting it immediately and sensing her minders' disapproval at the artist's impertinence and concern their plans for a successful visit might be ruined. Ein Künstler *und* ein Ausländer.<sup>31</sup> Unknown terrain.

"May I come in"?, she gestured to the stanchion surrounding *Stela*. Once inside the perimeter she asked what the work was about and I responded with a version appropriate for a busy minister on a military schedule.

"May I try one"?, she asked a little coyly. I had not expected this; no one had. The press were there en masse. An unflattering snap. Few of us look good frozen while eating. An injudicious moment. But it was the symbolism of the Minister of Defence biting the head off an — albeit emblematic — soldier, that I thought a savvy politician would avoid. It was the kind of image that could come back to haunt one, especially if, as Wikipedia says, she is a contender to succeed the Chancellor.<sup>32</sup> And politicians have an instinct for such things.

The biscuits were past their best. Three nights ago during the throng of Museums Sommernacht when the exhibition opened they had visibly wilted in the heat and humidity.<sup>33</sup> I had stood with my back to *Stela* while interviewed by the German language TV culture programme, 3sat *Kulturzeit*.<sup>34</sup> The interviewer smiled and nodded encouragingly as I repeated my well-rehearsed lines under the spots' glare. But I wasn't worried about interviews: by now with the substantial media interest in the project, they had become routine. I stood with my back to *Stela* wondering if the swelling biscuits would tip so far forward they would collapse onto the floor.

I gestured to a stack in front of the Minister and she delicately picked one from the pile. "That's a New Zealander", I said about to launch into an explanation as to how the biscuits were differentiated by national uniforms. The New Zealanders, I would have told her — gesturing with my open hands above my head, wore then and still do, a hat called a lemon squeezer.

If she had been interested I might have elaborated. The Germans — it would have been diplomatic to start there — were wearing the Stahlhelm — introduced in 1916 to replace the comical Picklehaube. Even looking at the biscuit silhouette I am reminded uncomfortably of the Second World War Wehrmacht. Or the Australian, wearing his distinctive slouch hat with a turned-up brim. Or the French 'Poilu' in his Adrian helmet and the musical symmetry of his greatcoat. There was also the generic shape of the Brodie helmet — the universal soldier — that covered Britain and her Dominions as well as the United States. Each nationality was represented by 3 body shapes: 'complete', one armed, and one-legged.

But the Minister wasn't listening. She bit off the head of the New Zealander, declared him delicious and requested the recipe claimed by Australia and New Zealand, as the Antipodeans scrambled for a sense of identity they could call their own. Again, with consummate charm she requested my signature on one of the photographic giveaway cards depicting the biscuits and cookie cutter. I obliged, there was a blur of photos, she thanked me and was gone, her diminutive frame lost in a sea of followers. A 'good sport', I thought.

### The General's Daughter

I told the curator that the person who was to distribute the biscuits on the night of the opening, had to handle them with care for two reasons. Firstly, because they were individually delicate and the stacks they formed, at risk of collapsing. Secondly, it was important that members of the public who received a biscuit observed that the museum staff treated the symbolic soldiers with respect. For the project to work, the illusion that the biscuits were something other than the sum of their physical ingredients, had to succeed.

"The librarian, Frau R., has volunteered", the curator declared. Thinking that one of the museum attendants would do the job, I expressed surprise that the museum's librarian would take on the task. "She is a general's daughter",

he shrugged matter-of-factly; as if the link between her paternity and the task of distributing *Stela*'s biscuits was obvious.

Frau R. was nothing like I expected. The combination of librarian + general's daughter in my 'search engine' resulted in an entirely different preconception. Not the woman with dyed blonde hair, close-fitting, short, black dress with white polka dots and high heeled shoes. In a slow and rather exaggerated manner—to get the point across—I demonstrated, rather than described, the care with which I wanted the biscuits to be removed from the memorial. Frau R.'s English language knowledge was limited but she understood her role completely. At the opening, when the speeches were over, a long line of visitors assembled in front of the memorial. One by one they stepped forward to receive a biscuit. Frau R. carefully—but without unnecessary ceremony—selected a biscuit from a stack with her white-cotton-gloved hands and placed it in the specially-designed, waxed paper bag complete with sponsors' logos. Judging from the number of biscuits that remained by the end of the night she must have repeated this action some 3,000 times.

She had obviously been thinking about her role. Perhaps even rehearsing. It was as if Frau R. had done this before; at least she seemed born to it. It was a ritual, she understood as much. Now her costume made sense; she was a priest officiating at communion as I had intended.

At the end of the night when I thanked her she replied in English with obvious deep sincerity, "It was an honour". A general's daughter. Now I understood what the curator had meant.

## The Sailors

The military presence in the museum of the Bundeswehr is apparent without being overwhelming. Museum military staff would occasionally walk by undertaking their duties or armed services personnel would be part of guided tours.

Hauptmann N., one of the press officers, passed by *Stela* frequently. It seemed every day there was another press event. The local TV channel will be at the baking academy tomorrow. Oh, and various newspapers will be there as well. The next day there is an interview at Deutsche Radio. He drove me to various engagements and we talked about his plans for the weekend. His girlfriend had a young son and every weekend he drove to his hometown of Magdeburg to be with them. I had read about Magdeburg.<sup>35</sup> It had a pitiful history; twice destroyed. I wondered if the Hauptmann knew. Hauptmann. Most of these military ranks took me back to my childhood and the war comics I had read and re-read, the black and white war movies I watched on Sunday afternoons with my mother, starring the likes of John Mills, Alec Guinness, and Anthony Quayle.

The soldiers in the museum were very different from the jack-booted automatons portrayed in the comics; their voice bubbles shouting "Achtung",

“Himmel”, “Die Engländer dog”! and the like. Today, they are citizen soldiers with a responsibility to follow their own consciences, not their orders exclusively. Most of the armed services personnel seemed happy to eat a soldier biscuit if the opportunity offered itself.

Several days before the exhibition opening, while I was stacking the biscuits, I noticed a group of young men standing on the other side of the stanchion tape watching me. They were wearing casual civilian clothes and some were bearded, but there was an air about them that suggested they were in the armed services. Perhaps what is called a ‘military bearing’. “What are you doing”? asked one of them, a tall, broad young man with blond hair and beard. I explained the meaning of the artwork. They were silent and just stood there looking at the stainless steel *Cenotaph* and the rising layers of biscuits. I broke the awkward silence asking them if they were from Dresden. “No”, replied the laconic, blond one, “Kiel”.

Later I described my experience to Hauptmann N. “They must be trainee naval officers on an excursion”, he offered. “Kiel is a naval port in northern Germany, on the Baltic Sea coast”.

They continued to stare, in no way hostile but apparently deep in thought. Then, without a word, several nodding, they turned and walked away. This was the only time when I felt my explanation might have been a bit glib.

I had promised the curator that I would work on my German before returning to Dresden to undertake the project. Despite the best efforts of Elizabeth Smith and her “*Fast German*”, I was largely unsuccessful in this aspiration.<sup>36</sup> It seemed my ignorance had prevented a meaningful exchange with the young men from the navy. This lack on that and other occasions is the one failure of the project for me.

## The Old Lady

However, over the 10 days I spent stacking biscuits I had many encounters with museum visitors and staff. I was gratified by what seemed a genuine interest to learn about *Stela*. Ranging from young to old visitors, the reaction to the work by those who spoke to me directly or through translation, was overwhelmingly appreciative. Many were moved. When the memorial was complete and museum attendants took on the distribution of biscuits, I watched discreetly in the background as visitors continued to engage with the work.

The elderly couple on Day 8 were from an ‘old’ family, I suspect. Dressed very well, chic, but understated. I saw them out of the corner of my eye but decided not to approach. They stood facing *Stela* for a while talking in hushed tones. They seemed interested. Time to approach them and engage in conversation. “Guten Tag. Es ist ein Denkmal für die Soldaten, im ersten Weltkrieg und heute”.<sup>37</sup> It was embarrassing but it would have to do. Little is expected of native English speakers, after all. Lazy or pragmatic, it didn’t matter, the Germans would soon realize that even limited English was better than the bastardised German this fellow uttered.



They nodded politely. The man drifted away to another exhibit and his female companion to *Stela*'s interpretive signs, one in German and the other in English. I continued stacking, aware of her presence.

Minutes passed and she was still looking at one of the signs. Presumably, the German version. I kept stacking. Standing upright now I was making good progress. Soon I would need a ladder or scaffolding to complete the top sections. Still she stood there, motionless, staring down at the sign. Perhaps I should talk to her. I moved towards the stanchion cord that separated us but she had already left the sign and approached where I stood facing her. Up close I could see the tears. We looked into each other's eyes. As tears welled up in mine too she said softly in English, "Thank you for doing this". I had no reply. She turned and walked away to join her male companion who was inspecting the early submarine exhibit. If I had needed any affirmation of *Stela*'s existence, that encounter had provided it.

## The Endnotes

1. The bombing was carried out by the British Royal Air Force and United States Army Air Forces.
2. Kurt Vonnegut Jr., *Slaughterhouse-Five, Or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-dance with Death* (London: Random House, 1991. First published 1969), 120. For years after the bombing the strategic rationale of the Allied raid was questioned. While the Allies argued that Dresden was a legitimate military target, critics asserted it was of little military significance. Frederick Taylor's *Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945* (referenced below) provides a well-researched and balanced discussion of this issue, attesting to the city's military and industrial importance to Germany's war effort.
3. Vonnegut, an American serviceman, was a prisoner of war in Dresden and experienced the bombing and aftermath first-hand.
4. Vonnegut, 122.
5. *Ibid.*, 124.
6. *Ibid.*, 163. Tralfamadore is the home of the fictional alien race which kidnaps Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.
7. *Ibid.*, 147. The figure of the *Allegory of Goodness*, carved by Peter Pöppelmann, became famous from Richard Peter's 1945 photo depicting the figure of the Allegory looking down on the destroyed city.
8. *Ibid.*, 146.
9. Earlier reports that claimed the figure to be 10 times this number have now been discredited. Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 443-448.
10. Vonnegut, 114.
11. Gorch Pieken and Matthias Rogg (eds), *Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr: Exhibition Guide* (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2012), 7-13.
12. <http://www.architecturetoday.co.uk/?p=20907>. Retrieved 26.8.15.

13. <http://libeskind.com/work/military-history-museum/>. Retrieved 26.8.15.
14. “Dr P”.: Personal correspondence to the author, 18.4.12.
15. Kingsley Baird, “Stela im Tod sind alle Kameraden” [Stela: all are comrades in death] in ed. Gerhard Bauer, Gorch Pieken, and Matthias Rogg, *14 Menschen Krieg* (Dresden: Militärlhistorisches Museum, 2014), 238. German text.
16. <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/55100/POLYGON%20WOOD%20CEMETERY>. Retrieved 26.8.15. Sixty of those buried in the Polygon Wood cemetery served with the New Zealand forces.
17. This paragraph is taken from the author’s German text essay, “Stela im Tod sind alle Kameraden” in *14 Menschen Krieg*, 232.
18. Käthe Kollwitz’s over life-sized stone sculpture, *Die trauernden Eltern* (The Grieving Parents) (1932), located in Vladslo German Military Cemetery in Belgium, depicts the artist and her husband kneeling before the plaque bearing Peter Kollwitz’s name.
19. The blue hospital uniform worn by soldiers convalescing in English hospitals during World War I.
20. Vonnegut, 19.
21. Mersa Matruh is an Egyptian seaport. I remember the name from my grandfather’s reminiscences. It might have been connected to the massacre story described in the text which may or may not have happened.
22. Vonnegut, 115.
23. <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/ypres-salient/cemetery-langemark.htm>. Retrieved 26.8.15.
24. Sir Edwin Lutyens’s war memorial Cenotaph in Whitehall, 1920.
25. An existing recipe ‘fine-tuned’ by my sister, Susan Jane Baird, so that the biscuits would hold their soldier shapes when baking.
26. ‘Poilu’, meaning ‘hairy one’, is a term used to describe a French World War I infantryman. Poilus often wore beards and moustaches.
27. German for monument or memorial.
28. The Stauffenberg exhibition curated by Linda von Keyserlingk, *Attentat auf Hitler. Stauffenberg und mehr* (Assassination attempt against Hitler. Stauffenberg and more) at the Military History Museum marked the 70th anniversary of Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg’s attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler.
29. “Ich spreche ein wenig Deutsch” (“I speak a little German”).
30. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula\\_von\\_der\\_Leyen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula_von_der_Leyen). Retrieved 26.8.15.
31. Ein Künstler *und* ein Ausländer (An artist and a foreigner).
32. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula\\_von\\_der\\_Leyen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula_von_der_Leyen). Retrieved 26.8.15.
33. Museums Sommernacht is a tradition in Dresden and some other German cities in which once a year during summer, museum collections are open to the public until late at night for a reduced entry fee. In 2014 Dresden’s Museums Sommernacht was on 12 July.
34. Screened on 3sat Kulturzeit, 14 July 2014.
35. Magdeburg was destroyed twice in its history: in 1631, during the Thirty Years’ War the city was burned and 20,000 inhabitants massacred, and during the

Second World War when Royal Air Force bombing destroyed much of the city and approximately 16,000 inhabitants were killed. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdeburg>. Retrieved 29.8.15.

<sup>36</sup>. Elizabeth Smith and her *Fast German* (textbook and cd) language course which I had taken to Germany intending to complete during my residency in the museum. Elizabeth Smith, *Fast German*, 2011 (London: Hodder Education [Hachette]).

<sup>37</sup>. “Good day. It is a monument for the soldiers, in the First World War and today”.

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Ursula von der Leyen; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula\\_von\\_der\\_Leyen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula_von_der_Leyen)

## Biographical Note

Kingsley Baird is a visual artist and academic whose work represents a longstanding and continuous engagement with memory and remembrance, and loss and reconciliation through making artefacts and writing. Major examples of his work in this field are the New Zealand Memorial in Canberra (2001, with Studio of Pacific Architecture), the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior (2004); the international Nagasaki Peace Park sculpture, *Te Korowai Rangimarie The Cloak of Peace* (2006); *Tomb* (2013) at France's Historial de la Grande Guerre; and *Stela* (2014) at Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr in Germany in 2014. Kingsley Baird is the board chair of WHAM (War History Heritage Art and Memory) Research Network; was the co-convenor of "Contained Memory Conference 2010"; and is the General Editor of Memory Connection journal.

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Commemoration and Moral Choice  
in *the Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's  
Daughter*

Sally J. Morgan

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Abstract

This article/photo essay examines Sally J. Morgan's 2013 work, *The Travails of the Bomb Aimer's Daughter*, a performance/installation that unfolded over a week at Wellington's Performance Arcade Festival. Acting as a kind of 'denkmal' or commemorative provocation, the piece interacted with the audience in ways that unsettled viewers' expectations and demanded moral choices. The presentation examines and discusses the installation's development and denouement.

Keywords: performance art, temporary memorial, denkmal, commemoration, World War II.

This article/photo-essay discusses an installation presented by the author in the *Performance Arcade (PA)* 2013 in Wellington, New Zealand. *PA* is an annual, international Live Art festival that selects proposals from artists, musicians and designers who work in the areas of installation, performance, and interactive art and design. The presentation spaces allocated to the selected artists are freight-containers arranged in a small village next to a thoroughfare by the water. Here artists, designers, musicians, and theatre-makers make site-specific artworks that remain on display for a short period of time in a well-traversed part of New Zealand's capital city.

I am a Welsh born artist who is now a New Zealand citizen. As an artist I have worked with matters of memory, both personal and public, as source material for the exploration of notions of guilt and complicity in relation to heritage. In addition, as a cultural historian, I have written and co-written<sup>1</sup> extensively on memorials, monuments and other forms of formal and informal commemorative practices. This artwork constituted a coming together of these threads in an enactment that plotted its way through the creation of a destructive event, and the eventual consignment of that event to a commemorative process.

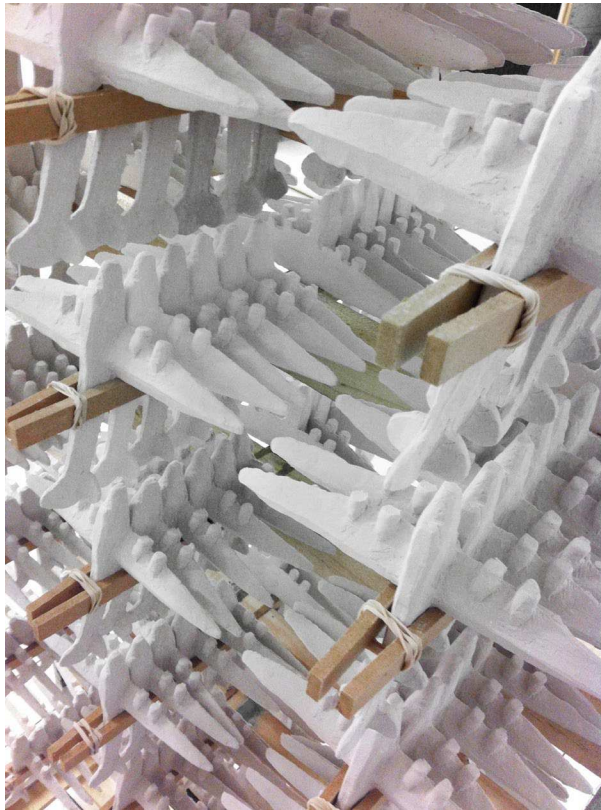
The work selected for this festival was called *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter*. It was described in the programme as an 'episode in a series exploring memory, grief and guilt in a durational performance installation'. It was five days long and had its genesis in a sequence of performances/installations that I created after my Father's death in the early 1990s as explorations of grief, war, guilt, and memory.

The installation was designed, in its entirety, to act as what the Germans call a Denkmal, the kind of monument that invites sober contemplation of the past rather than its unreflective celebration. This denkmal would unfold over time through discrete 'chapters'. It would move quietly through the city from my office, in what was once the National Museum, to the National War Memorial that stands directly in front of the Museum, then down through busy Cuba Street to the Waterfront, and back again. In my mind, I was already sub-titling the work *The Peripatetic Memorial*: something not only temporary, but also without a fixed abode. So it was not a "site of commemoration", but a process and a critique of "memorialisation". In this respect it would be similar to works by artists such as Christian Boltanski, Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and indeed Paul Gough, whose Faux Cenotaph I wrote about in a exhibition catalogue essay in 2003<sup>2</sup>, and again in an article that he and I co-published in the *Journal of War and Culture Studies* in 2013.<sup>3</sup>

Although my father was not a New Zealander, his World War Two experience is recognisable to New Zealand viewers whose fathers and grandfathers served in the same arenas as their British counterparts. Up until 1948 all New Zealanders were holders of a British passport, many New Zealanders enlisted in the British armed forces, and some had been aircrew in the Royal Air Force; indeed my father told me he flew with a New Zealander as his Rear Gunner. Furthermore, the pattern of migration from the United Kingdom to New Zealand after the War means that a fair number of Kiwis have parents or grandparents who served as Britons in the UK

armed services before they or their children emigrated. I was therefore confident that a New Zealand audience would understand and engage with the work I was making.

Figure 1. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter*, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013. Detail: stacked planes.



The first chapter of this denkmal was ‘The Making’. It began in November 2012 when I fashioned a small aircraft out of clay. The aircraft’s shape resembled the Liberator Bomber that my father flew in during the Second World War when he served in the Burma Campaign as a Bomb-Aimer in the British Royal Air Force. From such a plane he bombed the marshalling yards of the Burma Railroad in Mandalay. From this small sculpture a mould was cast and 500 planes were made from a stone compound mix. They were white in colour, hard and brittle and rang like porcelain when struck. Each plane was trimmed by hand — my hand — and then stored in a specially made wheeled wooden rack. This labour went on until early January, and my factoring was witnessed by all who went through the workshop. Word spread, and soon people were making special trips to see the Bomb-Aimer’s Daughter at work.



Figure 2. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter* ("The March to War"), Wellington, New Zealand, 2013.



The second chapter was 'The March to War'. Together with a colleague, Tanya Marriot, a New Zealander whose British grandfather had been a Bomber Pilot in the European Theatre in the Second World War, I trundled my planes out of the workshop in mid-February and stood them for one minute at the front of the National War Memorial. Shiny and white, all pointing upward, all beautiful, identical and clean, they were the epitome of martial optimism. Then we two women proceeded to parade the aircraft to my site on the waterfront. On the way down Cuba Street an exultant young man burst out of a coffee shop and ran down the street behind us impersonating a fighter plane. People smiled and clapped as we took our planes to war.

Figure 3. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter, Performance Arcade (PA)*, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013.



In chapter three, ‘The Theatre of War’, I transferred the planes into a wheelbarrow, and began to throw them at four minute intervals into the container that was my performance space. The container was situated at an intersection between a market place and a popular waterside promenade. My public was mixed: runners and cyclists, market goers, tourists, random citizens, children, teenagers, and adults. Some stopped to watch me, some observed from a distance. As the planes hit the wall or the floor they splintered with the sound of china breaking and scattered across the floor. I had intended the destruction of the planes as my own task and was surprised by how fiercely people wanted the chance to join in the destruction. I first realised this when a group of people gathered around the rack of planes that was standing ready for emptying into the wheelbarrow. I was watching from a distance. Someone gingerly picked up a plane and threw it. Then another person did the same. Then someone else. Before I knew it, they were clamouring and grabbing and had broken the rack, and plane after plane was crashing into the container. I managed to stop them, but they were very grumpy about it and slunk away, half-angry at being stopped, and half-embarrassed. Then an amiable drunk begged and begged to be allowed to smash a plane. Eventually I gave in, and he threw it with all his might. “That’s my grandfather”, he said, “Killing those fucking Nazi bastards”.

Figure 4. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter, Performance Arcade (PA)*, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013.



After spending the whole day working out how to stop people smashing the planes, I realised that evening that, actually, this was at least part of what I was examining through the work: social complicity. Who makes war: the Warrior or the Civilian? Where does guilt lie? It had always been my intention to make a work that asked these questions, but I had originally imagined that the public would observe this through my actions. The thought of involving my audience in making moral choices was suddenly very compelling and offered me a very interesting route forward. The piece evolved, and the next day I determined that I would offer every passer-by the opportunity to throw a plane onto the growing pile of debris in my container. I stood with arm outstretched, plane in hand. Whenever I caught someone's eye, I gestured in a welcoming way, making it clear that I was offering the chance to throw a plane. Some were eager, some were reluctant. Some smashed them into the wall so hard that the fragments struck us. Some placed them unbroken on the floor. A very few asked to be allowed to take them away rather than to break them. Some were overcome with sadness after they had done it. Some burst into tears. Some kept coming back to watch, or to ask me questions. For the majority, the destruction was exhilarating, but afterwards many felt a sense of guilt. For a significant number it was a moral dilemma. A surprising number of people, across a whole range of social backgrounds, understood the symbolism of the work. A doctor and his wife came back to see each stage and became increasingly excited as the work unfolded. A young Māori woman said, "This is what we do isn't it, we send them off and they come back broken — and

they can never be mended”. Cliff, an elderly man, a war veteran, who watched silently every day, brought his friends, and said to me in a barely audible voice, “This is beautiful”.

Figure 5. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer’s Daughter, Performance Arcade (PA)*, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013. The artist “plane in hand”.



Chapter three took us into the process of collecting and categorising the evidence of the past. The container and the high pile of smashed planes became an archaeological site. My years as an archaeological site-worker informed this part of the work. I measured, drew and recorded the debris where it lay and collected the ‘finds’ in trays. I then informally displayed the finds and the drawings as they would be at the site of an on-going excavation. I also attempted to rebuild a whole plane by wandering through the debris and retrieving pieces that matched. I managed to find three pieces that were a fit. As I did this I overheard someone saying “Is she trying to glue them together!? That’s impossible”.

Figure 6. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter, Performance Arcade (PA)*, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013.



In chapter four the container became a museum. The finds were arranged by typology, and a notice, like a plaque, was put on the wall. It read:

*On this site, in February 2013, five hundred Liberator Bomber Planes were deployed. Passers-by were invited to launch a plane to certain destruction. Twelve chose not to and opted to take a plane away with them. One returned the plane, unbroken, into the hands of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter. Two placed a plane, unbroken, on the ground (these were later picked up, by others, and thrown). Four hundred and eighty six planes were destroyed.*

The audience came and went easily, did not feel complicit, felt able to judge the process as though it were finished.

Figure 7. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter, Performance Arcade (PA)*, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013.



In chapter five all the remnants were sorted into boxes and placed at the front of the container with a tube of glue placed next to them. This was designed to indicate the impossibility and futility of trying to mend the outcomes of war. In this phase something unexpected happened, which was rather beautiful. A group of international exchange students, aged seventeen or eighteen, happened upon the artwork, examined it carefully from all angles, and decided to repair the planes. They weren't daunted by the seeming impossibility of the task. With the confidence of youth, they set about the task systematically. They laid out the pieces and worked through the parts until they found a match. Using this technique, they reassembled three planes before darkness fell and they moved off to do other things. The bleakness of my piece was changed by the optimism and energy of youth. They had succeeded in repairing the irreparable, though the planes were still scarred and chipped, they had, against the odds, been put back together.

Figure 8. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer's Daughter, Performance Arcade (PA)*, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013.

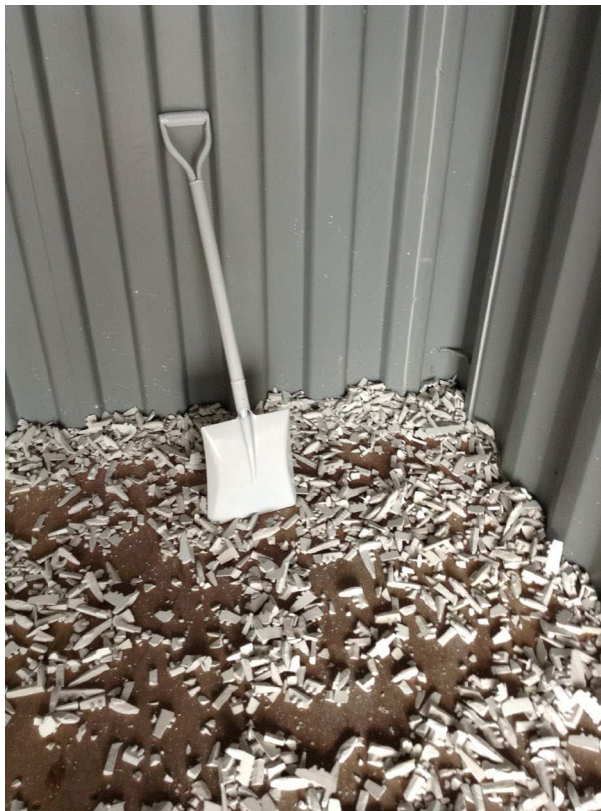


Chapter six, called ‘The Forgotten’, began at dusk on the last day, and consisted of the disposal, small bag by small bag, of all the unassembled fragments of the bombers. Carrying two at a time, I threw them into rubbish bins, skips, landfill sites and secluded parts of the Harbour under cover of darkness. Then the remaining few crippled planes were put back on the transportation rack, this time hanging downward like corpses where they stood in the cleaned-out container under a hanging light as darkness lay over the Harbour-side. The next morning I rolled them through the back streets up to the National War Memorial. No one ran behind me impersonating a jubilant fighter plane. No one saw me. Before taking the planes back into the Old National Museum, I stood the rack for one minute BEHIND the National War Memorial. Like the crippled British war veterans who were not allowed into the Service in Westminster Abbey after the Falklands War, my broken bombers were hidden from sight. Pathetic rather than heroic, they didn’t evoke any narrative of national glory and they were finally trundled away to the oblivion of my office.

The work, from start to finish, worked through a complex range of questions on matters of war and the commemoration of war. In the final chapters the piece enacted a ritualisation of forgetting rather than remembering. The broken planes, standing for the bodies of broken warriors, buried without ceremony in the rubbish bins and landfills of Wellington as well as the peregrination of disfigured and crippled Liberator Bombers through the back streets of the capital stood as the opposite of the victory parade or the state funeral. It was a physical

enactment of the deliberate forgetting or obscuring of inconvenient truths of war. In this way it was perhaps an example of the kind of counter-memorials that have been discussed by scholars such as James E. Young in “The German Counter-Monument”<sup>4</sup> and *At Memory’s Edge*<sup>5</sup> and *Michalski in Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage*.<sup>6</sup> Like the works of Gerz, Boltanski and Whiteread, this work attempted to be contentious in the way that it asked “us to interrogate our relationship with events of the past in a difficult and often uncomfortable way, (asking us) to acknowledge guilt and deliberate forgetting”.<sup>7</sup> In particular, it asked us to examine the notion of complicity. We make the planes and we throw the planes. We do not participate, but we facilitate. We make a moral choice. The planes fly easily from our hands to certain destruction. Once the plane is thrown, we realise our culpability, and perhaps at that moment, we also realise that the only way forward for us now is to find a way to forget.

Figure 9. Sally J. Morgan. *The Travails of the Bomb-Aimer’s Daughter*, Performance Arcade (PA), Wellington, New Zealand, 2013.





## Endnotes

1. See for example: Sally J. Morgan, “Memory and the Merchants: Commemoration and Civic memory”. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 103-13; Paul Gough and Sally J Morgan, “Manipulating the Metonymic: the politics of civic identity and the Bristol Cenotaph 1919-1932”. *Journal of Historical Geography* 30, no. 4 (October 2004): 665-684.
2. Sally J. Morgan, “Paul Gough’s Faux Cenotaph: the contestation of rhetorical public space”, Catalogue essay *Victory/Peace Exhibition*, Watershed Media Centre, Bristol. 2003.
3. Paul Gough and Sally J Morgan, “‘A Faux Cenotaph’: Guerilla Interventions and the Contestation of Rhetorical Public Space”. *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 6, no.1 (2013): 92-108.
4. James E. Young, “The German Counter-Monument”. In Mitchell, W.J.T., ed. *Art and the Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
5. James E. Young, *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, 1st ed. (Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).
6. Sergiusz Michalski. *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage, 1870-1997*. 1st ed. London: Reaktion Books, 1998.
7. Paul Gough and Sally J. Morgan. “A Faux Cenotaph”, 108.

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### Biographical Note

Sally J. Morgan is a conceptual artist and cultural historian whose research spans creative works and text-based inquiry. Her writing on visual artefacts as ‘historical texts’ informs her performance, installation and publicly located contextual artworks. She has presented work in France, Switzerland, Germany, USA, Japan, Brazil, Belgium and the Netherlands as well as in the UK and New Zealand. Career highlights have included work being presented at the ICA in London, the Arnolfini in Bristol, and Belluard Bollwerk, International Live Art Festival, Fribourg Switzerland. Sally J. Morgan has also published articles in international journals and chapters in a number of scholarly collections.

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# Witness: An Autobiographical Performance

Emily Rowan

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## Witness: An Autobiographical Performance

Emily Rowan

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### Artist's Statement

The song 'Witness' is an autobiographical telling of the performer's experiences as a witness in a court case in the summer of 2014. The presentation takes the form of a Pecha Kucha—a 20x20 presentation format showing 20 slides, each for 20 seconds. The slides forming the background to the performance are solid, objective, permanent. They present the facts. They are the authority: these are things that happened and words that were spoken. In contrast, the song presents the witness' experience of the proceedings. Here there are no facts, only how it feels to have your private memories of a traumatic event interrogated and the truthfulness of your words brought into question.

"Traumatic memory is not narrative. Rather, it is experience that reoccurs, either as full sensory replay...or as disconnected fragments".<sup>1</sup> The repetitive loop of the music is as unrelenting as the examination and cross-examination by lawyers of a witness in the stand.

*'I put it to you...'*

But unlike the drama of trauma, which replays itself over and over, capturing its victim in a bubble of 'now' with no option of being assigned to the past, a performance is something that must come to an end and disappear. "Performance's only life is in the present".<sup>2</sup>

Song combines language (the crystallisation of thought) and music (a flowing expression of emotion) to create narrative from the swirl of memory within a person, externalising those memories and creating a bridge that stretches across the silence imposed by trauma to form a connection. Art is retelling—not reliving—and reduces that which is formless and overwhelming in the mind into a solid reality, communicated to and accessible by a community that listens. "Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener".<sup>3</sup> When that listener questions the validity of your statement, the self is brought into doubt. When the listener is receptive, the traumatised, fragmented self is remade.

I am interested in how the personal and autobiographical ideas conveyed through art and music gain broader meanings through internalisation by an audience. You will watch my performance, hear my song through your own history

and experience, finding meanings I perhaps did not originally intend, but that are nevertheless inherent in the original. Every interpretation is right. My story becomes our story.

‘Witness’ was originally presented at Memory Matters, a Masters Symposium on Cultural Memory that took place at York St John University on 11 October 2014. [A video of the performance by Emily Rowan can be viewed at https://vimeo.com/165975441.](https://vimeo.com/165975441)

Keywords: autobiography, public memory, fluidity of memory, testimony, trauma.

## Witness

*Put me in the box and I'll tell you what I know  
You ask me what happened when I was 13 years old*

I solemnly, sincerely, truly declare.

*It's been 16 years, I don't come with a guarantee  
"I can't say for certain" is as valid an answer as any*

I solemnly, sincerely, truly declare.

*I'll stand and declare my most shame-filled memories  
In front of 12 strangers whose faces I've no way to read  
You're here to judge him, but it feels like you're judging me*

I solemnly, sincerely, truly declare.

*Pick, pick, pick me apart, dust off every box  
That I've mentally filed so I don't flashback  
Everyday, take possession of what I have lived through  
Label and tag it "Exhibit A"  
Wield your words like a scalpel to cut to the core  
I'll clear up after, I've done it before*

*I'll clear my mind after, I've done it before*

*Make your statement, cause yours is the burden of proof  
Don't forget the defendant is here and listening to you  
We need the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth*

I solemnly, sincerely, truly declare.

*You can put it to me any way that you want  
But I'm under oath, did you hope  
That I was lying to you*

*My memories are malleable in timing and chronology  
I can't say it all for certain, but of some things I am sure  
And you can keep on chipping till I am just a child  
But there are facts that I can cling to and I won't let go*

*My memories are malleable, they're placed upon your pedestal  
And, oh god, if I say something wrong, the case will collapse.*

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>. Susan J. Brison, “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self”, in: *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal et al. (Hanover: UPNE, 1999), 42-43.
- <sup>2</sup>. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146.
- <sup>3</sup>. Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening”, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub (London: Routledge, 1992), 70.

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## Biographical Note

Emily Rowan is a musician, composer and performer based in York, UK. She is one half of the ‘punk cabaret’ duo Flora Greysteel, completed a Masters in Music Composition at York St John University in 2015 and is currently co-writing an urban fantasy musical. Emily’s other musical works include the site-specific installation ‘Archiving Sounds’ (for Infinite Record: Archive, Memory, Performance (international seminar), October 2013), ‘Vestiges’ (in collaboration with David Lancaster and Fabia Preece, 2014) and ‘Songs for the First World War’, settings of Katharine Tynan’s ‘Joining the Colours’ & Wilfred Owen’s ‘Anthem For Doomed Youth’ (2014).

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# Archive, Empathy, Memory: The Resurrection of Joyce Reason

Matthew Reason

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## Archive, Empathy, Memory: The Resurrection of Joyce Reason

Matthew Reason

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### Abstract

This paper uses the prism of archival, ancestral research to consider the nature of our relationship to the lives of the Others that we find in the past. The particular Other within this paper, the intergenerational haunting that appears in words and in walks, in stones, photographs and in memories, is Joyce Reason. My Great Aunt, whom I never met, Joyce was a writer, an idealist, an evangelist, a bluestocking, a spinster, a crank, and a missionary.

In reflecting upon the attempted resurrection that lies in all historical writings, I return to the question at the heart of Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*: how can the I “enter into relationship with an Other without immediately divesting it of its alterity”? With this question the investigation of personal archives and family memory intersects with considerations of public memory and produces two interlocking concerns. What is the articulacy, or otherwise, of the archival trace? And how can we know the life of another, without subsuming it into our own preoccupations and perspectives?

Presented as a collage of fragments, this paper explores walking, the body, place, photography and memory in the performance of the biographical archive. It asks ethical questions, exposes its own loose ends and involves time travel, but does not result in a resurrection.

It begins with a walk. A pilgrimage even.

Keywords: archives, biography, empathy, Levinas, memory.

While my purpose is to consider how the archive ‘speaks’ to us of the lives of others, I will begin elsewhere. I will begin with a walk. A pilgrimage even, although it is hard to think of something as pilgrimage when it takes place in Guildford, a county town in the heart of Surrey. Should I be calling it a pilgrimage at all? My destination was neither holy nor celebrated; my journey had not been arduous. If it was an act of devotion it was a purely personal one. Still, the pilgrim has been articulated as the “archetypal seeker” and there I was, undertaking a kind of quest. Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman describes the pilgrim as “a restless seeker for identity”,<sup>1</sup> a description that resonates strongly with this particular journey.

The street was distinctly ordinary, so much so that I initially walked straight past my destination—not noticing—and had to backtrack. But there it was, 102 Addison Road. A semi-detached house, set a little back from the road, with a blue half-glazed front door. There was a Vauxhall in the driveway, figures moving in the kitchen. I paused and looked, wondering what I would say if asked what I was doing.

After debating internally how long I should stand and look to make this pilgrimage complete, I turned—without making any form of votive offering—and made my way down the hill and back into Guildford. I do not know what I had been expecting, although certainly not a blue plaque<sup>2</sup> reading: Joyce Reason—author and great aunt—Lived here—b. 1894 d. 1974.

Figure 1. Joyce Reason Blue Plaque. Manipulated photograph: Matthew Reason 2013.



After all, unlike the lives of the famous, Joyce’s archive has not been meticulously reconstructed and made public; instead, like most lives, it has sunk into time. To me Joyce was the substance of family rumours and forgetful rememberings, by which I mean her absence was marked by fragments, not memorials. But while I had not expected any form of tangible presence, perhaps I had desired some tangible *absence*. Some gap in the world where she had been. That I did not find this at 102 Addison Road was not because she had never been there, but perhaps because other people now were. The house was no longer hers. It was full of

another family's stories, the mess and detritus of other people's existence. Yet the objective of my walk had been to 'find' Joyce, or possibly to invent her for myself. It is this sense-making, identity-building pilgrimage into the archive of an Other that is this essay's focus, as I ask myself what are our possible relationships with the lives of the Others that we find in the past.

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Motivated by that familiar desire to seek out our ancestral past, to construct our own origin myths, to find out (to paraphrase a British television series) who we think we are<sup>3</sup>, I began seriously attempting to construct and make sense of the archive of Joyce Reason in around 2012. I had grown up reading the historical novels she had published for children, enjoying the sensation of having an author in the family, but never questioning who she was as a person. In following traces of her life, through both public archives and private collections in attics and cupboards, I discovered that as well as a writer she was an idealist, an evangelist, a bluestocking, a spinster, a crank, and a missionary. Moreover, as this personal quest intersected with considerations of public and cultural memory, two key interlocking questions emerged, both relating to the theory and practice of archival research.

The first question relates to the articulacy, or otherwise, of the archival trace. The thing unearthed from the archive often seems bursting with voice. It seems—axiomatically, metaphorically, poetically, wishfully—to speak to us directly from the past and yet it is also silent. The image of stones is useful here, as objects that are proverbially speechless (as silent as stone, as dumb as stone) and yet which are also evoked as communicating history and knowledge (these stones can speak, if you have ears to hear).

Stones feature as imagistic metaphors for archives and the reading/writing of history in two contrasting texts. First, in *A Chorus of Stones*, Susan Griffin suggests that the close study of stones will reveal the history of what they have witnessed, in both human and geological time. They hold traces of fires, the pressures of the earth, the working of hands. "Perhaps", writes Griffin, "we are like stones; our own history and the history of the world embedded in us".<sup>4</sup> Second, in *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida argues that the axiom 'Stones Talk'! is the product of a desire for a history, an origin or an archive that speaks by and for itself. For Derrida this is the conceit of an archive that effaces the archivist, and thereby also effaces interpretation, mediation, translation, omission and *desire*.<sup>5</sup> For both writers, stones provide a metaphor for historical presence and articulacy—the sense that the past speaks to us; that the past is somehow present for us—with a tension between contrasting perspectives on the relationship between ourselves now and this historical past. In this essay, I am interested in *both* the embeddedness of history within the archive and the problematic effacement of ourselves in the desire for authentic or unmediated voices from the past.

I am therefore interested in exploring how it is possible to traverse a path that recognises the legitimacy of both these perspectives, specifically through

making *overt* the ways in which a researcher’s relationship to archival objects and voices is performative. By which I mean that, to engage in the archive is an active *doing* that constructs and re-constructs the archive. Explicitly highlighting this performativity—through drawing attention to *acts* of doing, acts of speaking and of remembering—has the potential to be both a methodological and an ethical process. Methodological in the manner that it changes how we present archival research, requiring us to find ways of writing that do not efface the archivist but rather make the *performance* of sense-making apparent. And ethical in the manner that it recognises the complex relationship between the archivist and the lives embedded within the archive.

For connected to this concern for the articulacy of archival traces is a second question, with the archive (almost always) a trace of the life or lives of others which the archivist encounters within or through material traces. The archival objects speak or are spoken-for and in so doing it is life that is speaking or being spoken-for. The life of an Other—from another time, another place, another consciousness and another sensibility—is a life like ours but not ours. This life can be subsumed all too easily into our own preoccupations and perspectives.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas asks how the I can “enter into relationship with an Other without immediately divesting it of its alterity? What is the nature of this relationship?”<sup>6</sup> Of course the I is never *not* in a relationship with otherness, and it is this connection that determines for each of us that we are not infinite. The problem, as Diane Perpich puts it, “is whether an I and an Other can be in relationship without one of the terms absorbing or determining the meaning of the Other”.<sup>7</sup> As I set about attempting the resurrection of my Great Aunt, I have been wondering about this question, and how it relates to Others from the past, from one’s own family, the Others that we find within and through the archive.

This essay explores these questions in the context of my attempts to resurrect the archive of my Great Aunt Joyce—an attempt to bring a life back to life without either naïvely presuming it speaks for itself or hubristically believing that I can speak for its totality and alterity. At stake here is how we tell stories of, about, and through the lives of Others no longer living and the sense-making, identity-building that is involved in archival research.

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I began with that walk in Guildford not because it was the beginning but because it had a certain pathos. It referenced formal acts of memory in order to implicitly critique them; it usefully introduced themes of trace and walking and place that I will return to; and because it made the act of doing self-evident. And already I have started crafting this life story, making choices that give shape to the narrative and thereby also give meaning and have affect. Started, perhaps, making it mine and about me.

If I had chosen to begin somewhere else, I would have begun with a page from a family photograph album, artefacts which Halla Beloff describes as one of the vehicles that enable the continuation of previous generations.<sup>8</sup> By enabling

memories, or memories of memories, to be passed between generations the family album is a familiar way of holding the past in our present. Perhaps photography, maybe particularly family photography, “is best understood as the return of the departed”.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 2. Page from Reason family photograph album. c.1894-1904. Author’s own collection.



The year is 1894. In one photograph, Joyce lies on the lap of her mother. Just a few months old, she was born in Canning Town where her father was warden of the Mansfield House Settlement, founded to counteract the extreme poverty that existed in east London. Districts such as Canning Town, wrote Congregationalist minister Andrew Mearns in 1883, were “pestilential human rookeries, where tens of thousands are crowded together amidst horrors which call to mind what we have heard of the middle passage of a slave ship”.<sup>10</sup> Family rumours relate that a combination of poor diet, lack of exposure to sunlight and the environment of Canning Town led to Joyce contracting rickets as a child. Anatomically rickets softens bone, permitting a marked bending and distortion of the skeleton, which left Joyce with a slight bow in her legs and an almost imperceptible limp.

The year is 1900. Joyce reads to her younger sister Hazel. They now live in the North London suburb of Friern Barnet, where the streets are lighter, the houses

further apart and even the sun seems to shine more brightly. Joyce's father was the Reverend Will Reason, a radical Congregationalist minister who wrote and campaigned against poverty and inequality: "Sometimes it is said", he declared at the International Congregational Council in 1908, "that Socialism would only work with a population of angels. But only angels could make life possible under the conditions in which the great mass of our people have to live".<sup>11</sup>

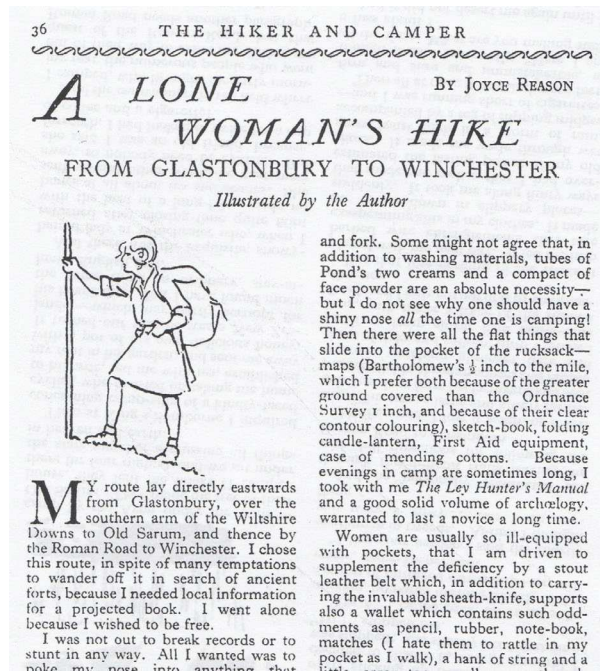
The year is... and my eye is caught by the empty space, the blank circle in the photograph album where a picture has become detached and lost. For Carolyn Steedman a key characteristic of the archive is as much what is missing, "its emptinesses", as what it does contain.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore appropriate to pause on the omissions and, in considering why this gap draws my attention so strongly, I am reminded of artist Sophie Calle's *Last Seen...* (1991), which consisted of an exhibition of the physical gaps on gallery walls where stolen or otherwise absent paintings had previously hung. In Calle's work the paintings are replaced by descriptions provided from memory by gallery visitors and staff. For Peggy Phelan, such description "does not reproduce the object, it rather helps us to restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost".<sup>13</sup> Disappearance, either in fact or in potential, therefore generates the energy and dynamic power of memory, it generates the longing for memory.

In this instance I cannot know what the missing photograph might have depicted, which makes the longing all the more seductive. By virtue of not being present, it is an empty space that has great potential, prominent in its noisy silence. It feels like a fissure that at once highlights the distance between myself and any absolute knowledge and simultaneously reduces this distance down to zero. I can fill the gap with whatever I want, imagining the photographs, the stories and knowledge that I cannot find elsewhere.

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The year is 1930 and Joyce takes a hike—perhaps a pilgrimage—from Glastonbury to Winchester. I can accompany her on this walk with uncanny detail because she wrote about it in an article published in *The Hiker and Camper* magazine. "My route", she writes, "lay directly eastward from Glastonbury, over the southern arm of the Wiltshire Downs to Old Sarum, and thence by the Roman Road to Winchester. I chose this route, in spite of many temptations to wander off it in search of ancient forts, because I needed local information for a projected book. I went alone because I wished to be free".<sup>14</sup>

Figure 3. A Lone Woman's Hike,  
Illustration by Joyce Reason.  
*The Hiker and Camper*. 1930.



As she walked Joyce noted the traces of people that had been there before—the Roman Roads, the ancient burial mounds, the well-worn ridgeways. This sense of the distant past is accompanied by a warm engagement with the people she encountered along her way. Incidents of life observed, remembered, written down and turned into micro-narratives: Mr and Mrs May at Kingsettle, where she camped on sweet and springy turf; a kindly mother of nine children, all flaxen-haired and as numerous as chickens, who talked about being a suffragette; the game-keeper who mistook her for a gypsy.

I found myself taking walks that Joyce took, visiting sites where I know she visited and paths that I know she trod. I wanted to place myself in the same location—the same geographical landscape—that Joyce experienced and wrote about. I saw in this something of what Lucy Lippard describes as the multifaceted experience of overlay within landscape: human time on geological time; the contemporary on the prehistoric; human habitation on the landscape; Christianity overlaid on paganism; urban on rural. Such encounters of overlay in the landscape produce, Lippard suggests, a “juxtaposition of two unlike realities combined to form an unexpected new reality”.<sup>15</sup> For my great aunt Joyce this overlay of unlike realities included her own contemporary ‘now’ of 1930s England, the traces of previous prehistoric, Roman and Saxon inhabitations she encountered and the fictional narratives she placed upon all of these. Now, through telescoping time, Joyce is also accompanied by myself. As I trace my great aunt’s footsteps we are both walking through and on landscapes; both walking through and on time. And there is also, in both Joyce’s walks and my re-visitations, an echo of the rites of pilgrimage—they produce a kind of ‘kinetic ritual’<sup>16</sup> in which walking, seeking and journeying “allows ‘pilgrims’ to discover a sense of contact with the past”



even if only on a temporary basis that cannot be held known outside the act of pilgrimage itself.<sup>17</sup>

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The year is 2013. I am sitting on a bench, amongst the geraniums and tobacco plants outside my parents' house, talking to my aunt Ann about her aunt Joyce. That is, I am gossiping across generations.

The conversation is filtered across time as I listen to the recollections of a woman in her 70s half remembering conversations she half overheard as a child. What she recalls most are snippets of speech, judgements made about Joyce by other relatives, retained and relayed voice-to-voice in defiance of the ephemerality of the oral:

*"It's a shame Joyce never married".*

*"Joyce had a fiancé once. But nothing came of it. So careless of her".*

*"What person wears a cape and carries a staff in this day and age"?*

*"That sounds like just the sort of thing that Joyce would do".*

*"I cannot see why she would want to be so solitary".*

*"You know the reason she walks with a limp, don't you"?*

In these rumours there is none of the authority of the archival document or mechanical objectivity of the photograph. There is instead only mutable memory and disembodied voices. The rumours speak of a generation of what were called 'surplus women', women destined to be spinsters by the slaughter of men in World War One. Women who had no choice but to invent a new template for what it meant to be a woman beyond the home and outside marriage, whose sexuality went unspoken and who were often judged harshly for the choices they made. These women in many ways were the pioneers of contemporary gender politics; although, as I come to 'know' her, I suspect that Joyce would never have viewed herself in this manner. Yet I cannot help but speak for her.

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The year is 1925. On the Friday morning of the Easter weekend, a group of men and women gathered in Chinley Station, at the edge of the Derbyshire Peak District. All were dressed in a jerkin, cowl and wimple, in dark greens, greys or browns. A Saxon-looking outfit, a Robin Hood costume. Although it was early April, the men all wore shorts, with thick socks pulled up high almost to their knees. The women wore one-piece kirtles, shapeless dresses cut to the knee, a leather belt around the middle. Both men and women had sheath knives in their belts, rucksacks on their backs and a rough ash staff in their hands. As they walked the wind caught their cowls, tugging and whipping the thick woven cape around them. The walkers made their way through Chinley and were soon out into the countryside, quickly rising above the valley and making for the heights of Kinderscout.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 4. Women's Easter Hike.  
c. 1925. Courtesy of the Kibbo  
Kift Foundation.



This strangely dressed ensemble were members of the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, a camping, hiking and handicraft movement that dressed in vaguely medieval clothing, mixed Saxon words in their daily language, carved their own totem poles and published leaflets with titles like ‘Can the Kibbo Kift Come to Power’? They considered themselves the inheritors of an English tradition of rebellion that included Wat Tyler, Robert Ket, Jack Cade, Robin Hood and the Levellers. They were a folk movement in a country that has largely neglected its folk traditions and at the same time genuinely believed that they were the vanguard of the future.<sup>19</sup>

The year is 2013. In a pale brown folder in the archives of the London School of Economics, I find Joyce’s name.<sup>20</sup> Her handwritten signature is in a list of members of the Kibbo Kift attending an annual gathering called the Al-Thing. First something with great familiarity — for her name, Reason, is also of course my own — but then something much stranger. Each member of the Kibbo Kift also took a woodcraft name, or as they termed it a ‘name of truth’. They would address each other solely by this name, often not knowing the normal everyday name of other kinsfolk. Joyce’s name of truth was Sea Otter.

Joyce, as Sea Otter, became a prominent member of the Kindred bearing at various times the titles of Skald (storyteller), Folklorist and Nomad Chief of the North.

Figure 5. Sea Otter, Nomad Chief of the North. c. 1926. Courtesy Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London.



The year is 1928 and Sea Otter writes unto all of them that are of the Northfolk....

*“Greetings.*

*“A night hike will take place on Saturday, February 18th, starting at Chinley. Hikers will assemble at Chinley Station, central platform waiting room at 10 pm Saturday. The route will be by Lower Crossing, Bole Hill and Tideswell, returning by Peak Forest. Two or three night hikes have been already held in the South, and it is quite time that the North showed itself to be not behind the South in hardihood.*

*“It has not been possible to arrange for shelter, so bring tents or be prepared to construct a wikiup when required. Kinsfolk should bring with them a blanket, refreshments for a wayside halt and breakfast.*

*“All hikers will wear Kin costume. Wearing of stockings that are not regulation colour is taboo. See that all packs are neat and workmanlike. No extras strapped outside.*

*“WOK formation will be adhered to for the majority of the route. A Wedge of Kinsfolk is a triangle headed by the campswarden and followed by two marching abreast, then three, then four. A WOK is completed by a solitary walker following two steps behind. A WOK should hike silently, keeping their eyes and ears open for every sight and sound. People who are jabbering do not notice much as they go along.*

*“To many this appears mere childishness—a form of play-acting. They say it savours of the “secret gangs” of boyhood. So it does, and perfectly rightly. The boy’s instinct, though not his mind, perceives the binding effect of forms and ceremonies used only by the elect. There is herein both a binding and a severing—a binding of Kinsfolk, on to the other—a severing from the outside world. I am sorry to have to put this into words at all, it is a matter that should be felt.*

*“Grith and Waes Hael. Sea Otter”.*

Figure 6. A Wedge of Kindred.  
c. 1930. Courtesy of the Kibbo  
Kift Foundation.



Over eighty years later, on the moors above Swaledale, I attempt to recreate a WOK with a group of arts students. They are dressed in a myriad of colours, their clothes decorated with slogans and logos, their packs far from neat and workmanlike. There is much giggling, much assertion of individuality, a fair amount of rolling of eyes at the childishness of it all. They struggle to keep silence as they fall out of step, treading on each other’s heels, their strides of different lengths and their hearts not really in it.

They persevere dutifully with the exercise, but it is an effort, fitting uneasily with their contemporary consciousness and attitudes. Can it be anything otherwise? Can we be more than sceptical outsiders, reading the past only in the light of our own preoccupations? As Levinas asks, can we enter into a relationship with an Other, without immediately divesting it of its alterity? I have been thinking about this question as I follow archival clues, rumours, half remembered stories and imagined possibilities, as I walk in the footsteps of my Great Aunt.

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According to Henry James this attempt to enter into the consciousness of another time and another place is impossible and cursed by a fatal cheapness: “You may multiply the little facts that can be got from pictures and documents, relics and prints, as much as you like”, he wrote, “the real thing is almost impossible to do, and in its absence the whole effect is nought”.<sup>21</sup> James was referring specifically to the historical novel, that attempt to write about *those* days instead of *these* days; to comprehend what is the ultimate foreign country; to project ourselves way back, to the olden days, a long time ago, to once upon a time, when they not only did things differently but also thought differently. “I mean the invention”, James continued, “the representation of the old consciousness, the soul, the sense, the horizon, the vision of individuals in whose minds half the things that make ours, that make the modern world, were non-existent”. We cannot write ourselves, think ourselves, imagine ourselves into an old consciousness. The attempt, James argues, requires an effortful *tour de force*—“and even then it’s all humbug”.<sup>22</sup>

It’s all humbug. The accusation almost feels directed straight at me and my attempt to enter the consciousness of Joyce. Come back to the palpable present, demands James.

It is of course the little facts, the scraps, traces, relics, pictures and documents that I have been using to attempt to reconstruct and inhabit the consciousness of Joyce. And she is a very distant consciousness, in terms of time, gender, attitude, values, and faith. What is the modern apparatus, as James puts it, through which we look when we look back to those days from these days? Witnessing Joyce’s engagement with faith, with idealism and esoteric spiritualism, I have found myself more and more aware of the positions of rationalism, secularism and skepticism that are often typical of the contemporary Western mindset. From this perspective the missions to which Joyce attached herself— with creativity, with zeal, with her whole individual spirit— are manifestly out of step with time.

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The year is 1928. A group of Kinsfolk meet at Piltdown, Sussex. They have brought with them a replica model of the Piltdown skull, cast out of plaster in careful consultation with the Natural History Museum. Together they walk to Barkham Manor Farm where the original skull, celebrated as the fossilized remains of an early human, had been discovered in 1912. Four Kinsfolk carry the skull in a carved oak kist to the site of the diggings, while the other Kindred recite the Psalm of the Piltdown Man.

*“Who was he that brought fire out of sticks”?*

*“Who was he that gave flight to an arrow”?*

*“Who was he that digged down, and digged deep, till the water gushed up; an everlasting well”?*

*“He that digged the deep well is forgotten, but the traveller of today stops to drink”.*

*“A man’s name shall go down into the darkness and be forgotten, but his life shall live amongst those who build where he built and live where he lived”.*

Figure 7. Dedication of the Long Man Banner. Wilmington, Sussex. c. 1929. Courtesy of the Kibbo Kift Foundation.



The Kibbo Kift, and Joyce among them, made regular pilgrimages to sites of prehistory. They felt a presence at such locations, in the traces left in the earth and in the stones that had been shaped and handled; in the dolmen and cromlech; in the trackways and green roads. For the Kibbo Kift, such stones did indeed carry the history of what they had witnessed. In June 1930, Joyce participated in a Kibbo Kift “motor hike” that visited the Blowing Stone and White Horse at Uffington, camped on the edges of Avebury, carried a banner up Silbury Hill and finally squabbled with druids over access to Stonehenge:

*“Stonehenge was in possession of the Ancient Order of Druids, whose stiff collars and P.T.U.’s showed at either end of their surplices. Their faces, talk and headgear were as depressing as their portable harmonium. The Kinsfolk, however, wokked to the Stone Circle and, forming trail, followed round until they stood behind the Slaughter Stone and the Arch Druid. His addressing showing no signs of sense of ending, the circuit was completed and the Kinsfolk left the Temple”.<sup>23</sup>*

The tracing of human habitation through the prehistory of place was taken by the Kibbo Kift as a means of connecting the contemporary to the past, an identification symbolized explicitly as The Psalm ended with the line: “I am the Piltdown Man, so art thou”. These were pilgrimages in the most evocative sense of the term, attempts to connect to the past and to construct identity through the land and across history.

Although the Piltdown Man was definitively proven to be a hoax in the 1950s, doubts about its existence were circulating in the 1920s. The Kibbo Kift were not alone in wanting to believe, but the ritual and meaning with which they invested

this belief were dramatic. It is easy to smirk with contemporary superiority, to point out that the Piltdown Man was a glorious grotesquery of human skull fused with the lower jaw of an orangutan and the fossil teeth of a chimpanzee. In seeking connections through the land and the prehistory of place the Kibbo Kift fell victim to a now notorious hoax. The Kibbo Kift were particularly susceptible to the hoax because they so desperately *wanted* it to be true; like Christian pilgrims venerating human relics, they wanted the sense of trans-historical lineage to place and land that the Piltdown Man suggested. There is an appropriate irony in this, and a reminder of danger of attempting too blindly to find the connections that we want — that serve our purposes — in the traces of the past.

The Kibbo Kift burned brightly during the 1920s before transforming themselves — in one of the strangest metamorphoses in history — from pacifist folk movement into the paramilitary Green Shirts, who in 1930s London demonstrated under placards declaring “No More Bloody War” and “Down with Banker-Fascism”, fighting running battles with both the fascist Black Shirts and communist Red Shirts. Within their eclectic mix of ideals — which included a cult-like leadership; an over-fondness for uniforms, rituals and insignia; similarities to German youth movements such as the Wandervogel; their environmental awareness; their participation in anti-war demonstrations; their staging of dramatic anti-banking protests and proposal for the introduction of a national dividend for all — the Kibbo Kift might trace lineage variously to fascism, the Green Party, the Woodcraft Folk, the Occupy Movement, and esoteric spiritualism. They sit outside the left wing/right wing binary which we often use to avoid having to think about things; from our point in history neither the Kibbo Kift nor indeed the Green Shirts sit easily within our contemporary consciousness.

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This politicisation drove out many members, including Joyce, who left in the 1930s to begin a new career as a writer, publishing works ranging from political pamphlets and missionary biographies for the London Missionary Society to historical novels for children. In her historical and biographical writing, Joyce attempted that same act of imaginative resurrection that I am attempting here: seeking to write a life back to life. She did her research, drawing upon first person reports, letters and other official documents along with published histories. At the same time, the form of narrative required her to invent characters, extrapolate dialogue, bend and telescope chronology and interweave research with imagination. She often filled the gaps with what she thought *might* have happened, drawing upon her sense of cause and effect, and her understanding of human psychology. These are gaps where the writer constructs what novelist Margaret Atwood terms “plausible whoppers” — that is narrative bridges that adhere to our expectations and understandings of what would be plausible according to character, time and place, but which are essentially fictions nonetheless.<sup>24</sup> This is what narrative requires when the archive inevitably fails, and in doing so operates within what Jerome Bruner describes as a particular mode of narrative knowing:

concerning relationships, intentionality and the particularities of experience located within time and place that convince through ‘verisimilitude’ and ‘goodness as a story.’<sup>25</sup> Considering the role of storytelling within history, Hayden White similarly points out the need for narrative devices: tropes, figures, schemata of thought, characterization, personification, emplotment and so on. Through such techniques events are made into stories that adhere to the real if not to the true.<sup>26</sup> It is through such devices that Joyce, as a writer, placed herself in minds and in places that were inherently Other to herself.

One example of such imaginative emplotment is *The Bricklayer and the King*, Joyce’s history of Henry Nott and the 18th century Congregationalist missionaries to Tahiti and the South Sea Islands. Published in 1938, her book begins with the King of Tahiti riding down to meet the missionaries when they first arrive on the island, imagery carefully selected to evoke the exoticism and strangeness of the place and its people: the King’s royal robe is a kirtle of bark-cloth, his jewels shark’s teeth and shells, his crown a bunch of feathers. Delayed in the description is the revelation that the King—and his wife at his side—rode men; they were carried on the back of servants who acted as their steeds. “They were young and full of high spirits”, writes Joyce in a dart of impossible empathy “and burning with curiosity to see the strangest thing that had ever happened on their island”.<sup>27</sup>

In the archives of the London Missionary Society, held by the School of Oriental and African Studies, there is a pale brown box containing journals from missionaries to the South Sea Islands between 1796–1803.<sup>28</sup> Many are written on brittle paper, the ink faded brown with age, the text often illegible. It is these journals that Joyce used when she conducted her research and she describes two in particular, noting: “Between them we can build up that first missionary voyage almost as if we had been there”.<sup>29</sup> In searching for my Great Aunt Joyce I found myself doing something similar. Like her I am writing a true story of a real person, although in doing so I am interested in constructing a different kind of relationship between the consciousness of now and the consciousness of my subject—one that does not seek identification, but rather a more nuanced kind of entwined empathy.

The scene Joyce depicts, on that beach in Tahiti, is full of detail, all designed to imply this *is* how it was. The missionaries are dressed in tailcoats, high stock, knee-breeches and buckled shoes. It is, Joyce writes, a scene worth printing on the memory. From her perspective, the missionary encounter with the savage other was a brave and idealistic expansion of Christian enlightenment. By contrast, we read this history of Tahiti as an example of colonialism, seeing the subjugation of the islanders as a dehumanising act of othering. The missionaries seem as exotic and strange to us now as the native King appeared to them *then*. We read the then through the ideology of the now—which is of course a further act of othering. And so equally with my Great Aunt, a figure exotic and strange to me now, whom I cannot contemplate except through a kind of othering.

According to historian Harry Shaw this view that all historical fictions are “a mere projection of present day concerns (...) has become automatic”. It has become an orthodoxy, a default position that reflects James’s assertion that all attempts at historical representation are destined to fail. A consequence of



this perspective, continues Shaw, is that “there becomes no real history to deal with, only the present” with the past only ever conceived in terms of our own individual or collective ideology and desires.<sup>30</sup> Everything that occurred there and then, becomes instead about the here and now.<sup>31</sup> The past becomes our contemporary because we force it to be, surrendering to our own self-fascination and unable to countenance its essential otherness. For Shaw there is the need for a counterbalance, the need to “hold on to the idea that history remained out there, confronting us in its otherness”.<sup>32</sup> If we do not attempt this impossible task then we will forever be repeating a form of colonisation of the past, through which we claim it as our own property and part of our own identity. I wonder again if I can be anything but a tourist, a colonialist, a missionary in my excavation of the archive of Joyce Reason. In re-making her through the archive do I inevitably make her mine; and in making her mine do I commit a figurative murder of her as herself?

I am thinking again of Levinas’ challenge to consider how we can relate to the Other without immediately divesting it of its alterity. I recognize in myself a desire for ‘possession’, to have, to hold, to know and thereby to somehow own the story (and thereby also the life) of my Great Aunt. Levinas describes this desire to possess the Other as a “total negation” (even a murder).<sup>33</sup> Yet Levinas also asserts an absolute “responsibility for the Other”, which stems from the very otherness of the Other. In the asymmetrical relationship of the archive this becomes, I would argue, a responsibility for otherness as otherness. That is, the responsibility to keep it strange and exotic; to keep it always fluid and unknowable even in the act of loving and empathetic knowing.

Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity* presents two conceptual fields through which this responsibility for otherness might be demonstrated: the face-to-face encounter with the Other; and the conversation.<sup>34</sup> With neither of these does Levinas imply an actual face or an actual conversation, but rather the ethical meaning of such as relationship—to be face-to-face with the Other; to be in conversation with the Other. Both assert at once exchange and distance, separation and relatedness; to be in conversation with an Other entails recognition of the limits of both the self and the self’s ability to comprehend the Other. A conversation entails recognition and acceptance of difference and investment into our encounter with that difference. The images of the face-to-face encounter and the conversation can be used as conceptual—even metaphorical—frameworks to describe the encounter with the Other that occurs with the lives discovered through the archive. For me the objective then becomes the attempt to construct a reciprocal relationship between then and now—between Joyce and myself—that produces a kind of knowledge more akin to a friendship than ownership; more like a conversation than a monologue.

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During a research conference on Cultures of Memory in 2013 I had the privilege to meet Ross Hemera, an artist and Professor of Māori Art and Design at Massey

University, New Zealand, whose work expresses the cultural values and beliefs of the Ngāi Tahu Māori people. He introduced me to the Māori word ‘whakapapa’, which means both genealogy and more than genealogy. ‘Papa’ is anything broad, flat and hard such as a flat rock, a slab or a board. ‘Whakapapa’ is to place in layers, one upon another. Whakapapa includes not only the layers of family relations but also the spiritual, mythological and human stories that accompany our ancestral history. Hemera described how in Māori culture this ancestral history is connected to objects (taonga) that carry cultural meaning precisely because they are genealogically connected to people. Since this encounter I’ve been curious about the extent, appropriateness and usefulness of the concept of whakapapa to my own investigation of Joyce’s archive— which engages with genealogy through story, through place and through the material objects of the archive.

The cultural challenge of transliterating a Māori concept to my own discourses within a Western paradigm is of course huge— to do so runs the risk of accusations of at best cultural naïveté or at worst colonial appropriation. On the other hand *not* to enter into dialogue with Māori concepts is similarly problematic, for such exclusion suggests they are in some sense entirely Other and unintelligible, that they must always be outside a global conversation.

In the context of the archive of Joyce I am also conscious that it was perhaps some kind of intergenerational whakapapa that the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift were evoking as they sought to find identity within their pilgrimages to prehistorical remains and sites. Within the human overlay of history upon the English landscape; finding their sense of self within quasi-mythical stories of England’s past. In a European context this often inspires fears and concerns of folk movements that slide too easily into nationalist or ethnic structures. Within this framework the Kibbo Kift’s folly at Piltdown Farm, the ancestral worship of a monstrous fake, becomes at once ironically appropriate and also a powerful warning. Indeed, perhaps within the English/European context processes of urbanisation, generational fragmentation and post-colonialism mean we are at once alienated from and cautious of situating identity too strongly within land or history.

Such a perspective, however, feels like a negation of the possibilities of reconfiguring the relationship with the lives of Others that we find within the archive. Another route might be to parallel the concept of whakapapa with what might seem cognate ideas within Western thought. Here we might consider Derrida’s concept of “hauntology”, a typically elusive idea that articulates the unfixing of historical time. Colin Davis discusses hauntology in terms of the being and presence of “the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive”. Davis continues to describe hauntology as an ethical turn in engaging with a historical Otherness that “is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving”.<sup>35</sup> In the work of resurrection – in the archival work of reconstructing the life of an Other— this preservation of otherness feels both a methodological and ethical way of counteracting the desire for the possession and negation of the Other.

There is a conceptual meeting point here: between the Māori evocation of *whakapapa*, Lippard's artistic notion of overlay in the juxtaposition in space of unlike realities and Susan Griffin's *Chorus of Stones*; between hauntology, ghost stories and the face-to-face encounter with otherness.<sup>36</sup> Without conflating the differences between these concepts I am drawn to them as divergent iterations of intersubjective relationships: whether between people and places; I and other; objects and subjectivities; between present and past consciousness. Each also marks an attitude, a kind of perception, with which to approach the encounter with the personal, historical, archival and ancestral past. This can be described as an attitude of participatory perception, that is not a singular or one-directional relationship (subject to object) but one in which we are *infected* and *touched* by the act of perception.

In engaging with the archive of my Great Aunt, the idea of a participatory perception seems to accurately describe the affective and empathetic qualities of the objects, stories and memories that I encountered. This is the archive as lived, as a hauntological experience in which the unfixing of time results in the archivist becoming possessed by the archive. It is the archive as a conversation or face-to-face encounter with an Other, in which there is a relational exchange, a going out and reaching between the archive and the archival researcher. Within this process the archivist is not effaced, but rather becomes a player within an overt performance of cultural memory. In the intersubjective exchange between the archive and the archivist, both construct each other: the archive makes us, just as much as we make the archive.

Figure 8. Joyce Reason. From Reason family photograph album. c.1901-1904. Author's own collection.



## Endnotes

1. Simon Coleman and John Eade (Eds). *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*. (London: Routledge 2004), 5.
2. In the United Kingdom ‘blue plaques’ are signs erected to commemorate a famous person who was born, lived or died in that location. There is no blue plaque on Joyce’s former home.
3. *Who do you think you are?* is a UK genealogy documentary series, featuring celebrities tracing their family trees, broadcast on BBC since 2004.
4. Susan Griffin, *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War* (New York: Doubleday 1992), 88-89.
5. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1995), 95.
6. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1969), 38.
7. Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2008), 30.
8. Hella Beloff, “Immortality Work: Photographs as Memento Mori”. In *Remember Me: Constructing Immortality*, edited by Margaret Mitchell (New York: Routledge 2011), 179-192.
9. R. McGrath, cited in Beloff 2011, 179.
10. Andrew Mearns, “The Bitter Cry of Outcast London” (1883), cited in Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late Victorian London* (London: IB Tauris 2007), 7.
11. Will Reason quoted in *The Guardian*, ‘Christianity and Labour’, 9. Jul 9, 1908.
12. Carolyn Steedman, “The Space of Memory”, *History of the Human Sciences*, XI/4 (1998). 67.
13. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge 1993), 146-7.
14. Joyce Reason, “A Lone Woman’s Hike”. *Hiker and Camper* 1 (1931), 36-8.
15. Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: The New Press 1983), 1.
16. Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press 1978).
17. Coleman and Eade. *Reframing Pilgrimage*. 2.
18. Less a mountain than a plateau, Kinderscout is the highest point in the Peak District. It has a particularly rich position in the history of walking given its proximity to nearby cities such as Manchester and Sheffield and as the scene of the mass trespass of 1932 demanding greater public access to open country.
19. For further discussion of the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, particularly within their political context, see Mark Drakeford *Social Movements and Their Supporters: The Green Shirts in England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 1997), Annabella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* (London: Donlon Books 2015) and also the unpublished thesis Josef Craven “Redskins in Epping Forest:

John Hargrave, *The Kibbo Kift and the Woodcraft Experience* (University College London 1998).

<sup>20</sup> All quotations and references to the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift taken from unpublished material held at the London School of Economic Archive running to over 200 boxes (collection YMA/KK). In relation to Joyce Reason (as Sea Otter) this includes various articles for official Kindred publications (such as *Broadsheet*), playscripts, poems, manifestos and a series of weekly newsletters signed as ‘Nomad Chief of the North’ over a period of several years.

<sup>21</sup> Henry James, in P. N. Furbank “On the Historical Novel”. *Raritan* 23:3 (2004), 94.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> “Motor Hike to Stonehenge”. *Broadsheet* 54. July-August 1930.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Atwood, “In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction”. *The American Historical Review* 103:5 (1998), 1503.

<sup>25</sup> Jerome Bruner, *Active Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press 1986), 11-12.

<sup>26</sup> Hayden White, “Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality” *Rethinking History* 9:2/3 (2005), 147-157.

<sup>27</sup> Joyce Reason, *The Bricklayer and the King* (London: Eagle Books 1938).

<sup>28</sup> LMS collection 4.3. Box 1.

<sup>29</sup> Joyce Reason, *The Story of the Duff*. (London: Livingstone Press 1946).

<sup>30</sup> Harry E. Shaw, “Is There a Problem with Historical Fiction”. *Rethinking History* 9:2/3 (2005), 178.

<sup>31</sup> For example Robertson Davies remarks, “we all belong to our own time, and there is nothing whatever that we can do to escape from it. Whatever we write will be contemporary, even if we attempt a novel set in a past age”. Cited in Atwood 1998, 1504.

<sup>32</sup> Shaw 2005, 179.

<sup>33</sup> Levinas, 194-8.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Levinas, 39-40. For a full discussion of Levinas’ ethics see Perpich, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Colin Davis, “État Présent: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms”. *French Studies*. 59:3 (2005), 373-79.

<sup>36</sup> I am also tempted to add here the notion of an “intergenerational habitus”, a development of Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ – that is, our disposition or world view, our proclivity to think and do in the particular way in which we think and do – that Brigit Fowler describes as “the product of your family’s experience over generations”. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans Richard Nice. (London: Routledge 1984) and Brigit Fowler, “Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory of culture” Variant 8. 1999.

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## Biographical Note

Matthew Reason is Professor of Theatre and Performance at York St John University (UK). His research engages with a number of areas including: audiences to theatre and dance, theatre for young audiences, performance documentation, reflective practice and cultural policy. He is interested in the use of creative and participatory research methods designed to explore the impact and experience of theatre and dance. Publications include *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (Palgrave 2006), *The Young Audience: Exploring and Enhancing Children's Experiences of Theatre* (Trentham/IOE Press 2010), *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Contexts* (co-edited with Dee Reynolds, Intellect 2012) and *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance* (co-edited with Anja Mølle Lindelof, Routledge 2016).

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# Inside the Experience of Making Personal Archive #1 [A Work in Progress]: The Art of Inquiry

Jules Dorey Richmond &  
David Richmond

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Inside the Experience of Making Personal Archive #1 [A Work in Progress]: The Art of Inquiry.

Jules Dorey Richmond & David Richmond

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Abstract

This article considers our collaborative process of creating the exhibition ‘Personal Archive #1 [A work in progress]’ and examines our experiences of remembering and misremembering our shared past. It will draw on Tim Ingold’s concept ‘art of inquiry’ to articulate a kind of thinking/doing that places value on lived experience and on alternative archives as sites of knowledge and meaning making.

Keywords: autobiography, memory, coupledness, partial truths, art of inquiry.

*Objects accumulate on shelves over time just as events accumulate in memory.*<sup>1</sup>

In these artists' pages<sup>2</sup> we will attempt to unpick and unpack what it was like to be inside the experience of making 'Personal Archive #1 [A work in progress]', a collaborative exhibition of 11 panels<sup>3</sup> that juxtaposed our individual memories inspired by objects drawn from our lives together. These collaboratively written artists' pages offer an opportunity to reflect on the process and realisation of our exhibition, first shown at York St John University as part of the Cultures of Memory Symposium II, 2014. We have included five of the eleven panels from the exhibition in these pages.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1. Exhibition image board. Helmet.

'Personal Archive #1 [A work in progress]' followed our duet *terrorists of the heart*; a performance investigating our 30 years together as parents, partners, lovers, collaborators and pedagogues.<sup>5</sup> Our work can be described as thinking from the debris of previous works. The tale we will tell about the making of 'Personal Archive #1 "A Work in Progress"' will be an act of memory about an 'act of memory': we will be looking at our lives together to see whether our recollection will spill over into cultural memory of coupledness. We speak for ourselves, but we offer this recollection as a kind of mnemonic space in which viewers and readers

can bear witness and reflect upon their own process of remembering. We take our cue from Young's observation about Holocaust memorials as spaces of memory:

*It is not to the Holocaust monuments as such that we turn for remembrance, but to ourselves within the reflective space they both occupy and open up. In effect, there can be no self-critical monuments, but only critical viewers.*<sup>6</sup>

We are inviting our readers to become critical—even self-critical—witnesses as they ponder our story of making our archive. Our making is often ahead of our thinking; or rather our making is our thinking. In his book *Making* Tim Ingold asks the question “What then is the relationship between thinking and making?”<sup>7</sup> He constructs the idea of the “art of inquiry”<sup>8</sup> to consider the position of the artists and the development of thinking through making:

*The way of the craftsman, . . . , is to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us (Dormer 1994; Adamson 2007). This is to practice what I would like to call an art of inquiry.*<sup>9</sup>

It is this art of inquiry that we are engaged in; our thinking will be a “to-ing and fro-ing” in time and understanding and will encompass individual memories, the process of creating the work, discovering tensions, gaps and mis-rememberings between our accounts, and the receptions that this exhibition provoked. We thus reflect on our learning that resulted from being in the process of making, as opposed to merely studying this process. We don't need to know what it is we have made until we have made it, otherwise why make it? We are following a line of inquiry, the art of inquiry, of which this writing is but one part.

Two events led us to make ‘Personal Archives #1[A work in progress]’. The first occurred during the Cultures of Memory Symposium I, 2013—when after performing our auto/biographical duet *terrorists of the heart*, which we described as a ‘living will’, Professor Charles Morris III of Syracuse University thanked us for “opening up our personal archive”. His use of the word ‘archive’ to describe our ‘lived experience’ expanded our thinking about how and what our work/life was and could be. We began to look at the creative potential of objects, artefacts, and documents from the ‘archive’ of our embedded lives. As Matthew Reason explains, “archives are by conception and practice intended to preserve traces of the past, making available for future generations to access, study and, more broadly, simply to know”.<sup>10</sup> A principal urge for us in the making of any work is to ‘simply know’. We have often said that we make work to understand the world we live in. However it was not until our second encounter when we visited the Museum of Broken Relationships in October 2013, that we began to see how we might activate our familial objects and stories as an archive.<sup>11</sup> At the museum we witnessed 100 unwanted objects, donated by individuals from across Europe, as evidence of past relationships that were no more. Consider some of the examples from the Museum of Broken Relationships<sup>12</sup> catalogued by Olinka Vištica & Dražen Grubiši:

*(99) A wisp of hair (less than two months) Skopje Macedonia.  
Well... a relationship very short, but mentally so tough and “crazy” that it  
brought me to a moment of complete madness... and I cut my hair and I lived  
without it for a long time and no one loved me... and I was happy.*

*(53) An iron (?) Stavanger, Norway.  
This iron was used to iron my wedding suit. Now it is the only thing left.*

*(94) A Galatasaray T-shirt (July 1–September 2, 2002) Zagreb, Croatia.  
Short but bitter. “Uzan ama aci”.<sup>13</sup> A summer fling which turned into a two-year  
agony.<sup>14</sup>*

We were struck by how effectively the fusion of personal story and object contextualised this collection of disparate things that alone might have been viewed as mere junk. Of course past relationships are both the content and source of inspiration for the exhibition. Inspired by Vištica and Dražen’s own relationship dissolution and refusal to see their experience as ‘yet another defeat’,<sup>15</sup> the Museum of Br( )ken Relationships was set up “as a safe place for both tangible and intangible heritage of our past love”.<sup>16</sup> The exhibits in the Museum of Br( )ken Relationships are attempting to resist the cultural norms of seeing heartbreak as something to get over, dismiss, forget, and move on from. We began to place ourselves as self-critical viewers as we witnessed the Museum of Br( )ken Relationships and we wondered what a museum of unbroken relationships would look like. We asked ourselves the obvious questions, what objects and stories would we choose to speak of our relationship? And what might such a project have to say about love?

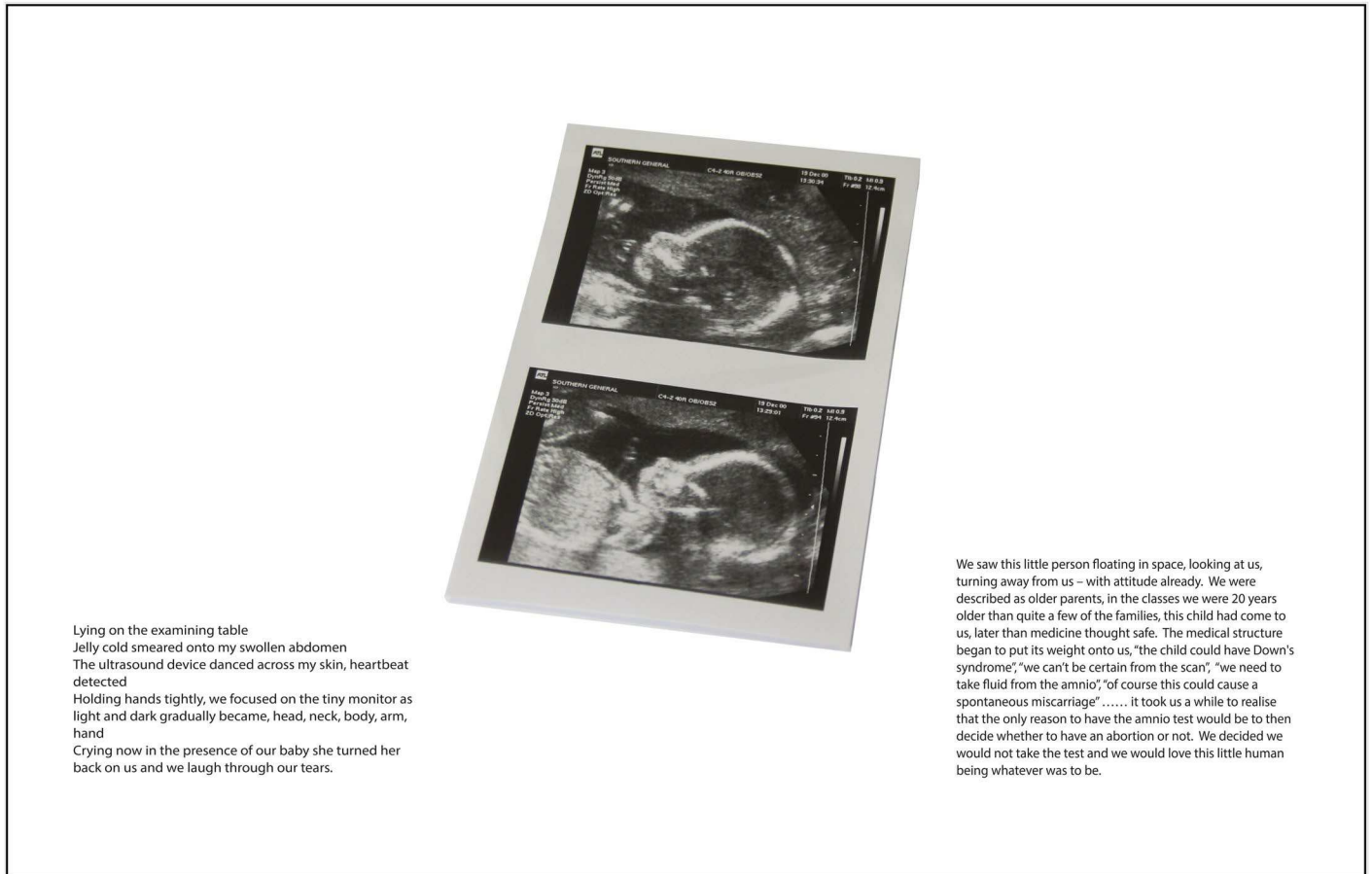


Figure 2. Exhibition image  
board. Foetal scan.

On returning to York, influenced by the idea that our lives and possessions could be viewed as archives and by the memory of the exhibit encountered in the Museum of Broken Relationships, we set about creating *Personal Archive #1*. We also looked to feminist art, which has long placed value on and given voice to lived experience. Scholars and artists such as Annette Kuhn, Bobby Baker, Marianne Hirsch and Joanne Leonard have all emphasised the interrelatedness and complexities of the familial, the private, and the domestic. Feminist analysis and documentation of the practices of everyday private experience suggest that representations of relationships are as ethically and politically consequential as any event played out in the public arena. Our interest in exploring further the personal detritus of our everyday lives acts as a continuation of the feminist project to give voice to alternative archives and partial truths.

We decided on some rules: there would be 28 objects, the number of years we had been a couple. We would take turns choosing an object. At this stage we were remembering the objects, not necessarily looking at them; later they would be assembled and displayed alongside the parallel texts. We would work, as we often do, without any veto over the other’s decisions, so we would write about each object separately. During the process of writing our texts it was important to us to keep our thinking/writing separate from each other, as we didn’t want our recollections or style of writing to influence the other. We would refer to

each other as ‘she’ and ‘he’ to keep the composition as open as possible in order to leave space for the witness’s self-reflection. We proposed to select an object a week, giving ourselves 28 weeks to complete the writing, and we stuck to this schedule even if one or both of us failed to complete the writing task in any given week. It was not until all 28 objects had been chosen and written about that we began the process of actually gathering together the objects and it was at this point that we shared our parallel texts for the first time.

It was fascinating to discover what we each had to say about the objects and the memories triggered by them. Of course how much, or, invariably, how little we had to say about a particular object was itself revealing. Reading aloud our parallel texts to each other, we realised that sometimes an object had been chosen in order for us to speak about pivotal moments in our relationship—our proposal, wedding, the birth of our daughter and so on—as a way of charting our lives together and the art we made together. These were often favourite stories that we frequently told in the ‘making of ourselves’ as a couple and family. However, in some accounts, glaring factual discrepancies highlighted how little was actually known, cared about, understood and assumed; and perceived value judgements, silences and contestations had an unexpected destabilising effect on our sense of selfhood and coupledness. We had not realised how each of us had truly felt about events in our lives whose memories were manifested by these objects and the stories attached to them. We had thought we were solid, but in actuality we were much more fluid.

# [Missing]

This is the only letter I ever received from my father, which makes it all the more disappointing that I do not recall where it went or really what it said. I do remember it was incredibly upsetting for me to read – as my dad was concerned that my marrying 'him' (David) was a mistake. From what I recall he based his assessment on a couple of conversations, which he had confused and selectively forgotten subsequent postscripts to. The gist of letter was don't marry him he is gay and, contradictory don't marry him because he's living with another woman (housemate). I do not know what happened to this letter, however in its absence, I can say with complete assurance that it was sent in love and concern that my impending marriage was a mistake, and, what's more I suspect, that my father felt that it was his duty to point this out to me, in order to spare me the heart ache, that I presume he suffered from marrying the wrong person.

We met in February – February the 1st, at a friend's birthday party in the halls of residence. She asked me to give her a twirl, which I did, and she said, "Yeah, I thought so – a wanker". By April we were living together and by December we were married. In June that year she received a letter from her dad, a rarity even in the days of post. The basic tenor of the letter, was, "what are you doing with that wanker?" Now if he hadn't met me and was going on the stories one might recount then I fully understand, unfortunately he had met me so he was going on prima facie evidence.

Figure 3. Exhibition image board. Missing.

We realised that the very gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions — which the parallel texts exposed — held a promise of 'truth' that no unified and/or refined account of our past, 'the past', could possibly deliver. As the American art critic David Frankel reminds us in reference to the art of the Poiriers,<sup>17</sup> "the human soul is made of memory and forgetfulness; these constitute being".<sup>18</sup> It was important for the integrity of the work to leave these mis-rememberings unchanged and to acknowledge them in our original artists' statement accompanying the exhibition. We wrote,

*Whilst agreeing with Kuhn when she asserts that, '[T]elling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of ourselves', (Kuhn: 1995; p.2) we are aware that this idea is problematised within embedded lives. Lives in which time lived together out-weighs time lived apart. Slippages and gaps of memory provoke doubt, contestation, frustration, and, an unsettling feeling of an unknowable and unstable sense of the past and the present.*<sup>19</sup>

We did not edit any of the written texts from the moment we had first written them, one draft full of grammatical and syntactical errors, inconsistencies and complexity. The work relied on us being 'truthful' without the benefit of artifice. We had wanted to exhibit our actual objects in vitrines, but unfortunately the gallery did not have access to any and we did not want to use shelving. Inspired



by the works of Kuhn, Hirsch and Leonard, we decided to conceive of our own objects as photographs. The restricted wall space meant that we were limited to what we could exhibit; therefore we made a selection of 11 parallel texts/objects. The purpose of choosing and composing with the 11 parallel texts/objects was to create a series of juxtapositions, as in a collage, as opposed to the creation of a narrative with a subtext. In recognition of this reduced selection that finally formed the show we added *A Work in Progress* to the title of the exhibition and hoped that the process of choosing an object to write from would be a yearly occurrence. All the objects were photographed and made the same size and spatially took up a unified central position on each of the boards, sandwiched between the parallel texts and arranged in a consistent relationship, Jules' text–object–David's text (see figures).

The project is not about photography<sup>20</sup> or the objects although it is important that they belong to us and are drawn from our domestic familial lives together, as they provide a stimulus for us to individually reflect and write about our remembered lives together. As Vištica says, “an object enables the fusion between immutable reality, the object itself that can trigger memory, and the very mutable character of a personal story, which has the alternate power to sublimate memory”.<sup>21</sup> And it is this mutability, the shifting points between the here and now, the there and then, the elsewhere and elsewhen, and the partial truths that our failing memories belie that offer us a site from which to consider the gaps, mistakes, and silences.

When we began this project we hoped that our texts would be candid and unselfconscious and that they would resonate with our audience. We were interested to discover what individual narratives would tell us about archives and embedded lives, as at this stage we had not really understood the extent to which they would reveal something about, and to, us. These revelations [re]affirm us as coupled individuals as we bear testimony to each other's life. Yet they also provoke questions, such as “how could you have not known that”? and what are the implications of not knowing ‘that’ for our sense of coupledness?

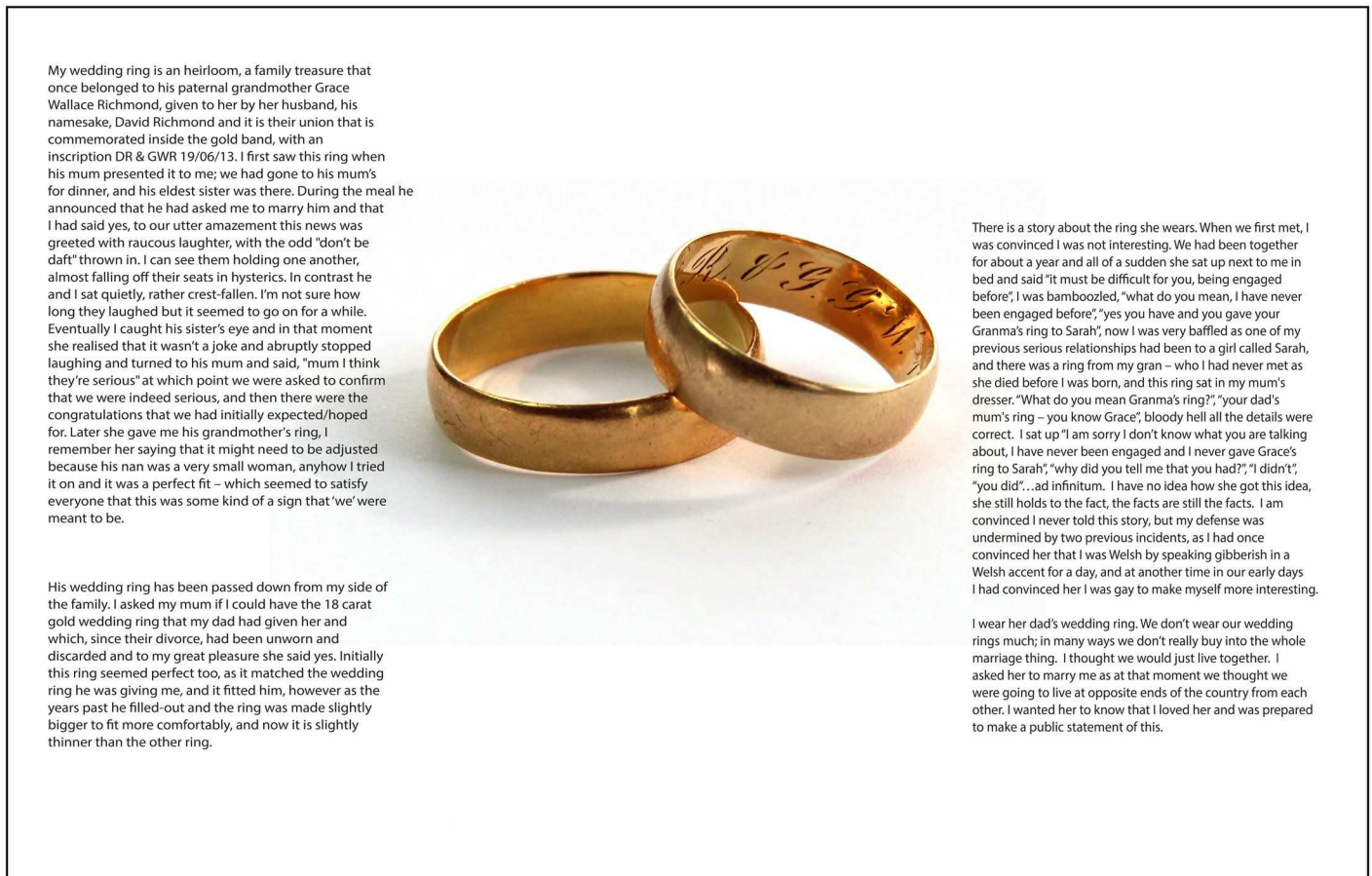


Figure 4. Exhibition image board. Rings.

Working from inside the experience of being a couple, as “archaeologists” we wanted to find out what makes a relationship ‘unbroken’. We were interested in excavating the memories associated with particular objects— whether debris, clutter, or treasure—in order to remember something about how these objects found a place in our lives and to ponder what our individual memories might tell us collectively about embedded lives, memory, coupledness, and love. By engaging in what Ingold terms the “art of inquiry”, the project offered us the opportunity of knowing from the inside of an experience, to “think *through* the observation rather than after it...”<sup>22</sup> We are constantly shifting our perspectives from the makers of *Personal Archives #1 A Work in Progress*, and the writers about the work, in a relentless parallax effect. So reflecting on the work we discovered that our collection of treasured objects was unremarkable and appeared just as tatty and random as the unwanted items donated to the Museum of Broken Relationships.<sup>23</sup> We also found our objects and parallel texts unequivocally place the viewer/reader in the domestic, familial, mundane, shared, co-embedded lives of a single couple, allowing a sense of who we are as individuals within a relationship to clearly emerge. The juxtaposition of our individual texts provides an expanded auto/biographical narrative and highlights the incongruities of constructing a (shared) life story through inconsistent fragments. A life lived together, in tandem, on top

of each other, over the shoulder, under the thumb, watching each other's back, eyes in the back of her head, I have my eye on you, he has selective deafness, hand in hand and by the balls. It is in our collected archive of memories that we graphically encounter mis-remembrances, gaps and slippages.

“The archive”, contends Reason,  
*is made from the selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and just ended up there... In the Archive, you cannot be shocked at its exclusions, its emptiness, at what is not catalogued.*<sup>24</sup>

From what was imagined to be a coherent shared life, we had our own “mad fragmentation” of stuff: a foetal scan, a lost letter from a worried father, a world war two helmet, a music box, a painting, a print that was hidden, a family photo, a wedding album, World War II binoculars, and a stuffed toy named ‘rabbit de niro’.



Figure 5. Exhibition image board. Rabbit De Niro.

“Feminist studies and memory studies both presuppose that the present is defined by a past that is constructed and contested”.<sup>25</sup> By opening up our personal archive through autobiographical stories attached to and ignited by our personal objects, we began to actively participate in the transmission of memory and through this dual act of remembering we clearly drew questions about the reliability of personal narratives. Through the accumulation of our individual juxtaposed accounts of our embedded life experience we exposed the flaws and cracks in both individual personal memory and presumed shared experience, collective memory. When the witness to the work and/or the reader of these pages is offered the opportunity to negotiate the differences in our accounts of our shared history, there is a shifting of perspective. This shifting engenders self-doubt and contestation in equal measure, providing the witness with “alternative ways in which truthfulness might be accessed and used”.<sup>26</sup> The gaps, misunderstandings and errors offer the opportunity to the witness/reader to position herself or himself as a self-critical viewer, asking them to remember and to [re]imagine their own lives.

We had many conversations about the discrepancies presented in our accounts and indeed between our accounts; these discrepancies varied from small details to wholesale errors. Despite the urge to tidy up, refine and make complete we realised it was in these very contested spaces in our lives that the project actually situated itself. The objects/texts were merely the device to expose the absences, lacunae and lostness that perhaps speak most eloquently about coupledness and love.

## Endnotes

1. Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 76
2. See *Performance Research Journal* for other examples.
3. We are showing 5 here throughout these pages.
4. All photographs were taken by Jen Todman from York St John University.
5. For further information see the chapter — *reflections on terrorists of the heart: a couple’s co-created performance about loss and acceptance*. In *The Self in Performance: Autobiographical, self-revelatory, & auto-ethnographic forms of therapeutic theatre*, edited by Susana Pendzik, Renee Emunah, & David Johnson. Due for publication by Palgrave in June 2016.
6. James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 189.
7. Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013), 6.
8. Ingold, *Making*, 6.
9. Ingold, *Making*, 6.
10. Matthew Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and Representation of Live Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 31.
11. Museum of Broken Relationships, Zagreb, Croatia. Concept and realisation by Olinka Vištica & Dražen Grubišić.

12. Olinka Vištica & Dražen Grubiši, *Museum of Broken Relationships* (Zagreb, Croatia: Hulahop Film & Art Production, 2009).
13. Turkish for— “but the pain goes on”.
14. The pages of the catalogue are not numbered, after the introduction “OBJECT’S TITLE (length and/or dates of broken relationship determined by the object’s donator), place of origin. Donator’s explanation of the relationship and/or object”.
15. Vištica and Grubiši, *Museum*, 2.
16. Vištica and Grubiši, *Museum*, 2.
17. Anne and Patrick Poirier— installation artists working as a ‘couple’
18. Green, *The Third Hand*, 79.
19. Artists’ statement, *Personal Archive #1 [A work in progress]* by Jules Dorey Richmond and David Richmond, York St John University 2014.
20. Jen Todman took all the photographs of the objects for *Personal Archive #1*.
21. Vištica & Grubiši, 3.
22. Ingold, *Making*, 11.
23. Tatty— early 16th century originally Scots, in the sense ‘tangled, matted, shaggy’
24. Reason, *Documentation*, 32.
25. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction”, in *Theories of Memory: A Reader*, edited by Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead, 223-229 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 226.
26. Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism”, 226.

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## Biographical Note

Jules Dorey Richmond (BA, MFA, FHEA) & David Richmond (BA, MA, SFHEA) are both Senior Lecturers in Theatre at York St John University (YSJU) and have been collaborating partners for 30 years. They work together to catalogue documents and to make performance events and critical writings. Their long-term collaboration takes their performance work into new and diverse territory; they have performed in theatres, galleries, clubs, streets, quarries, and rivers throughout the UK, Europe, and parts of the Far East and the USA.

Jules Dorey Richmond is a sculptor who makes books, video installations, and performances. She is fiercely committed to making work drawn from the autobiographical - framing and connecting what impels her fine art practice to a larger field of feminist thinking and wondering. For the past 20 years (at YSJU and prior to that at Royal Conservatoire of Scotland formerly Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama) Jules has been teaching a module on autobiographical solo performance — Performance of the self.

David Richmond is a Senior Teaching Enhancement Fellow at YSJU. He is a founding member of Pants Performance Association (1989–present) which was awarded the Barclays New Stages Award for Experimental Theatre in 1992. His research on memory, place, and performance can be traced in both his solo projects and collaborative practice with Jules Dorey Richmond. For the past 10 years David has been running a module ‘artist as witness’ which begins with a ‘secular pilgrimage’ to Auschwitz and ends with a collaborative ensemble performance.

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