

**Loss and return: Exploring collective memory in an Irish  
family archive 1950 - 1966 through installation art practice**

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*Declaration*

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## **Abstract**

This study examines how personal, autobiographical memories offer potential meaning for a wider audience. Through interrogating a set of cultural, familial artefacts, I explore how memory and forgetting are intrinsically linked to our identity, subjectivity and sense of belonging. I engage with recent, theoretical reconsiderations of the archive that claim that, far from being a site of certainty, truth and transparency, the archive shares many of memory's qualities, has a complex relationship to time, is fragmentary, even hallucinatory and, omits or represses as much as it represents. This 'family archive' consists of home movies, photographs, domestic furniture and a series of love letters produced during my family's, Irish, emigrant experience of Britain from 1950 – 1966.

Drawing on ethnographic and oral history methods, and using my subject position - as daughter, sister, niece, artist and researcher - I deploy a range of experimental processes associated with installation art, such as: found-object, appropriation, assemblage, collage, digital photography, sound and experimental short film. From the original artefacts I create formulations that, rather than insisting on an authoritative, static view of the past, enable multi-perspectival, polyvocal, fictional and factual accounts to emerge. By emphasising the senses and giving the viewer an interactive, central role, I explore the multiple ways personal memories circulate and are drawn from wider social and cultural discourses.

The project spans two countries and is located in one family's real-life and domestic world. By reframing the family narrative through installation art practice, I highlight the subtle way individual and social memory interact, not in theory but 'in action'. Employing sensory, inter-active, immersive encounters that acknowledge the ongoing struggle between different memories, I give creative form to the constructed, discursive, performative, fluid, real and fictional way we are able to engage with the past in the present.

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## Introduction

This enquiry has its origins in a childhood immersed in family stories, myths, home movies, photographs, furniture and even love letters that informed our family narrative, as an Irish emigrant family living in England from the 1950s - 1966. In 2003 I discovered my father's 8mm camera and started making short experimental films and as a consequence became curious about the home movie footage he had made of those early years. In 2005 my mother passed on to me some 29 letters she had held in safe keeping for over fifty years. These are my father's letters written to her during the early days of his emigration 1950-1952 – her return letters were lost.

Ajun Appadurai's observation that 'It is not the archive but 'what we do with it' that really counts' (Appadurai, A., 2013, p.2) resonates with the way in which I approach my family's autobiographical archival material to explore the complex weave of interconnected personal and public memories and realign them to wider social and cultural discourses in an art context. I take a 'ground up' approach, apply oral history techniques and research a range of narrative formats, such as, autobiographical, biographical and the documentary to investigate how different perspectives alter our perception of what is being said and the idea that family stories and memories are more collective than we may think. However, rather than simply responding to the family's 'real' events and experiences I also invent imaginary sites that I believe can further expand the search for a re-engagement with the past.

Drawing on existing theoretical discourses on memory and the archive and deploying art practice, my research project asks a series of interrelated questions, such as, whose memory do we encounter in 'the family archive? What time frame do we encounter in a family archive, what kind of spaces are represented and who has agency, that is, who has authority? How do truth and fiction intertwine in these accounts and what are the links between autobiographical, biographical and social or collective memory?

However, as recent theories on both memory and archival practice demonstrate, ‘The family archive’ is never neutral but rather a site of many contested voices and opinions from different perspectives and, as a family record is also a social construction, it combines as much fiction as it does truth (Hirsch, M., 1999). Furthermore, ‘the family archive’ is more than a material memory trace, it also represents a complex weave of both conscious and unconscious fragmentary feelings, anxieties, longings and desires enmeshed in the sensory world of the everyday (Derrida, J., 1996). Moreover, ‘the family archive’, as with any archive, is not a seamless whole but rather a partial, fragmentary selection (Foucault, M., 1969), where silence, hesitation, gaps and omissions are hidden in its layers.

Generally, we access the past in three main ways, that is, through history, memory and the archive, but, as historian, Keith Jenkins notes in *Re-thinking History* (1991), we should now really be referring to history as ‘our histories’ (Jenkins, 1991, p.3). Moreover, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen notable shifts in how we connect to the past such as the decline in traditional and universally shared heritage and this has had a direct bearing on the increasing need to return to the past, not as a communal sharing of common history but rather as a focus on personal and national identity (Lowenthal, D., 1986)

Memory is linked to history, but whereas history is ‘the official’ written version of what happened, memory offers an individual or collective interpretation of events which often takes many forms, for example: spoken; sound; written and material traces. The archive, many contend is the foundation from which history is written and as such presents a crucial and influential encounter with the past (Derrida, J., 1998). It relies on the existence and collection of a series of organised documents and artefacts that create history and therefore mediate the past.

Chapter one introduces the theoretical framework of the research project, which consists of two main trajectories, namely, a consideration of the function of memory and its relationship to the archive. I begin by introducing the work of philosopher Henri

Bergson who, with his publication *Matter and Memory* (1896), introduces for the first time a metaphysical approach to memory, outlined in concept of ‘of two forms of memory’, namely ‘pure memory’ and habitual or mechanical memory. Bergson shifts the study of memory away from a purely physical or psychological terrain, linked to survival, and into a perception of memory with social and even spiritual dimensions. This lays the groundwork for the conceptualisation of a collective or social memory which Maurice Halbwachs – a former student of Bergson – contends is passed on from generation to generation-through traditions, rituals, customs and gestures.

Halbwachs’ sociological approach to memory was very influential. Halbwachs’ hypothesis was to radically transform how we think about memory as a collective, social and cultural phenomenon (Halbwachs, M., [1950] 1992). For example, the anthropologist, Paul Connerton has made several in depth studies on the relationship between ‘the performative body and memory’ and ‘memory and forgetting’ (Connerton, P., 1989, 2009, 2009, 2011). Memory and forgetting are often seen as separate and contrasting activities but as Czech writer, Milan Kundera<sup>1</sup> remarks... ‘Forgetting is not the negative of remembering it is a form of remembering’ (Kundera, M., 1999, p.198).

Developing a framework to re-engage with the family’s past through the archive, the second section explores the unique relationship between the archive and memory. I examine several key philosophers who rethink the archive and its meaning. Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* ([1995] 1998) suggests a radical re-reading of the theory of the archive according to what Freud saw as the indissociable presence of the death drive in the necessarily repetitive act of recollection, suppression and anxiety. Michel Foucault takes another perspective on the archive by approaching it as a structure that is

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<sup>1</sup> Czech author, Milan Kundera famously proclaimed ‘Remembering is not the negative of forgetting. Remembering is a form of forgetting.’<sup>1</sup> This is a fragment, and comes from his book *Immortality* (1988). The full quotation is... ‘The present moment is unlike the memory of it. Remembering is not the negative of forgetting. Remembering is a form of forgetting’ (Kundera, M., [1988] 1999, p.198). Kundera reminds us of the malleability and interpretative quality of memory: the way remembering and forgetting are intractably linked – whether consciously or unconsciously.

implemented by the state in order to monitor and regulate both the inward and outward lives of citizens ([1969] 2002a).

Both Derrida and Foucault agree that texts from the past rather than being unproblematically afforded the status of ‘truth’ documents should be viewed as constructed and influenced according to a range of outside forces, such as, the unconscious (Derrida, J., 1998) and dominant voices of a particular period (Foucault, M., 2002a). Furthermore, they argue that the archive’s appearance as an uninterrupted, complete entity is often at the expense of omitting or even deliberately erasing other points of view.

My research project attends to these recent reconsiderations of the archive, such as Foucault’s view of it as a tool of fundamental organisation and an instrument of surveillance (Foucault, M., 2002a) or Derrida’s presentation of it as an hallucinatory and abstract site haunted by the unconscious forces of ‘Thanatos’ (Derrida, J., 1998). Informed but not circumscribed by these ideas on the archive and memory, I set out to explore how concepts such as, the instability and unreliability of memory, the dominance of a single, authoritative viewpoint, the archive as ‘truth document’ and the idea of considering the archive as a discursive, fluid site are present in ‘the family archive’.

Chapter Two explains the choice of combined, integrated methodologies with a focus on the ‘up close and personal’ that includes: oral histories, installation art practice and ethnographic practices. I draw on Annette Kuhn’s extensive writings on the topic of familial memory (Kuhn, A., 2002; 2006), and in particular her ‘memory method’, where Kuhn argues that a crucial factor in engaging with family recollection is its role in re-forming individual identity, which then further problematises wider social and cultural contexts.

Chapter Three contextualises the enquiry in relation to its core discipline of contemporary art by analysing works by three artists. This also allows me the

opportunity to identify my specific contribution to the field. It is now well established that in recent years art practice has moved from a focus on aesthetics and originality to an interest in social, cultural and political issues or as Hal Foster notes, from ‘intrinsic forms’ to ‘discursive problems’ with many contemporary artists’ projects gradually becoming more interdisciplinary (Foster, H., 1996). Foster believes that artistic intervention in the past in general and, specifically in memory and the archive, is part of this ‘gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory’, which he contends ‘often harbours the possibility of the utopian’ (Foster, H., 1996, p.11).

Many critics, writers and artists see an important role for the archive in reclaiming the world according to the biases of individual commitments (Merewether, C., 2006). However, the chosen artists do not simply investigate the past, history or historiography as such, rather they show us newly imagined ways of returning to a deeper or more complex relationship with a range of personal and historical moments, events or people, as route ways to access and discuss a range of diverse issues relevant to today.

Chapter Four presents the artworks in concert, in a public installation. These represent the findings of the research and consist of a series of short films, sound works, sculptures and one large photographic work. First I discuss particular strategies deployed in the various artworks under review and analyse how these allow different types of experiences of the past to emerge and be represented. For example, by using sculptural appropriation it is possible to reference and subvert traditional archival language to reinvent an empowering, alternative and imaginative archival system that relates to and celebrates the ordinary experiences of one family.

The position taken in this research project can be viewed as anti-monumental. By reconfiguring ‘the family archive’, I set out to offer a counter-point to more official, institutional, authoritative approaches from above, issued by those in power. The installation represents an iteration of the artworks as a complex arrangement of sounds, images and objects that explore a particular moment in Irish and English History - seen through the eyes and ears of one extended family.

By re-engaging with ‘the family archive’ I set out to create alternative family narratives that allow a polyphony of voices to emerge that, rather than approach the past as a fixed phenomenon with a singular, dominant perspective, instead suggests a negotiated and conflicted terrain where the struggle for memory is constantly linked to concepts of identity and agency. Chapter one follows where I introduce the theoretical framework that discusses a brief overview of some key ideas relevant to the enquiry from the past and present, that informs, challenge and contest this practice-based investigation.

## **Chapter One**

### **Family Archiving: A Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter I introduce the theoretical framework of the enquiry by drawing on a range of disciplines, such as: memory studies, philosophy, sociology and cultural studies. I focus on the dual concepts of memory and archive as understood through recent reconsiderations and contestations to analyse what I call ‘the family archive’: its function, meaning, limitations and fabrication in relationship to wider social and cultural contexts. The time frame of the study is 1950 – 1966 and spans two countries, Ireland and England. The collection consists of: a cache of 29 letters - written from my father to my mother in Ireland<sup>2</sup> in the early 1950s, when he first emigrated to England; two large spools of home movies made during the early 1960s, produced after my parents marry, set up home in London and start a family; several items of home furniture which, when the family returns to Ireland in 1966, is referred to as ‘the English furniture’.

In this chapter I also introduce the role of practice as a means of redeploying the family’s artefacts through creative, imaginary, and experimental strategies supported by critical arguments from within the fields of cultural studies and contemporary art practice. Focusing on the relationship between my extended family and ‘the family archive’ and the context and environment in which they emerged, this study set out to address several interrelated research questions. For example, I am curious about what ‘time’ we encounter in a family archive or what kind of spaces are represented and whose voices are represented? Also I interrogate how truth and fiction intertwine in these accounts and explore the links between autobiographical, biographical and social or collective memory.

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<sup>2</sup>There is one shorter letter by my father addressed to my maternal grandmother – written while the couple were still dating and living in Ireland. This is in the style of a formal apology for keeping ‘Mary’ out too late on a date the evening before, which, in hindsight, seems to demonstrate both my father’s personal sense of propriety but also reflects the accepted social standards of the time and the constraints of family life. In addition to this letter there was a handful of birthday cards.



This chapter presents the theoretical framework that allows me to introduce and give a substantial and critical appraisal of the broader context and key terms of the enquiry, in order to clarify and locate the terrain that the creative outcomes of the enquiry sits within and through that process highlight my contribution to these debates. The ideas selected contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex role of remembering, forgetting and the drive to preserve a record of our everyday life by connecting these activities to the way in which we habitually construct, maintain and negotiate our sense of identity.

### **1:1 Memory's role in 'the present'**

Everybody needs his memories. They keep the wolf of insignificance from the door

Saul Bellow<sup>3</sup>

It appears we represent the past in the present in three key ways, namely, through history, archives and memory. Firstly, as many scholars have argued, historical accounts are always partial and potentially misrepresent the past since historians never work with raw, uninterrupted facts. Secondly, as we know, historians construct and use archives that contain traces of the past, therefore historians, archivists and librarians determine which traces are preserved and stored. Finally, memory - taken on its own - is fallible, unstable and subjective.

In order to investigate how memory functions in the present, I focus on a set of familial artefacts, stories and memories that constitute a specific, early emigration experience of my own and my family's past: tracing an emigrant experience. My subject position as family member and researcher allows me to both participate in and explore these narratives; a perspective that blurs the conventional polarisation of subject and object.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), Penguin Classics, 2004, p.156.

Deploying art practice, experimental oral history and ethnographic methods, I re-examine the idea of the archive in relation to the everyday memory practices of my own family. Artistic strategies associated with installation art, such as: appropriation, combining moving image, sound and objects, and highlighting the senses are critical to this investigation as they allow me to interrelate autobiographical, biographical and documentary narratives to create a discursive, multi-media installation that brings past and present, memory and the physical record into juxtaposition. These narratives are drawn from personal and cultural memories and respond to ‘the past’ not as a fixed entity but as a composite of fictional and factual accounts continually drawing on memory, perception and imagination.

There is no perception that is not full of memories.

(Bergson, H., 2004, p.33)

From my research into memory studies<sup>4</sup>, Henri Bergson’s theories were the ones that best help me articulate critical concerns of the project. I specifically draw on Bergson’s understanding that (a) memories are not forgotten, only stored and subject to the whims of perception and recall - affecting our relationship to notions of ‘past’ and ‘present’, (b) the unconscious aspects of memory connect us to our ‘inner selves’ and, (c) the implications of social remembering within memory processes. These ideas are presented in Bergson’s seminal text, *Matter and Memory*<sup>5</sup> (Bergson, H., [1896] 2004). I draw on Bergson’s observations to support the examination of ‘my family archive’ as an

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<sup>4</sup> Memory studies is an emergent, cross disciplinary academic field, constituted by a range of critical dialogues and debates on the theoretical, empirical and methodological issues central to a collaborative understanding of memory today. Typically, ‘memory studies’ examines the social, cultural, cognitive, political and technological shifts affecting how, what and why individuals, groups and societies remember, and forget. It is shaped by public and academic discourses on the nature, manipulation, and contestation of memory in the contemporary era. Despite the epistemological and causal significance attributed to memory in the study of such questions as the formation of personal and public identity, culture and politics, and social communities, there remains dramatic divergence on the basic concepts and methods of the area and it is primarily within this domain that this enquiry is framed.

<sup>5</sup> Originally published in French as *Matière et Mémoire: Essai sur la Relation du Corps avec L’esprit*, Paris: F. Alcan, (1896).

intrinsic case study of collective memory that highlights a subjective perspective and sensory engagement with the everyday world

Henri Bergson was one of the first scholars to examine the subjective role of memory. Bergson believed that mental and spiritual aspects of human experience were greatly neglected as a result of focusing so single-mindedly on the physical and material aspects. Most of his philosophical questioning centres around how to perceive time<sup>6</sup> and, as Patrick McNamara notes, his research into this area was unusually rigorous and at the same time broad with many psychological interests, including: ‘consciousness, perception, habits, memory, the aphasias, dreams, laughter, intuition, time perception, brain functions, multiple personality disorder, the déjà vu experience’<sup>7</sup> (McNamara, P., 1996, p.216).

‘Memory’ stands for a range of mental activities by which we retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for present purposes. Our capacity to remember enables us to call up experiences and events that are not happening now, which makes memory different from perception that is a result of the ‘now’, of our sensory and cognitive nervous system. Memory is intrinsically linked to our perception of time. Memory allows us to remember events that really happened, so it is unlike pure imagination which relates only to events that have never taken place and it is connected in obscure ways with dreaming. Yet, in practice, there can be close interactions between remembering, perceiving, and imagining.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See the online website of ‘Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’ dedicated to Henri Bergson at URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bergson/>, for a comprehensive summary of Bergson’s ideas on ‘time’ and ‘memory’ and his influences and contribution to contemporary philosophers, such as, Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984) (accessed 17/01/12). Deleuze wrote *Bergsonism* in 1966 and it is credited as adding to the revival in Bergson’s theories. See *Bergsonism*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (1990), Zone Books (NY) (first published 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Sourced from the essay ‘Bergson’s “Matter and Memory” and Modern Selectionist Theories of Memory’ by Patrick McNamara in *Brain and Cognition* 30, 215–231 (1996)  
ARTICLE NO. 0014 URL: [www.bumc.bu.edu/.../bergsons-matter-and-memory-and-modern-selectionist-theories-of-memory-1996.pdf](http://www.bumc.bu.edu/.../bergsons-matter-and-memory-and-modern-selectionist-theories-of-memory-1996.pdf) (accessed 12/01/2012).

<sup>8</sup> I am drawing here on an excellent summary of modern philosophical discussions on ‘Memory’ in an online article by Lawlor, Leonard and Moulard Leonard, Valentine, “Henri Bergson”, *The Stanford*

### 1:1:1 Agency and identity

Although Bergson's major concern in *Matter and Memory* was to develop a solution to the classic mind-body problem within Philosophy, the result is a detailed and radically new theory of memory. He proposes the concept of memory as a complex, subjective occurrence, a negotiation between the mind and body through which we form a set of social, material, psychic and even spiritual relationships that inform our sense of agency and identity. However, Bergson does not advance his argument on memory by abstract theorising alone, but through a careful consideration of work done on mental diseases, brain lesions, studies of the failures of recognition, insanity and pathologies of memory. Bergson's breakthrough was to see how memory relates to our sense of identity (and agency is implied in this). This hypothesis was greatly developed by his identification of two types of memory which Bergson claimed had, (a) different functions, (b) different levels of consciousness, and (c) different perceptions of time.

He gave these dual memories different terms and concluded that (1) 'habit memory', linked to motor mechanisms and necessary for our day to day existence, was far less influential than (2) 'pure memory', which produces personal memory-images that Bergson argued emerge from deep within our unconscious and, because they represent our 'inner selves' or 'soul', are critical to our human development.

The first, conquered by effort, remains dependent upon our will; the second, entirely spontaneous, is as capricious in reproducing as it is faithful in preserving.

(Bergson, H., 2004, p.102)

Chapter II of *Matter and Memory* ([1896] 2004, pp.86-105) is devoted to describing in detail 'the two forms of memory'. Firstly, memories that function mechanically and repetitively are 'actual memories' or 'habit memories' (the terms are interchangeable). These perform a practical and necessary function for everyday survival. They are best

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*Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/bergson/> (accessed 08/07/2013).

described as ‘remembering how’ memories, such as, learning to ride a bike or recite a poem. The second category are those illusive kinds of memories, he terms ‘virtual memories’, that although they appear to have little or no practical purpose, critically enable us to have broader and more complex relationships to the past: helping us to form nuanced and social identities. Although these may at times resemble dreaming, they are different in that they are based on real events that have taken place and are now momentarily recalled,

Of what use are these memory-images? Preserved in memory, reproduced in consciousness, do they not distort the practical character of life, mingling dream with reality?

(Bergson, H., 2004, p.96)

Bergson goes on to answer his own question by arguing that these ‘virtual memories’ constitute ‘real’ memory as they hold the key to understanding how we create our personae, identify with others and build critical social and cultural memories. This facet of Bergson’s theory propels Maurice Halbwachs (one of Bergson’s students) to posit the existence of a type of independent ‘social’ or ‘collective memory’ and I will deal with this in detail later on in the text.

Bergson observed how these ‘pure’ or ‘virtual memories’ (the terms are interchangeable) are nearly always spontaneous and mirror how we actually experience time, that is, as a continuous flow, with no clearly demarcated beginnings and ends. Bergson maintains this that this condition is continuously confirmed by our own experience of time – that he links to the concept of *durée* - developed in an early publication, *Time and Free Will* (1889)<sup>9</sup>. Basically Bergson saw a fundamental problem in the way that time was being approached with attempts to measure a moment, believing that all one is doing in this instance is measuring an immobile, complete line, whereas time is mobile and

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<sup>9</sup>‘Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness’ was the title of Bergson’s dissertation which he submitted, along with a short Latin thesis on Aristotle (*Quid Aristoteles de loco senserit*), for his doctoral degree which was subsequently awarded by the University of Paris in 1889. The work was published in the same year by Félix Alcan in Paris. Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Bergson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Bergson), (accessed 01/09/2013).

incomplete. Moreover, and this directly concerns the enquiry, time for the individual may speed up or slow down, whereas, for science, it appears to remain the same. Hence Bergson decided to explore the inner life of man, which is experienced as a kind of duration, neither a unity nor a quantitative multiplicity.<sup>10</sup>

Bergson thought of time in terms of duration and coins the term *durée* to articulate a theory that argues for the preservation or prolongation of the past through memory's processes which, in turn suggests the co-existence of past and present: a concept critical to the enquiry. Instead, for Bergson memory is linked to creative duration (*durée*) and to *sense*. As Bergson notes, matter does not remember the past since it repeats it constantly, subject to a law of necessity, whereas, a being (subject) that evolves creates something new at every moment (Bergson, H., 2004, p.223). If memory is a form of duration, then it is one with the impetus of consciousness itself (understood in the broad sense that Bergson gives to it as that which is bound up with discernment), and in this instance it is not so much remembering that needs explaining but forgetting.

Bergson is helpful to the enquiry in three core ways. Firstly, Bergson argues that there is a link between these 'pure' memories and the concept of durational time or *durée*, which is fundamentally inexpressible and can only be shown indirectly through images that never reveal a complete picture. Secondly, this leads Bergson to maintain that 'a fragmentary approach' is the only appropriate way to explore, access or reencounter the past. In the third instance, Bergson argues that conceptualising time and memory in this way, that is, by disrupting our habitual way of seeing or thinking about the past (as a linear narrative) bestows greater agency on the individual and control over his/her sense of self: enabling the formation of new and constantly changing narratives throughout an individual's life-span. Finally, Bergson contends that 'pure memories' by bestowing a

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<sup>10</sup> Many of Bergson's concepts are intertwined and reoccur throughout his many publications. I have had to select only those that bear direct relevance to the project, as a detailed account of each would be outside the scope and scale of this dissertation. The concept of multiplicity is introduced and discussed in another of Bergson's seminal works, titled *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp.11-14, translated by Mabelle L. Andison, New York: The Citadel Press, 1992 [1946]; translation of *La Pensée et le mouvant*.

form of individual agency allow us to escape from the ordinary and repetitive nature of everyday life actions associated with our survival and thus experience a more spiritual level of existence.

By allowing us to grasp in a single intuition multiple moments of duration, it frees us from the movement of the flow of things, that is to say, from the rhythm of necessity. The more of these moments memory can contract into one, the firmer is the hold which it gives to us on matter: so the memory of a living being appears indeed to measure, above all, its powers of action upon things and to be only the intellectual reverberations of this power.

(Bergson, H., 2004, p.303)

Patrick McNamara in his essay ‘Bergson’s “Mind and Matter” and Modern Selectionist Theories of Memory’ (1996) takes up Bergson’s idea on memory’s ability to allow us to escape the influence of ‘the present’, which McNamara contends, ultimately frees us to experience instead... ‘multiple moments of duration - multiple possible worlds as suggested or implied by the ensemble of past perceptions now available in memory’ (McNamara, P., 1996, pp.221-222). For the enquiry, Bergson’s concept of ‘pure memory’ and its links to time and agency allows me to explore alternative spaces in the family’s record that suggest a return to the past from different perspectives and through that process enable new, subjective reenounters to emerge. These sites of memory, rather than being entombed in the fixity of time and place, suggest a continual process of reassessment and reconfiguration that implies access to the inner self while bestowing a valuable sense of agency and identity.

Bergson insists that a special status is to be given to the word memory, he calls it a “privileged problem” precisely because an articulation of it would enable us to articulate unconscious states (Bergson, H., 2004, p.222). However, unlike Sigmund Freud, Bergson does not concern himself with the problem of psychological explanations at the level of the structuring of the subconscious.

However, Bergson's treatment of memory is not without difficulties or problems and he is not without his critics. It is easy to imagine how his style, imagery and free usage of terms such as ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ would not appeal, for example, to those with a more

rational or materialist approach to the subject. For example, Pascal Engel points out, in his essay titled ‘Psychology and Metaphysics from Main de Biran to Bergson’ (Engel, P., 2004), that the eminent English philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, and social critic, Bertrand Russell (1872 – 1970), had serious doubts about Bergson’s metaphysical approach to memory.

Russell famously criticized Bergson’s notion of intuition and accused it of mysticism (Russell 1917). But it does not follow that there is no space for an epistemological theory of intuition and its role in knowledge. On the contrary, a number of contemporary philosophical enterprises are based upon intuition.

(Engel, P., 2004)<sup>11</sup>

Engel suggests that though Bergson’s approach to memory stresses intuition over rationality this does not result in a lack of critical intellectual rigour in Bergson’s hypothesis. Suzanne Guerlac takes up this point, writing in *Thinking in Time: Introduction to Henri Bergson* (2006), observing that Bergson’s philosophy ‘in principle is open and nonsystematic, making it easy to borrow in parts and be altered by enthusiastic admirers’ (Guerlac, S., 2006, p.10). Furthermore, she argues this contributes to the continued influence of Bergson on such major contemporary thinkers as Gilles Deleuze where, for example, duration (*durée*) becomes the model for Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s core conceptual term ‘becomings’<sup>12</sup> (ibid 2006, p.175). There can be no doubt that Bergson’s theories outlined in *Matter and Memory* represent a radical approach to memory that continues to be referenced in contemporary memory studies as one of the most succinct explanations of the complex weave between the neurological, psychological and metaphysical components of memory and its

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<sup>11</sup>Online essay available at URL:

<http://www.unige.ch/lettres/philo/enseignants/pe/Engel%202004%20Psychology%20and%20philosophy%20from%20Biran%20to%20Bergson.pdf> (accessed 01/09/2013).

<sup>12</sup>Deleuze and Guattari explain the process of “becoming” as not one of imitation or analogy, rather it is generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences rather than resemblances. The process is one of removing the element from its original functions and bringing about new ones. Their concept of ‘becoming’ is discussed in detail in chapter 10, pp.256-341 of *Mille Plateaux* translated into English as *A Thousand Plateaus*, by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1987). Information extracted from URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/deleuze/> (accessed 01/09/2013).



relationship to time<sup>13</sup>. For example, Pierre Nora<sup>14</sup> cites Bergson as one of his foremost influences for his essay 'Between Memory and History', while noted French philosopher. Later I examine how Bergson's new approach to time and memory opens up the way for a range of scholars, such as, Maurice Halbwachs to introduce his concept of social or collective memory and Gaston Bachelard to examine how memory's intrinsic relationship to objects, place and time continually plays a role in our lives and how we construct our identity (see p.38). More recently thinkers like Gilles Deleuze<sup>15</sup> - who has written extensively on Bergson and reintroduced the philosopher to a contemporary audience through his 1966 publication, *Bergsonism*<sup>16</sup> (Deleuze, G., 1990), demonstrate the relevance of Bergson's work to contemporary philosophical debates. Specifically Bergson's concepts of intuition and duration, which help Deleuze reformulate new philosophical insights around cinema. Similarly but for different reasons, Foucault's post structural, critique of the archive, for example, in *Archaeological Knowledge* (1969) that explores Bergson's concept of *durée* in relationship to the past and history.

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<sup>13</sup>Many scholars draw attention to the fact that Bergson's sister was married to the author Marcel Proust and that they would have spent time in each other's company. The novelist Proust (1871-1922) is famed for a major oeuvre in seven parts, titled, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* or *In search of Lost Time* published between 1913 and 1927. It is his most prominent work, it is known both for its length and its theme of involuntary memory, the most famous example being the "episode of the Madeleine" where the author while biting into a small cake has a memory that transports him back in time.

<sup>14</sup>Pierre Nora, one of the founders of memory studies in the 1980s, distinguished between a primordial world before the French Revolution in which "milieux de mémoire" had still been able to function, and a modern world of historical remembrance in which only "lieux de mémoire" were left. See Pierre Nora, 1984-1992: *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Gallimard), abridged translation, *Realms of Memory*, published by Columbia University Press, 1996-1998.

<sup>15</sup>Gilles Deleuze (1925 - 1995) is a philosopher well known for interpreting the work of other philosophers: Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Bergson, Foucault, and artists Proust, Kafka, Francis Bacon. He also devoted his time to a range of philosophical themes organized by concept, e.g., difference, sense, events, schizophrenia, cinema, and philosophy. Regardless of topic, however, Deleuze consistently develops variations on similar ideas. Source: Smith, D., and Protevi, J., "Gilles Deleuze", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), E. N. Zalta (ed.), URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/deleuze/> (accessed 25/09/2013).

<sup>16</sup> The term *Bergsonism* is a noun and refers to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, which asserts that the flow of time personally experienced is free and unrestricted rather than measured on a clock and contends that all living forms arise from a persisting natural force, the *élan vital*. URL: <http://www.wordnik.com/words/Bergsonism> (accessed 16/07/2013).

More recently, another new term ‘Prosthetic Memory’ has emerged which has been the subject of much commentary – though not directly aligned to my project – it demonstrates how the relationship between the processes of memory and identity continue to reconfigure as society evolves and changes. In *Prosthetic Memories: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Landsberg, A., 2004) Alison Landsberg argues that the preeminence of the moving image in contemporary culture has reshaped our collective imaginary relationship to history. She maintains that rather than compartmentalising (American) experience, the technologies of mass culture make it possible for anyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender to share collective memories and to assimilate as personal experience historical events through which they themselves did not live.

What is interesting for my project is how Landsberg looks at the formation and potential of privately felt public memories. Landsberg argues that mass cultural forms such as cinema and television in fact contain the still unrealized potential for a progressive politics based on empathy for the historical experiences of others. The result is a new form of public cultural memory, that is, “prosthetic memory” that awakens the potential in (American) society for increased social responsibility and political alliances that transcend the essentialism and ethnic particularism of contemporary identity politics.<sup>17</sup>

Certainly, a form of ‘Prosthetic memory’ seemed to be evident during the interviews with my five aunts and mother - described later in detail in chapter two. For example, many of these women’s relationship to the Hollywood cinema of the day echoes Landsberg’s argument that ‘prosthetic memory’ can ground individual subjectivities in a world of experiences larger than ones own, offering alternative life scripts and role models, dreams and desires that embodied, sensuous engagement with different cultures and topics, such as: gender, religion and lifestyle choices not mirrored in the conservatism of Irish society of that period, circa 1950s (Landsberg 2004).

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<sup>17</sup> Counter arguments put forward are for example that as these memories are not defined by organic, individual experience but by simulation and reenactment they are potentially dangerous, posing the threat of alienation and revisionism.

To summarise, Bergson argued that duration aligned to ‘pure memory’ is a mobile and fluid concept and that one cannot understand duration through an ‘immobile’ analysis, but only through experiential, first-person ‘intuition’. Bergson’s theoretical methodology<sup>18</sup> is a useful critical tool for the enquiry in three fundamental ways, such as: (a) centralising the role of subjectivity and spontaneity in memory, (b) offering an explanation of memory’s relationship to durational time – or the way we ‘feel’, or experience, time, and (c) arguing that memory - constituted in its free and spontaneous form - provides autonomy and agency for its users which consequently provides a sense of personal and social belonging. These observations inform how I set about imaginatively exploring the temporal and psychological gaps in the family archive by offering a set of theoretical tools to approach the complex relationship between the past and present, and memory’s multi-functioning role in bridging this expanse mediated through a collection of artefacts.

Not only in *Matter and Memory* but also through his prolific output, Bergson explored the possibility that immediate experience and intuition are more significant than rationalism and science for understanding reality. However, Bergson is often criticised for his total lack of interest (especially for one so interested in time) in the emerging worlds of photography and the cinematic during the period that coincides with Bergson’s academic life circa 1850s – 1930s. Deleuze writing in ‘The Conception of Difference in Bergson,’ notes that while Bergson was ‘overhasty’ in his critique of the cinematic, his position should be assessed in the context of his time, and is due in part to the fixed view-points offered of cinema at that time by Lumière, Edison and Muliers which with the advent of modern cinema is replaced by an understanding of one of most essential elements the medium has to offer: that film unfolds in time (Deleuze, G., 1986, p.214).

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<sup>18</sup> In the beginning of *Bergsonism* (1990) Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) argues that it is more fruitful to approach Bergson’s ideas in *Matter and Memory* as a new ‘methodology’ – an approach I draw on in the enquiry.

Interesting to note that Bergson had a long association with Albert Kahn's utopian project "Archives de la Planète"<sup>19</sup> (1908-1931) and, as Paula Amad in *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert's Archives de la Planète* (2010) points out, Bergson was an important influence on Kahn's project not least because of his radical rethinking and theorising of time and memory. Amad suggests that Bergson's influence is best seen through the project's archival motivation and furthermore, that the approach taken is best described as 'counter-archival' which is pertinent to the approach taken in my enquiry.

As previously outlined, Bergson mocked the idea that memory could be neatly put away in drawers or inscribed in a register. Throughout *Matter and Memory* (1896) he makes the philosophical argument against the brain as an archive that stores and catalogues memories as though they were photographic-like documents salvaged from the ravages of time and available to us at any time. By contrast, as Amad points out, "the Kahn Archive proudly reduced the past to fragments of photographic based media, stored in boxes and tabulated in registers, ready for access via mechanical animation" (Amad, p.118). Amad continues by suggesting that Bergson, in rejecting the archive-brain

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<sup>19</sup> "Archives de la Planète" was entirely financed by Alsatian, Jewish, businessman and Philanthropist Albert Kahn. It was a vast undertaking spanning over twenty years and encompassing over forty countries – only coming to an end after Kahn lost all his money in the great American stock market crash of 1929. Begun in 1909, Kahn's basic (and grandiose) premise was to document the whole world in photographs (72,000 colour autochromes – the largest collection of its kind in the world), films (183,000 meters – approx.100 hours) and stereographic images (4,000). To carry this out, Kahn hired a whole battery of photographers and independent cameramen to visually document the planet, employing topics as diverse as... " 'prostitutes', public toilets', 'boulevard construction', 'marriage parties', 'street parades', 'religious festivals' and 'children's entertainment' " (Amad, P., 2010, p.117). According to Amad... "His archive was primarily made up of nonfiction films and colour, autochrome photographs shot across the planet with the intention of capturing and containing a world that stood on the threshold between the traditional and the modern, the local and the global" (Amad, P. 2010, p.6). The extremely wealthy Kahn granted travel scholarships to selected intellectuals, photographers and cameramen to film all over France and the far flung corners of the world, the goal bring to document everyday life. However, as Amad points out, "the Kahn Archive was a bastion of elitism" (2010, p.18) and was never intended for public exhibition, circulation or access, but only produced and maintained for the private amusement of Kahn's guests that included Henri Bergson, Louise Lumière, Jean Epstein and Mme. Henry de Jouvenal (Colette). Following Kahn's financial ruin the Département de la Seine - in 1936 - took over his collection and his vast Boulogne property, which they still maintain. It now operates as "The Museum Albert Kahn" (MAK). However, as these early films were nitrate based and therefore potentially dangerous and, the photographic plates were fragile all the material has been digitalized for safe-keeping and it is this virtual version of the archive that is now open to the public. For more details see URL: <http://albert-kahn.hauts-de-seine.net/http://albert-kahn.hauts-de-seine.net/> (accessed 01/05/2014).

metaphor and the notion of memory as a filing cabinet of the mind, thus comes a bit closer to the idea of ‘a counter-archive’ which is always anchored to the accumulated but unrecollected past and consequently... “expands memory’s parameters into a deeper and longer period of time” (Amad, p.119).

In Chapter Three, ‘The Counter-Archive of Cinematic Memory: Bergsonism, La Durée and the Everyday’ (pp.96-132), Almad examines in detail the philosophical relationship between Bergson and Kahn’s archive. In it she develops a convincing argument where she claims that even if Bergson rejected the traditional model of the archive to explain memory and, subsequently viewed cinema as an illusion that makes us believe we can conjure up the past, it does not necessarily mean he adopted a totalitarian opposition to the processes of the cinema and photography. Rather, she argues, he was opposed to their claims to a total, spatialised, fixed record. as opposed to ... “Memory’s true place of residence, a place that is nowhere in time” (Amad, p.118).

She refers to the fact that, throughout *Mind and Matter*, Bergson uses metaphors of transmission, transportation and media technologies associated with industrial capitalism to underwrite and find new models for understanding the processes of memory (and potentially history), for example, a “central telephone exchange” or an “electric circuit” or “focusing of a camera” (Amad p.123)<sup>20</sup>. Thus Almad concludes that... “if on the face of it photography and film simply expanded the false, historicist illusion of total recall, when imagined within a counter-archival logic they appear to also reconfigure matters of memory according to rifts, voids, and disorder of a radically new type of history” (Almad, p.123) and, it is at this juncture that Bergson and Kahn approaches overlap.

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<sup>20</sup> The metaphor of ‘transmission’ and its relationship to the processes of memory - through Bergson’s concept of *durée* - is one that I explore in several of the artworks and is discussed later on in detail in chapter four.

I return to the idea of the ‘counter-archive’ from a different perspective in order to demonstrate how they allow me to examine my humble family archive from new perspectives that open it up for an exploration of the social, cultural and even political associations when I examine how Michel Foucault explores the intrinsic relationship between the mechanisms of how we record the past, power relationships and the archive in the second section of this chapter titled “The Relationship between Archive and Memory’ (p.48),

### **1:1:2 Individual - Collective memory**

In *On Collective Memory* or *La Mémoire Collective*<sup>21</sup> ([1950] 1992) Maurice Halbwachs pursues the question of how we remember the past by concentrating on how the past is represented in an individual's and society's consciousness through studying the social mechanisms that shape memory. His meeting in 1905 with Émile Durkheim<sup>22</sup> sparked his interest in sociology and he switched his studies from philosophy to sociology. As Erika Apeelbaum points out in her essay ‘Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory’ (2010), one of Halbwachs’ contributions was to take Bergson’s groundbreaking work on memory and develop it so that we might see...

[...] the long-lasting traces remaining deeply and permanently engraved, often without our realizing it, in traditions, institutions, and cultural heritage, as well as in the physical environment itself.

(Apeelbaum, E., 2010, p.91)

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<sup>21</sup> *On Collective Memory* was published posthumously in 1950. Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) first introduced his theory of a ‘collective memory’ in his publication *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*, - The Social Frameworks of Memory - originally published in *Les Travaux de L'Année Sociologique*, Paris, F. Alcan, 1925.

<sup>22</sup> David Emile Dunkheim (1858-1917), an eminent French social scientist was known for his explanations of legal and moral institutions through reference to purely social causes. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) he wrote extensively about commemorative rituals. He is often credited as ‘the father of Sociology’. Along with Bergson he was a major influence on his student Maurice Halbwachs in developing the theory of ‘Collective Memory’.

Halbwachs' methodology moved away from the metaphysics of memory - associated with Bergson - to a more sociological framework. In *On Collective Memory* Halbwachs shows that collective memory is not a given, but rather a socially constructed notion by noting that,

While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember.

(Halbwachs, M., 1992, p.48)

It follows that there are as many collective memories as there are groups and institutions in a society. For example, social class, families, associations, etc., have distinctive memories that their members have constructed, often over long periods of time. 'Every collective memory' notes Halbwachs, 'requires the support of a group delimited in space and time' (Halbwachs, M., 1992, p.84). Halbwachs also noticed how problems arise if we don't share enough collective memories as this creates estrangement.

Halbwachs suggests three practices for organising knowledge of the past in a manner compatible with contemporary society's needs, these are: 'Autobiographical memory', which contains personally experienced events; 'Collective memory'<sup>23</sup>, which contains events that are transferred to an individual by other members of society; and 'Historical memory', which shapes the past through the work of historians.

For the purposes of the enquiry I draw only on the first two categories, as 'Historical Memory' is not central to the project. Halbwachs believed that both history and collective memory are publicly available social facts – the former “dead”, the latter “living”. He argues that as we no longer have an ‘organic’ relation to the past – as the

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<sup>23</sup>Source Url:

<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/CollectiveMemorySeminarHome.html#2> (accessed 01/09/2013). This is an excellent resource website with many texts available for download. The material is posted by the eminent History Professor, Harold Marcuse and relates to a range of courses he teaches on “Collective Memory in The History Department at UCSB University of California Santa Barbara, USA. Marcuse holds the post of Associate Professor with a particular focus upon public memory and German History.

past is no longer an important part of our (modern) lives – collective memory becomes the ‘active past’ that forms our identities and helps us understand who we are.

Firstly, Halbwachs contends that human memory can only function within a collective context. He argues that autobiographical memory fades in time and individuals recollect different details, and sometimes remember things wrongly. Although these memories take place in individuals’ own minds and have the appearance of personal experience, in fact they are more likely mediated by our social surroundings and in relationship to their experience with others and codes of social conduct - even though people like to think they are free thinkers. Secondly, he suggests that collective memory stands apart from autobiographical memory in that it concerns all or many members from the same group, for example, a family.

As previously stated, ‘collective memories’ are drawn from many spheres. These memories are vital, as groups remember more than individuals because groups are able to draw on the knowledge and experience (i.e., memories) of all individuals present - provided they meet regularly enough to sustain the memory of the group. Halbwachs finds ‘locations of memory’ from across society - from the religious to the domestic. However, unlike Bergson, Halbwachs – as a practising sociologist - does not concern himself with the sphere of dreams or the unconscious precisely because, for Halbwachs, the psychic is not rooted in any social context and structure and therefore lacks organisation.

In summary, Halbwachs’ theorising of the critical role of ‘collective memory’ in society offers the enquiry an analytical framework to approach ‘the family archive’ at the centre of the enquiry. Firstly, by highlighting the influence of social memory on the individual, often creating a situation where different types of memory contradict. For instance when the personal, autobiographical memory of emigration contradicts with the collective



memory of that event as something tragic and inevitable. Secondly, I argue for the constructed nature of memory and demonstrating the range of spaces, environments, rituals, customs, objects and activities that are used for transmitting those shared memories. Finally, by offering an opportunity to explore what happens when a selected family group is exposed to other forms of societal behaviour and have different experiences – as a result of a period of emigration – so that they no longer share all the same collective memories, common conventions of beliefs and meanings with other family members.

While representing a major figure in the history of sociology and making a substantial contribution to memory studies, Halbwachs' theories have been challenged. For example, many believe that the concreteness of 'collective memory' and his marginalisation of individual memory is a stumbling block in Halbwachs' theory, as historians Noa Gedi and Yigal Ela point out,

Halbwachs must have been aware of this, since, toward the end of his discussion, we find him qualifying his original position that dismissed private memory, and presenting the latter as a complementary "point of view" to that of "collective memory."<sup>24</sup>

However, what concerns me and is helpful for the enquiry is Halbwachs' central argument that conceptualisation is basically a social function that critically shapes how we remember the past. This can be seen when certain dominant factions in society seek to exercise power over individuals' minds or memories by, for example, deciding what to commemorate and what to ignore.

### **1:1:3 Forgetting in remembering**

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<sup>24</sup> This quotation was taken from an online source titled, 'Collective Memory -- What Is It?' by Noa Gedi and Yigal Ela in: *History and Memory* 8:1(1996, pp.30-50), p.8. URL: <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/articles/96GediElaCollMemH+M.htm> (accessed 10/08/2013).

Meanwhile, historians and social scientists continue to refine Halbwachs' insight that there is a relationship between changing social discourses, practices and expectations, and the way in which individuals remember the past. One such scholar is Paul Connerton (1940 - the present), a well-known contemporary social anthropologist with an interest in memory and forgetting. He has made a study of social or group memory concentrating on the way rituals, customs, gestures and postures enact through the body a site of memory that he refers to as 'embodied memory' (Connerton, P., 1989, pp.72-104). Connerton's studies emphasises society's incorporated practices of memory, which he maintains are often marginalised in favour of the written text.

Diane Taylor, in her article 'Acts of Transfer,' in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* concurs with Connerton and adds that there is a repertoire of embodied memory 'conveyed in gestures, the spoken word, document, dance, song and other performances that offer alternative perspectives to those derived from the written archive' (Taylor, D., 2003, p.30). Pertinent to the enquiry is how a transference of memory in non-verbal actions is articulated through 'the family archive' that passes on tacit knowledge through a range of obvious, subtle and sometimes unconscious actions. This can range from still or moving images of important moments and events in the family narrative to orally passing on myths, songs and stories from generation to generation.

Connerton came to prominence with his publication *How Societies Remember* (1989) where, developing Halbwachs' theories, Connerton argues, memory is a socially constructed phenomenon that is neither purely psychologically nor constructed through social narrative. One of his main contributions is that memory is embodied in social practice and that 'habit memory' is primarily expressed through the body and ritual experiences of people. This theory obviously owes a debt to Bergson's earlier

recognition of the important role of the body in forms of remembering which he termed 'mechanical memory' or 'habit memory'.

However, Connerton, greatly influenced by Halbwachs theory of a socially constructed memory, focuses on the way memories are 'acted out' or performed in society (as opposed to inscribed). He argues that 'embodied remembering' has been badly neglected in favour of written texts and notes that... 'The transition from an oral culture to a literate culture is a transition from incorporating practices to inscribing practices.' (Connerton, P., 1989, p.75). Connerton has been criticised however for seeing social practices in too rigid a manner and that in fact the oral and text based ways of communicating are more intertwined than that. For example, it is not possible to define our (modern) culture as exclusively a literate culture or to suggest it has become a non-oral culture. The internet is a good example; it incorporates a range of oral aspects, such as the incorporation of the popular and effective internet teaching/demonstration methods<sup>25</sup>. Also Connerton claims that his is a new perspective but many anthropologists have previously studied 'bodily practices'.

In *How Modernity Forgets* (Connerton, P., 2009), Connerton develops his theory on collective memory by concentrating on the role of 'forgetting' in society. He maintains that, for example, the size of cities, the great speed at which we live our lives and an overload of information in modern life necessitates a change in our relationship to memory and forgetting. Now that we no longer have secure or traditional foundations on which to build our shared memories, 'forgetting' has become an integral part of contemporary life. In a more recent interview titled, 'Historical Amnesias: An

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<sup>25</sup> I first came across this criticism and idea of the internet as a site of oral communication in an online review of *How Societies Remember* at URL: [http://www.ciao.co.uk/How\\_Societies\\_Remember\\_Themes\\_in\\_Social\\_Sciences\\_S\\_Review\\_5528000](http://www.ciao.co.uk/How_Societies_Remember_Themes_in_Social_Sciences_S_Review_5528000) (accessed 25/09/2013).

Interview with Paul Connerton'<sup>26</sup>, Connerton discusses his perspective on memory studies, the origins of memory and why it is fruitful to reconsider forgetting and its positive role in society. He even goes so far as to suggest that 'forgetting' could be thought of as a virtue (Connerton, P. et al, 2011, p.1). Connerton's theorising helps us to grasp the relationship between what needs to be forgotten in order for other things to be remembered. The concept of 'loss and return' is a theme that underpins the enquiry through explorations of 'the family archive'.

For the purposes of the enquiry I focus on an essay, titled, 'Seven Ways of Forgetting',<sup>27</sup> (Connerton, 2008, pp.59-71), in which he proposes a preliminary taxonomy for 'forgetting'. In it Connerton continues his questioning of forgetting *only* in terms of 'failing' by arguing that it is not feasible to use only one single term, such as, 'to forget'. He cautions us that...

Forgetting is not always a failure, and it is not always, and not always in the same way, something about which we should feel culpable. Forgetting is not a unitary phenomenon. It might be helpful, then, to try to disentangle the different meanings that cluster together under this single term. I suggest that we can distinguish at least seven types.

(Connerton, P., 2008, p.60)

Connerton proceeds to distinguish different types of forgetting, which he lists as: repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; forgetting as humiliated silence. At least two of these terms are useful for my investigation, these are namely 'forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity' and 'forgetting as humiliated silence', and this will become clearer in the course of the thesis. Connerton is not alone in doing pioneering work in this area, for

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<sup>26</sup> For access to this essay online go to URL:

[http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/42/kastner\\_najafi\\_connerton.php](http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/42/kastner_najafi_connerton.php), (accessed 09/04/2012).

<sup>27</sup> For access to this essay online to URL:

<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/articles/08Connerton7TypesForgetting.pdf>. (Accessed 1/02/2012).

example, Louise Passerini's oft cited essay on subjectivity and silence, 'Work, ideology and consensus under Italian Fascism'<sup>28</sup> (1979), focuses on the role of 'listening' in oral history and also emphasises the importance of recognising what is not being said, in order to understand how silence – as a form of forgetting - operates as a powerful and strategic tool in communication.

In the instance of 'forgetting as a process in forming a new identity' (Connerton, P., 2008, pp.62-64), Connerton draws on ethnographic studies done on different kinds of communities who have atypical attitudes towards remembering their ancestors, for example,

Ethnographic studies of these societies, in Borneo, Bali, the Philippines, rural Java, frequently remark upon the absence of knowledge about ancestors. Knowledge about kinship stretches outwards into degrees of siblingship rather than backwards to predecessors; it is, as it were, horizontal rather than vertical.

(Connerton, P., 2008, p.62)

Connerton argues that the consequence of 'forgetting' allows newcomers to the islands to be transformed into kin through hospitality, through marriage and through having children. Past diversity is unimportant and the act of forgetting is gradual and implicit, and 'no particular attention is drawn to it; but it is necessary nonetheless. Forgetting is here part of an active process of creating a new and shared identity in a new setting (Connerton, P., 2011 p.63). Furthermore, Connerton argues this can also apply, for example, when 'a person undergoes a transition to some new kind of identity – a new form of sexual identity say, or political attachment' (ibid, p. 64). In the case of this research the new life of an Irish emigrant family learning to adapt to a different and 'modern' environment may necessitate 'forgetting' older more traditional customs and

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<sup>28</sup>Source for this article is: Louise Passerini, 'Work, ideology and consensus under Italian Fascism' (*History Workshops*, 1979, no. 8, pp.82-108). This article is widely referenced as a critical contribution to listening in the field of oral histories. There is also a publication by the same author titled, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* by Cambridge University Press (1987).

rituals and developing new ones.

Secondly, ‘forgetting as humiliated silence’ (Connerton, P., 2008, pp.67-70), Connerton argues, is probably driven by an unconscious or conscious desire to forget the immediate past that is considered shameful and ‘must be distanced in order for the person or nation to move forward’. Connerton draws on the example of the aftermath of World War II in Germany and the devastation of so many cities and towns. ‘It might even be that this desire to forget was most effectively at work in the determination and hectic pace with which the reconstruction of German cities was undertaken after 1945’ because ‘at another level they were also ever present signs of all the destruction that the war had left behind in the consciousness of the German people’ (Connerton, p.68). Connerton contends that, ‘confronted with a taboo, people can fall silent out of terror or panic or because they can find no appropriate words...’ While this could be described as a type of repressed forgetting it is at the same time a form of survival and the desire to forget, which, Connerton contends, may be an integral ingredient in the process of survival (Connerton, P., p.68).<sup>29</sup>

Connerton’s contribution to the enquiry is to focus on memory as a social construct, to emphasise the importance of non-inscribed, embodied, memory practices, like rituals and customs, and especially relevant for the enquiry is his suggestion that the role of ‘forgetting’ is a critical and necessary tool in negotiating the past and as a subject for social, cultural and political concern.

#### **1:1:4 Materialising memory**

Earlier I examined how Bergson maintained that only memories that are non-reliant on their materiality and that emerge spontaneously were directly linked to our ‘inner

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<sup>29</sup> Refer here to a pertinent essay that looks at this aspect of memory in an Irish context titled, ‘What we will remember, and what we must forget’ by artist and writer Daniel Jewesbury. Here Jewesbury discusses the role of ‘remembering and forgetting’ in the artwork of Willie Doherty, titled ‘Ghost Story’, commissioned for The Northern Irish Pavilion. URL: <http://www.northernirelandvenice.com/default.asp?view=2&mode=4&item=9> (accessed 23/09/2013).

selves', agency and identity. In this subsection I counter-balance these observations by presenting a range of scholars who examine how we create memories through our everyday contact with the material world and remind us how central these memories are in representing our corporal, sentient beings as we spend our lives dreaming and imagining among objects in a material world. In order to focus this discussion I examine the concept of material memory primarily from the family or domestic perspective that then leads into a brief discussion how this functions in materialising a family's memory.

A lived life creates physical effects; a cache of letters, a hand-full of photographs, vinyl records or pieces of family furniture are things that construct correspondences between experience and materiality - where the larger world is reflected in personal objects. In the enquiry I reconfigure a range of 'ordinary' personal, family artefacts that I believe have ethnographic significance in constructing the family's memory and narrative over time.

In *Material Memories: Design and Evocations* (1999), Marius Kwint suggests that 'material memories' have three main functions (in Western traditions): (a) they constitute our picture of the past, (b) objects stimulate remembering, and (c) objects form records (Kwint, M. et al, 1999, pp.2-3). In the enquiry I examine a selection of artefacts from these three perspectives to: (a) explore how they constitute a material representation of the past that references external social and cultural changes, and attitudes to, for example, burgeoning post World War II consumerism; (b) I explore how objects stimulate memory both as tangible images and through the unique qualities of their materials and surfaces that store information that goes beyond individual experience; (c) reformulate - from the original artefacts - a new set of records through artistic strategies that highlight the senses and encourage an immersive, interactive encounter.

Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, (1958) takes memory back to its origins or, at least, introduces a unique perspective on memory, materiality and the imagination by suggesting that our homes, their objects and intimate spaces, form a 'typology of

intimacy’ that is always with us. Bachelard examines the relationship between the physical, domestic, inhabited world and our human experience of these everyday spaces to reveal a more nuanced understanding of their cultural, philosophical and imaginative impact on our lives. Though an eminent scholar in physics, much like Bergson in *Mind and Matter* (1896), Bachelard was also looking for an alternative way to approach an interrogation of how the material world effects our understanding of philosophical issues like time and identity, that veered away from the standard, rational and scientific view of the time.

I focus here on his seminal work *Poetics of Space* (1958) translated into English in 1964. In *Poetics*, Bachelard presents his unique approach, describing in detail and in a language more associated with poetry or literature his perception of our everyday, critical relationship to those ordinary spaces and objects that make up our everyday environments, such as, wardrobes, drawers, attics, corners and shells. He was an influence on many subsequent French philosophers, among them Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, both referenced in this chapter.

Pertinent to my enquiry is how Bachelard reframes ordinary, domestic items in a way that connects them to memory and identity. He maintains that certain ‘images of intimacy’ (Bachelard, G., 1994, p.74) like dressers and chests are aligned to ‘other hiding-places in which human beings, great dreamers of locks, keep or hide their secrets’ (ibid p.74). He goes on to suggest that ‘wardrobes ‘with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms’ have a secret psychological life’ (ibid p.78) that, although we may not be aware of it, constitute a way for us to connect and make poetic associations that connect us at a different level to our world because we recognise in them this ‘ quality of intimacy’ (ibid p.78).

Bachelard’s theory allows me to approach ‘the family archive’ from another perspective as a series of images that not only ‘materially’ exist but actually connect us to our



innermost feelings and thoughts and permit us to explore what he terms the wholeness of an image, its 'oneness' that transcends time and through memory links us a range of identities, for example, childhood and family.

If Bachelard examines the intimacy and poetic potency of memories embedded in the family home that allow us to access our imaginations long after the buildings and objects themselves have disintegrated, Marianne Hirsch approaches family memory by aligning it to wider social and cultural discourses (Hirsch, M., 2003; 2001 with R. S. Suleiman; 1999; 1997). As a memory scholar is particularly known for coining the term 'Postmemory' which specifically refers to the memories past on from generation to generation of Holocaust survivors<sup>30</sup>. Pertinent to my enquiry is her critique of how we use photographs not only to re-engage with the person in the photograph but also to make broader social and cultural connections that support and continue to shape the identity of who we are. She argues for a greater understanding of what constitutes private and social memories and studies the conflict between individual and family memories or family and social memories. She maintains that such (family) images 'remind us that seeing is always mutual, if not always equal' and that there is 'a double vulnerability, the desired mutuality (and) the too-fixed and yet unsatisfying instants of connection' (Hirsch, M., 1999, pp.xi-xxv).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hirsch's term 'Postmemory' is now in wide circulation. It first appeared in an article on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in the early 1990's. On her website dedicated to postmemory URL <http://www.postmemory.net/> (accessed 24/04/2014) she offers the following description of the term's meaning and implication. "'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation."

<sup>31</sup> This essay appears in an excellent book containing a selection of essays by artists and curators, art historians and theorists who all examine family photos. In the final installation I deploy a single photograph alongside a series of reconfigured home movie footage. The theoretical arguments these writers and artists put forward open up multiple, alternative readings of family images, such as, their subliminal messages, hidden narratives and the ability of these images to deceive. I maintain these insights can also be applied when studying the family, home movie footage.

Annette Kuhn is a renowned memory scholar who has written extensively in the area (Kuhn, A., [1995] 2006; Kuhn, A. and McAllister, K. E., 2002). She has developed a methodology that she terms ‘memory work’. She maintains that this approach allows personal images to become useful social documents and memories. For example, she argues that although memories belong to an individual ‘their associations extend far beyond the personal. They spread into an extended network of meanings that bring together the personal with the familial, the cultural, the economic, the social, the historical’ (Kuhn, A., 2006, p.5) (see Chapter 2 for more analysis of this term).

Home movies are another way that families set out to keep a record and to tell the family narrative, but always from someone’s perspective of course. Film theorists Patricia Zimmerman and Karen L. Ishiguro, responsible for the first critical publication on the topic, titled *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in histories and memories* (2008), argue that these humble, fragmentary documents offer more than just an insight into private memories but can be mobilised as social memories. However, in a contributory essay to the publication, renowned French scholar Roger Odin warns against a kind of fetishism of home movie material by proposing nine modes of analysis that include: the spectacular; the fictionalizing; the fabulizing; the documentarist; the artistic; argumentative/persuasive; the energetic and ‘the private’<sup>32</sup>, and critically these modes of textual construction change in relation to context allowing many types and levels of readings to emerge (Odin, R., 2008, pp.255-271).

In many ways this ‘fetishism’ is modified by the goal of home movie making. As Odin points out, ‘in family cinema, the production of the film is not a primary goal. The filmmaker films to play with the camera and its various gadgets. He/she films for the

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<sup>32</sup>Space prevents me from going into each of these in any detail. In the essay Odin gives a footnote which I reproduce here for some clarity as to how he comes up with these modalities in the first instance: ‘I characterize them from the reader’s perspective, but this characterization also applies to the space of direction; one would just have to replace “seeing” with “directing” and modify the necessary details that are indispensable to the definition’ (Odin, R., 2008, p.268).

pleasure of gathering the members of the family' ... 'to film (*a home movie*) is to take part in a collective game in the family domain' (ibid, pp.256 - 257).

Scholar, Nancy K. Miller in 'Putting ourselves in the Picture: Memoirs and Mourning' (1999, pp.51- 65) analyses the concept of family pictures by looking at degrees of 'attachment and separation' which we measure according to readable social and visual codes and which she argues help us to understand 'what happened in the past' from new, nuanced, subtle, familial perspectives that shed light on familial social, cultural and even political structures hard to access elsewhere. She also argues that family images' function is not just to represent the family but also to shape 'the family' into a respectable reading for future generations (Miller, K., 1999, p.53).

As I have demonstrated, recent scholars acknowledge the collective and performative nature of keeping family records – whether in film or photographs - and their relationship to personal, family, social and collective identity. Echoing Derrida's psychological reading of the archive through the 'death drive', they argue that the relationship between these kinds of personal archives and time is frequently borne out of a contemplation of the family's own future demise: framed not in the past, but with some kind of future tense in mind, either imminent or in the distance.

Material memories, particularly those associated with our early life and families, offer us the opportunity to go back in time through a tactile and sensual engagement with objects that both stir our memories and offer new ones. Material memories play a substantial role in creating the family narrative by activating those memories that both bind and help us to know who we are and how to continue evolving our own identity and agency within the familial and wider social group. Scholars suggest we create our memories from many sources. Perhaps what makes material memories so potent is that they are both a reflection and reminder of our experience as well as a concrete physical part of its

materiality and therefore a constant reminder of its transience and physical deterioration over time.

To conclude, this first section introduced and mapped a selection of scholarly perspectives on memory that are pertinent to the enquiry. I began with Bergson's dual interrogation of memory's dual functions, including its ability to bestow agency and identity, and reflect our inner selves through Bergson's concept of 'pure memory' and its unique relationship to durational time or *durée* (Bergson, H., [1896] 2004). Next I looked at how Halbwachs builds on certain aspects of Bergson's memory theory, mainly, his argument that individual and social identities are intricately interconnected. Halbwachs asserts that as we live collectively and are constantly in the milieu of broader social memories we must now speak of a 'collective memory' and forget about 'individual memory' (Halbwachs, M., [1950] 1980). Then I introduced Connerton's ideas that though recognising the presence of a truly social memory focuses on 'embodied memories' that are constituted in our rituals, customs and even clothing (Connerton, P., 1989). Connerton believes that through bodily memories, we pass on encoded memories from generation to generation, offering a valuable, alternative source of information that counters the dominant mode of inscribed memory.

I then introduced the concept of 'forgetting' and its central role in memory studies and how - though often thought of negatively – Connerton views 'forgetting' as an integral aspect of how we, individually and as a society, process our memories, allowing us to, for example, re-imagine new identities and systems that free us from the past (Connerton, P., 2011; 2008). The early record of family life is usually our primary and most subjective frame for revisiting the past and this parental – often paternal – gaze is the one we, as adults, revisit to establish new connections in the present (Hirsch, M., 1997; Kuhn, A., 2002; Odin, R., 2008).

Associated with this (though not exclusively) are the photos, films, furniture, documents, artefacts and material memorabilia of the past – in all their nostalgic, sensual and tactile qualities which stimulate our memory and help us reconfigure the past (Kwint, M. et al, 2006).

The next section builds on these discussions with an examination of how we catalogue and order the past through archival systems and how this transforms, enhances and distorts its meaning.

### **1:2 The Relationship between Archive and Memory**

Memory is not an archive, nor is an archive a memory bank. The documents in an archive are not part of memory; if they were, we should have no need to retrieve them; once retrieved they are often at odds with memory.

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi<sup>33</sup>

In this section I explore the intersection of memory and archive by referring to a series of key texts that primarily emerge out of poststructural theorising. These radically reposition our understanding of archival processes and in doing so influence our understanding of how we remember the past.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida also proposes, like Hayim Yerushalmi (above), that the archive takes place at the ‘breakdown of memory’. He claims that the archive ‘will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience, on the contrary... the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory’ (Derrida, J., 1996, pp.10-11). Many contemporary theorists suggest that the archive not only documents but also constructs its subject, that is, the archive

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<sup>33</sup> Source: Yosef H. Yerushalmi, “Series Z. An Archival Fantasy,” URL: <http://www.psychomedia.it/...> (Accessed 25/09/2013).

does not simply reproduce and make available knowledge but actually produces meaning. This position reassesses what we mean by ‘truth’ in the archive (Foucault, M., [1969] 2002a).

In this section I trace the tensions between Archive and Memory: although memory is not the same as an archive, its function of collecting, preserving and retrieving images of the past for future use is in many ways similar. However, whereas memory is presented as subjective, anecdotal and speculative, the archive is conventionally viewed as objective, valid and real, thus implying Archive’s power over Memory.

The archive is commonly understood as allowing access to historical evidence that is accurate, objective and valuable. On this understanding, the value of the archive is in the action of archiving, in assuring that data does not disappear by preserving it for future reference. This activity of keeping a tangible and retrievable record of the past for the future has ancient origins. The Chinese, Romans and Greeks all kept extensive records and thousands of clay tablets have been found dating back to the third and second millennia BC in Syria and Egypt.

However the ‘action’ of archiving, that is, the underlying principles that allow us to archive, such as collecting, selecting and cataloguing, have evolved over time, affecting the way we interact with the archive. Scholars like Michel Foucault (Foucault, M., 2002a, pp.10-11) and Sven Spieker (Spieker, S., 2008, pp.17-33) have noted that the archive we encounter today is directly linked to the project of ‘Modernity’ and the 19<sup>th</sup> century European drive towards a totalising, regulatory system of preserving the past. They argue that this shaped the way archival practice developed. Foucault, writing in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) to comment that ... ‘The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events’ (Foucault, M., 2002a, p.29), which suggests that the archive, far from being an historical resource, in fact creates history.

In fact, the modern conception of the archive and archival administration was developed in revolutionary France as ‘The National Archives’ were founded there in 1789 and the Archives Department in 1796. As Sian Evans points out, ‘the archive (and especially the national archive) played into a general sense of historical positivism typical to the era’ (Evans, S., 2010, p.2). This points to the different administrative strategies that were needed to further the broader project of Modernity, a large aspect of which was to create new disciplines and categories in the pursuit of knowledge in which the archive, museum and library played an integral role.

### **1:2:1 The Archive – Order and chance**

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) Foucault approaches ‘the archive’, by theorising it as a technical term to examine how particular historical systems make specific statements possible in order to ‘write history’. He argues that the archival process aligns knowledge to power through the specific kinds of ‘statements’ and ‘utterances’ chosen to represent the past (Foucault, M., 2002a, pp.99-118). He claims that archival process takes place on,

[...] a particular level: that of a practice that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated. [...] It is the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.

(Foucault, M., 2002a, p.130)

Foucault argues that archiving systems in modern societies create ‘unities, totalities, series and relations’ and that the consequences that inevitably ensue from such rationalisations affect our understanding of the ‘truth’ in these documents. As Foucault reminds us,

The document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally memory; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked.

(Foucault, M., 2002a, p.7)

Foucault's argument suggests that the presumed logical 'order' of the archive is a fabrication and instead, we should view it as essentially a series of fragments, which, dispersed over time and space, present to us in the archive as a totality. Foucault uses the principles of discontinuity, break and difference in his analysis of the archive in order to contest a range of essential, philosophical concepts embedded in history, such as cause, effect, progress, destiny, tradition and influence, and exposes instead the archive's contingency. He demonstrates how the archive is gathered together from fragments and only appears to present a total view of continuous history rather than this actually being the reality. Instead, 'history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations' (Foucault, M., 2002a, p.7).

Developing Foucault's observations, historian Carolyn Steedman, also believes in the constructed nature of the archive, which she claims seems to have more in common with memory's processes than with activities we think of as associated with official archival processes. In *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History (Encounters)* (2001), she argues that the archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation and, while acknowledging a debt to Derrida and Foucault for radically repositioning the archive, adds her own unique perspective. She draws close analogies between the operations of archiving and memory and the recurring theme of 'loss and return' is these processes.

But in the actual Archives, though the bundles may be mountainous, there isn't in fact, very much there. The Archive is not potentially made up of everything, as is human memory; and it is not the fathomless and timeless place in which nothing goes away that is the unconscious. The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there ... And nothing



happens to this stuff, in the Archive. It is indexed, it is catalogued, and some of it is lost. But as stuff, it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativised. In the Archive, you cannot be shocked at its exclusions, its emptinesses, at what is not catalogued ... Its condition of being deflects outrage: in its quiet folders and bundles is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated, through ledgers and lists and indictments, and through what is missing from them.

(Steedman, C., 2001, p. 68)

Steedman implies that rather than being a repository of fixed knowledge and logical interpretation, instead 'official archiving' should be thought of as having more in common with memory, as, it also is an amalgamation of, 'mad fragmentations', 'bits and pieces' and 'exclusions'. Her interpretation suggests, at least for this researcher, that, as it is not impossible to have a collection that represents a totalizing, truthful account of events, looking to a 'family archive' is as good a place as any to find coherence and meaning, provided that – as this enquiry will demonstrate - it can be reformulated to communicate outside its own narrow, private rhetoric to reach a wider audience.

Cultural historian, Arjun Appadurai, also comments on the role of contingency and chance in the archive...

The central property of the archive in this humanist vision is to be found in the ideology of 'trace'... This property is the product of contingency, indeed of accident, and not of any sort of design. The archive is fundamentally built on accidents that produce traces. All design, all agency and all internationalities come from the uses we make of archives, not from the archive itself.

Arjun Appadurai<sup>34</sup>

Appadurai reinforces both Foucault and Steedman's arguments that to deny chance or contingency in archival procedures is to misrepresent how documents come into the archive in the first place, that is, through collating arbitrary collections from different periods and places over time. However, Appadurai takes issue with Foucault in

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<sup>34</sup> Online article titled 'Archive and Aspiration' p.1/8, by Arjun Appadurai URL: <http://archivepublic.wordpress.com/texts/arjun-appadurai/> (accessed 12/08/2013).

particular when he reassesses the importance of archives not on their content but rather on ‘the uses we make of archives’ and how this is constantly changing.

In his online article ‘Archive and Aspiration’ quoted from above, Appadurai argues that perhaps Foucault had too dark a perspective, when he describes, ‘the panoptical functions of the archive, of its roles as an accessory to policing, surveillance and governmentality’. For the enquiry, Appadurai demonstrates the relevance of restoring or returning the role of archiving to everyday life. He argues that... ‘The personal diary, the family photo album, the community museum, the libraries of individuals are all examples of popular archives and, of course, oral archives have been repositories of intentional remembering for most of human history’. Appadurai also notes that electronic archiving introduces new strategies to these processes, ‘by allowing the formation of new prosthetic socialites, denaturalizes the relationship of memory and the archive, making the (interactive) archive the basis of collective memory’ (Appadurai, A., 2013, pp.2-3).

Foucault and the other scholars theorise ‘the archive’ from different perspectives, for example, by foregrounding the contingent nature of the historical document, highlighting context over content in order to understand not only what records document but how records are produced, or by understanding the archive as a site of ‘enunciation’ that re-interprets the archive as a socially and politically constructed site, where only certain utterances may be spoken. However, drawing on Appadurai, I believe ‘the family archive’ in my study while *only* representing a limited, private archive, a simple collection of personal artefacts - outside of official classification systems – still performs as a kind of ‘truth document’ for the family’s past and, as I intend to demonstrate, can communicate to a wider social and public audience.

I contend that ‘the family archive’ framed within the analytical framework outlined here, highlight its role in constructing and shaping identities, rather than simply recording the past. These theoretical positions give me the opportunity to reframe the original family archive through exploring alternative, classification systems that draw on a range of imagined and real sources and sites while also acknowledging the role of chance and contingency.

### **1:2:2 The Archive – Time**

(...) The question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past... It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise, and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come. Perhaps. Not tomorrow but in times to come, later on, or perhaps never.

(Derrida, J., 1998, p.36)

Derrida’s observation points to an enigma apparent in the archival process, that is, the impossibility of really knowing the effect or importance of the archive until the future becomes the present. Time and its relationship to the archive is perhaps the most essential and obvious principle governing the archive but, as recent theorists suggest, the stability of this relationship is questionable. We assume that the archive relates to the distant past and, according to Derrida, we are encouraged to do so but in fact the practice of archiving is regulated for future use and examination.

Kylie Thomas, a South African writer and academic who specialises in researching the archive and its relationship to public culture, recognises the importance of Derrida’s hypothesis stating that it fundamentally alters (or at least should fundamentally alter) any attempt, from within any discipline, to think about the past. She argues that we must now critically reconsider the archive, ‘not only in our ways of thinking about the past but also how we think of the future’ (Thomas, K., 2013, p.1).

In the beginning of *Archive Fever*, Derrida notes that the ‘Archons’ were not only in charge of preserving documents but also of controlling access; that is, they had the authority to distance those wishing to enter the archive too early. This suggests that the relationship between time and the archive was dependent upon power and control. As Derrida points out, controlling access ensured that a certain amount of time elapsed before the materials stored within would become history, that is, dead matter, remote, forgotten and lost in the passages of time (Derrida, J., 1998, pp.2-5). Consequently this deferral in time means that the archive is perceived as a deposit of a time that is past, completed, one that poses no real threat to the power and to the law, and which therefore allows for the writing of history.

The theories outlined offer the enquiry new ways to understand the relationship of time and the archive. They offer a departure in the way we conceptualise the traditional relationship that shifts its meaning by suggesting that time is tied to such issues as control, identity and unconscious forces, like fear of our own demise. Regarding personal archives, such as, family albums, as previously noted, Hirsch and Kuhn argue that these representations are also in fact constructions created with a future tense in mind, to be re-narrated and reconsidered by future generations with the desire to control the family’s identity. These perspectives reiterate the changing view of the archive as a powerful entity that not only represents but also constructs its subjects (Foucault, M., 2002a).

### **1:2:3 The Archive – The unconscious**

Derrida writing in *Archive Fever* proposes that the idea that the death drive, or ‘Thanotos’, and to a lesser extent ‘Eros’, meaning the life force, underpins the need to archive. As Kylie Thomas, in an essay titled ‘The Archival Unconscious: A brief review of Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*’, notes Derrida’s repositioning of the archive in relation to the unconscious radically changes the traditional notion of the archive as a reliable structure to one which we must now view as ‘a series of shifting impressions

that perpetually eludes our desires for conceptual fixing' (Thomas, K., 2013, p.3).<sup>35</sup>

We generally think of the archive as a series of physical traces relating to the past but Derrida's alignment of the archive to unconscious processes, outlined in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* ([1995] 1998), speaks to a different understanding and perception of time. Derrida argues that the 'real' time of the archive is better understood by employing Freud's notion of the 'timelessness' of the unconscious<sup>36</sup>. This gesture subverts rational time by continually and spontaneously blurring past and present.

Derrida writes extensively about the underlying unconscious elements and forces behind the archival process, such as 'the death drive' and how this derails the concept of ordered logicity in the archive. Responding to the erratic, more subtle and illusive nature of 'unconscious memory' complicates and questions linear time and any fixed relationship between past and present.

Derrida is a Poststructuralist scholar<sup>37</sup>, and his interrogation of 'the archive' is critical to all scholars in the field and represents a unique contribution to 'the archival turn'<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Reference taken from an online essay titled, 'The Archival Unconscious: a brief review of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*' by Kylie Thomas, NRF Post-doctoral Research Fellow, Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative, University of Cape Town, URL: [www.archivalplatform.org/images/resources/Derrida\\_review.doc](http://www.archivalplatform.org/images/resources/Derrida_review.doc), (accessed 12/01/2013).

<sup>36</sup>The term 'the unconscious' could be said to represent the essence of Sigmund Freud's work (1856-1939). Indeed, Freud himself regarded his 1915 paper 'The Unconscious' as central to clarifying the fundamentals of his metapsychology, in it Freud argued the 'timelessness' of the unconscious.

<sup>37</sup>French philosophers Jacques Derrida and philosopher and historian Michel Foucault were two of the key theorists in poststructuralism. They developed a technique, described as 'deconstruction', for uncovering the multiple interpretations of texts. Influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche, Derrida suggests that all texts have ambiguity and, because of this, the possibility of a final and complete interpretation is impossible. For the enquiry I mainly draw on those theoretical characteristics attributed to the concerns of postmodernism and poststructuralist theory, such as, ambiguity, indeterminacy and multiplicity (Lyotard Francois-Jean, 1997, p.xvi). Poststructuralism is generally considered to include three main features or tenets: The 'Primacy of Theory', the 'Decentering of the Subject', and the 'Fundamental Importance of the Reader'. For example, the 'Primacy of Theory' suggests that in contemporary philosophy, it has become incumbent upon every critic to 'theorize' every position and critical practice. In effect, 'theory' has almost in and of itself become an independent field of study and research in the humanities, designating as it now does any account of whatever conditions determine all meaning and interpretation. Extracts sourced at URL: <http://www.ericdigests.org/1996-2/english.html> (accessed 13/10/12).

<sup>38</sup>'The archival turn' is now a common term, loosely applied to describe the recent shift from viewing an archive as a repository of objects and information essential to human history to - in the last half of the 20th

Derrida approaches the archival process through Freud and his theories of the unconscious forces of ‘Thanatos’ (death drive) and ‘Eros’ (pleasure principle)<sup>39</sup>, concepts that first appear in Freud’s essay titled ‘Beyond the pleasure Principle’ (1920)<sup>40</sup>. Derrida introduces the idea that, as well as being a powerful institutional tool, the archive represents a psychological and unconscious terrain, which he refers to as the ‘personal presence’ in the archive (Derrida, J., 1998). On the other hand Foucault does not interpret the archive as a ‘site’ (Derrida 1998) but rather as a fundamental method of State and institutional control (Foucault, M., 2002a). In my research project I draw on both of these perspectives, to enable me to explore the archive as a discursive and fluid site that far from being a repository of the past relates as much present and future tenses. Derrida and Foucault both agree that the archive is a fundamental instrument of control... ‘There is no political control without control of the archive, if not of memory’ (Derrida, J., 1998, p.4).

Although *Archive Fever* contains other themes<sup>41</sup>, I focus on Derrida’s argument that the

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century - a profound conceptual shift in emphasis; from the objects to the archivist, and from place to process. At the heart of this archival turn is a fundamental skepticism of Modernity’s scientific methodologies.

<sup>39</sup> In his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Sigmund Freud identified two key survival forces, which he maintained act as critical defence mechanism to fend off fear of death and finitude (outlined above). These are namely Eros - also known as ‘The Pleasure Principle’ and Thanatos – also known as ‘The Death Drive’. As Joanne Faulkner points out, according to Freud, the death drive is opposed to the life drive - libido, or Eros - which is committed to sex, bodily propagation and survival. Conversely, the death drive tends toward bodily disintegration, and in due course will return the organism back to an ultimate equilibrium through death, which is beyond that sought by the pleasure principle. For Freud, the ‘death drive’ was the most unconscious, or concealed, element of the unconscious: it resides beyond the ‘pleasure principle,’ which had attracted Freud precisely because it adheres to observable phenomena (i.e., to a ‘physics’ of the human mind). The death drive, on the other hand, is obscure because it is more primordial than libido; in fact Eros *emerges* from Thanatos, as its outward manifestation. Extracted from Joanne Faulkner’s article, titled, “Freud’s Concept of the Death Drive” URL: <http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol9/Freud.html>, (accessed 11/01/2013).

<sup>40</sup> ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (first published in German in 1920 as *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*) is an essay by Sigmund Freud marking a major turning point in his theoretical approach. Previously, Freud attributed most human behavior to the sexual instinct (Eros or libido). With this essay, Freud went “beyond” the simple pleasure principle, developing his theory of drives with the addition of the death drive(s) (*Todestrieb[e]*) (often referred to as ‘Thanatos’ quoted from URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beyond\\_the\\_Pleasure\\_Principle#cite\\_note-1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beyond_the_Pleasure_Principle#cite_note-1), (accessed, 20/07/2013).

<sup>41</sup> Derrida’s *Archive Fever* in fact has at least three main trajectories woven skillfully together. These are namely to discuss the archive in the context of Freudian psychoanalysis; in the context of Judaism and Jewish identity and of electronic technology such as e-mail. However for this enquiry, my main concern is

need to archive in the first place is driven by two powerful but unconscious drives, namely, the ‘death drive’ and the ‘life drive’, and that these fuel a desire to survive in a future space, only imagined and as yet unseen. For Derrida, archives are a way of imagining and being responsible for the future – not the past. ‘It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow’ (Derrida, 1998, p.36). Through aligning the archive to psychoanalytical processes, Derrida implies that the archive is somehow organic and ‘alive’ rather than simply a static entity and that this makes it prone to transformation over time, which in turn, radically influences its content and meaning.

Previously I noted that Bergson took a metaphysical rather than psychoanalytical approach to memory. Clearly, in hindsight, Bergson’s observation that ‘virtual’ or ‘pure’ memories as images are laid down in a non-linear formation and can erupt at anytime, without warning or apparent purpose, resonates with ideas explored later by Sigmund Freud<sup>42</sup> in his development of a psychoanalytical interpretation of memory, which Freud compared to archaeology. Freud maintained that memory was essentially a stratified configuration, constantly replenishing layer on top of layer (without obliterating those traces still underneath). This process is articulated well by Freud in a short but influential essay ‘Mystic Writing Pad’, where he compares the processes of the unconscious to a child’s popular play tablet (Freud, S., 1925, pp.207-211).

But it is easy to discover that the permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights. Thus the Pad provides not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also permanent traces of what has been written, like an ordinary paper pad: it solves the problem of combining the two functions by dividing them between two separate but interrelated component parts or systems. But this is precisely the way in which, according to the hypothesis, which I mentioned just now, our mental apparatus performs its perceptual

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to focus on Derrida’s discussion of the reinterpretation of the archive through Freud’s theories of the unconscious.

<sup>42</sup>In fact it would appear that Bergson predates Freud’s published findings on the unconscious and memory which are contained in Freud’s essay of 1925 and in his earlier seminal book *Interpretations of Dreams*, a version of which was first published in German with the title, *Die Traumdeutung: Dreams* in 1899 with many subsequent additions and republications.

function. The layer that receives the stimuli - the system Pcpt: Cs - forms no permanent traces; the foundations of memory come about in other, adjoining systems.

(Freud, S., 1925, p.211)

Resonating with the concept of 'pure memory' (Bergson, 1896), Freud suggests that the unconscious stores memory-images that – though generated in the distant past - can and do intrude in present day life, spontaneously triggered and unsummoned these can appear anytime and anywhere.

Contemporary art historian, Sven Spieker writing in *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Spieker, S., 2008), takes up Freud's theories of the unconscious and its relationship to 'time' and 'the archive' by noting that...

While materials arrive in an administrative archive in series of chronological files that are more or less neatly separated, indexed, numbered, and registered, this is not the case with the Freudian unconscious. Here mnemonic traces are stacked on top of each other without regard for clarity or readability, and crucially, without regard to time. For Freud, the unconscious was timeless; consequently, the chronological sequencing typical of a registry does not apply here.

(Spieker, S., 2008, p.43)

What interests me is how Spieker interprets artistic processes and examines how they contribute to the debate of the unconscious and its relationship to the archive. He analyses a range of early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists such as Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968).

According to Spieker, Duchamp's artworks drew on the dream world and the unconscious to deliberate challenge the idea of rational classification and indexing systems using absurdist and other Surrealist<sup>43</sup> strategies. Spieker points out that 'these artists critically challenged the nineteenth century confidence in the registration of time

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<sup>43</sup>“Surrealism was a movement in art and literature that flourished in the early twentieth century. Its exponents aimed at expressing imaginative dreams and visions free from conscious rational control. Salvador Dali was an influential surrealist painter; Jean Cocteau was a master of surrealist film”. Sourced URL: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/surrealism>, (accessed 15/06/2013).



by highlighting instead the elements of chance and contingency present at every level in the archival process' (Spieker, S., 2008, p.6). Spieker, through an analyses of these surrealist artworks, argues that the origin of the modern archive's approach actually reflected dominant discourses of the day that prioritise a practical, logical, rational, (often silent) determinism and this position, over turns any inclusion of other illogical, irrational or contingent approaches to storing and retrieving knowledge.

Philosopher and critical theorist, Roland Barthes (1915-1980), saw in a small photograph of his mother a way to theorise the process of photography as both a material and metaphysical trace that engages with death and memory. In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes wrote a short essay, commonly referred to as 'Wintergarden Photograph' (though there is no such title in the book) describing how he goes looking for a photo of his recently deceased mother 'that represents her'. What follows is a theoretically rigorous, insightful and moving account of the emotional complexities this entails and a thought provoking discussion on photography, memorialisation and death that deals with the failure of photography 'to represent' truth.

Barthes' personal failure to find an image of his mother that is appropriate to his memory, depth of feeling and their shared life experience, offers him an opportunity to meditate on the role of the archive, its relationship to death and the role of photography generally. He concludes that rather than interpreting or imbuing these inert objects as legitimate records of 'what once was', we should instead view them as a memento mori<sup>44</sup> that can reconnect us with the subject but only through a series of meditations on

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<sup>44</sup> A 'memento mori' is any object or remnant that is cherished and has belonged to the deceased. Roland Barthes uses the term in *Camera Lucida* to refer to the photograph that he repeatedly looks for, and eventually finds, to represent his dearly departed mother. For example, in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes argues that... "The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror the anterior future of which death is the stake... the photograph tells me death in the future... Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe." Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980, p.96). Author Susan Sontag, refers to 'memento mori' when she observes that 'photographs are always memento more' in her book *On Photography* 1977 (Sontag, S., 2002, p.15). Sontag and Barthes were friends, and her ideas about death and the photograph as 'memento mori' may well have influenced Barthes. Later on, in chapter four, I return to this concept while discussing a large-scale photographic work, titled *Street Portrait*, in terms of how a photograph can hold both the nostalgic love of life and (at the same time) the

life and not to return to the past as a fixed entity (Barthes, R., 1980, p.96).

In summary, while Derrida explored the relationship between unconscious forces and our need to preserve and archive, Spieker demonstrates how certain artists used avant-garde artistic strategies to create alternative, illogical and absurdist cataloguing systems - such as Dadaist <sup>45</sup> montage and collage - through which they sought to disrupt and dramatise 'the precarious oscillation between narrative and contingency' inherent in the modern archive (Spieker, S., 2008, p.7).

Like Derrida, Spieker implies – through his analysis of particular artworks – that unconscious forces at play in the archival process are constantly informing, complicating and undermining fixed notions of time, order and truth in the recording process. Meanwhile, Barthes, through analysing the processes of photography, suggests a desire to return to the past through the material presence of the archive that goes beyond the obvious or conscious surface and meaning of the document. Barthes also suggests alternative sub-or unconscious forces at work (in the archive) and offers the opportunity and space to reconnect meaningfully to others and to make sense of our own mortality.

#### **1:2:4 The Archive - Legitimacy and transparency**

...History now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, and describes relations. The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations.

(Foucault, M., 2002a, p.7)

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fear of death, which according to these two scholars can be encountered in contemplating any photograph.

<sup>45</sup>Dadism is the term given to the style and techniques of a group of artists, writers and poets of the early 20th century who exploited accidental and incongruous effects in their work and who programmatically challenged established canons of art, thought, morality. For an excellent source on art terms see URL: [http://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?theme\\_id=10455&texttype=2](http://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?theme_id=10455&texttype=2), (accessed 25/09/2013).

Foucault argues that ‘truth’ is as much a construct of power as any other system. As a thinker associated with poststructuralism, Foucault does not agree that there is only one ‘truth’ but rather that there are ‘regimes of truth’. Clare O’Farrell, author of *Michel Foucault* (2005) notes that ‘Foucault believes truth is an event, which takes place in history. It is something that ‘happens’ and is produced by various techniques rather than something that already exists and is waiting to be discovered’ (O’Farrell, C., 2005, pp.87- 88). Foucault contends that the archives - as opposed to functioning as sources of truth - are actually reservoirs of stories that historians use to construct meaning out of the dust and detritus of people’s lives.

One of Derrida’s most important contributions is the concept of ‘archivization’, which he maintains is a crucial tool in legitimating the archive, one that often goes unnoticed. Basically, Derrida contends that history and memory are shaped by the technical methods and technologies used during the archive process As Marlene Manoff notes in her essay ‘Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines’ (Manoff, M., 2004, pp.1-17),

Derrida cites the example of the history of psychoanalysis and its reliance upon Freud’s correspondence with his colleagues. Derrida claims that if Freud and his contemporaries had had access to telephones, tape recorders, fax machines, computers, printers, and e-mail, it would have completely transformed the history and development of psychoanalysis “in its very *events*”.<sup>46</sup>

(Manoff, M., 2004, p.12)

Derrida demonstrates how the methods for transmitting information shape the nature of the knowledge that can be produced. Thus Derrida claims ‘archivization produces as much as it records the event’ (Derrida, J., 1998, p.17).

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<sup>46</sup> Manoff’s in text quotation can be found in *Archive Fever* (1998) *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, paperback, trans, Prenowitz E., USA: University of Chicago Press, p.17.

Most historians agree that today there is a suspicion of the historical record that, in turn, affects our reading of the legitimacy of the archive (Huysen, A., 2003; Jencks, M., 1995; Jenkins, K., 1991; Lowenthal, D., 1986). Keith Jenkins, in his influential but slim volume, *Re-thinking History* (1991), argues that 'a history', as we know it, is no longer viable as a metanarrative, that is a worldwide and totalizing narrative schema, which orders and explains knowledge and experience (Jenkins, K., 1991). He argues that we should,

Bear in mind that 'history' is really 'histories', for at this point we ought to stop thinking of history as though it were a simple and rather obvious thing and recognise that there is a multiplicity of types of history whose only common feature is that their ostensible object of enquiry is the past.

(Jenkins, K., 1991, p.3)

As we know from Foucault, the archive is anchored to how we construct history and Jenkins recognises such a poststructural influence on History. He maintains that to really take a contemporary view of 'doing history', the discipline must align itself in some way to those discourses that have 'readings', such as literary theory and philosophy which recognise the construction of meanings as a major concern (Jenkins, K., 1991,p.3). However, if, as Jenkins claims, there can be no true history and 'all accounts are problematic and relative', the fact still remains that some histories are actually dominant and others marginal (ibid, p.25), which points to the question of who and what gets into the archival record.

As previously referred to, Foucault famously maintained that... 'The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events' (Foucault, 2002a, p.29). With this statement Foucault raises the issue of legitimacy in the archive. For, if there is a controlled system of documents or 'statements' telling us what happened in the past in a particular order – with certain exclusions - then what we are actually experiencing is a construction, a version of events.

Foucault reminds us that ultimately this means that ‘the archive establishes the possibility of what can be said’ (Foucault, 2002a, p.30). Or more simply put, it is the archive that makes something legitimate. While Gutting claims that for Foucault,

The archive is the locus of the rules and prior practices forming the conditions of inclusion or exclusion that enable certain practices and prevent others from being accepted as “Scientific”, “Moral”, or whatever other social rubric may be in use at a particular epoch.

(Gutting, G., 2005, p.31)

Foucault suggests that the archive has a set of meanings that change with the mental frame that we bring to it and thus cannot be considered as either a static set of documents or a legitimate account of events. Yet, Foucault maintains, as a state document, the information deposited in the archive becomes the authorised source of knowledge and legitimate evidence of the existence, identity and status of the individual, which, Foucault believes, tells us more about those collating the information than it does about any individuals represented by it (Foucault, M., 2002a, pp.55-61). In contrast to Foucault, my investigation examines an ‘unofficial archive’ but by drawing on many of Foucault’s observations I attempt to reclaim, reconfigure and subvert my family archive as a ‘legitimate record’ of family life in order to investigate its social and cultural content to understand if it is withholding as much as showing the truth.

To summarise, this second section on ‘The Archive and memory’ introduced and analysed a number of core concerns that underpin this research project, such as: examining the multiple interpretations of ‘the archive’; the transparency and truth of records; what or who do they represent, how is interpretation and its negotiation made transparent, who has agency and how are those who are not the writers of history but merely perform in it ultimately represented and remembered? These selected scholars, rather than suggesting a ‘right way’ of returning to the past, of describing memory, or responding to the material traces of the world or reading images from the past, rather,

help us to understand the complex, subtle, social, cultural, unconscious, influences involved in such processes. What is critical for me is that these scholars rather than holding absolute positions promote the archive as first and foremost a discursive space, which, among other things, shifts our relationship to the past as fixed and allows for a blurring of the borders where private experience meets public event – a key trajectory in the enquiry.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the theoretical framework of the thesis. I analysed a selection of theorists that contest the conventional assumption that grounds the archive in truth, plausibility, order and authenticity and equally contests the notion that memory is devalued by its association with subjectivity, inaccessible, unauthoritative and unempirical. This enquiry is positioned between these two poles where I explore the possibility for the archive and memory to have a different and more productive relationship through deploying the research tools of art practice, oral history and an ethnographic approach. I set out to apply the many and diverse approaches to the archive discussed in this chapter to interrogate the archive as a contingent site that appears to share many of the properties usually associated with memory, such as, its fragmentary origins, instability, gaps, omissions and discontinuity by deploying a range of artistic strategies.

This analytical framework for the enquiry allows me to approach my ‘family archive’ (a) to question the conventional properties of the archive, such as, stability, durability, objectivity, (b) to interrogate the kind of ‘truth’ that is available through the archival record, (c) to scrutinise the role of interpretation in the archive; that is always from a particular perspective by questioning how this process is negotiated and made known, and (d) to analyse the role of memory and forgetting and how this shapes the archive.

In the studio I reflected on these theories while practising artistic strategies associated with installation art practice to expand and build on existing knowledge. The resulting artworks represent new perspectives on the key concerns of family memory and archiving to better reflect the affective, pluralistic, inclusive, sensual, evocative records

of personal and social experiential life. These new responses explore the archive as a site of imaginative, subjective, individual, social and cultural material that links past and present worlds sometimes through small and inconsequential fragments that then allow us to study the things that critically shape the shifting sense of who we are and where we belong in the world.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Research Methodology – An Integrated Approach**

This chapter outlines the research methodologies used for the enquiry. First, I discuss the methods chosen and how these relate directly to the main concerns of the enquiry, before providing an analysis of how each method allowed the research project to unfold, develop and negotiate specific elements of the enquiry, highlighting various problems that I encountered along the way.

The research project revisits my family's past to examine the processes of memory through a reencounter with personal traces that I refer to as a 'family archive'. The material was generated by an emigration experience from Ireland to England during the period 1950-1966. As I outlined in chapter one, the enquiry's core concerns are framed by recent scholarly reconsiderations of memory that align it to the formation of a sense of personal and social identity (Bergson, M., 1992; Halbwachs, M. 1980; Connerton, P., 1989; 2008; 2009; 2011; Hirsch, M., 1999; 1997; Kuhn, A. 2002). I appropriate and artistically interpret the visual language of archiving, for example: making cabinets, creating files and inventing alternative taxonomic and labelling systems to interrogate the mechanics of archiving and question its claim to objectivity, transparency and claims of 'truth' (Spieker, S., 2008; Foucault, M., 2002a; Derrida, J., 1998).

Viewed in this context, the methodology chosen needed to accommodate the following possibilities (a) to incorporate as many different and competing voices as possible to explore the role of social and family memory, which both Maurice Halbwachs and later Paul Connerton view as vital to how a society forms, maintains and passes on an identity, not only through written texts but also through the performance of shared



customs, rituals and even gestures; (b) to draw on knowledge and understandings from across a range of disciplines - such as: social science, philosophy, film and cultural studies that enhance the principle method of creative artistic process - to respond to the phenomenon of family memorialising in all its aesthetic, sensory, social and cultural complexity.

Social scientists, Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln have written extensively on the changing, expansive and necessarily more interdisciplinary nature of contemporary methodological approaches to capture the needs of current social researchers. They created the term 'bricolage', as outlined in 'The Qualitative Researcher – As – Bricoleur' to describe this complex and layered process through which one can remain open to a range of interdisciplinary influences which in turn allow appropriate methodologies to emerge through employing experimental processes while continuing to define and redefine the research question (Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln, 2005, pp. 4-6).

Likewise, Annette Kuhn's 'memory method' with its emphasis on exploring the influences of unconscious and conscious drives, fears and desires present in the family archive (Kuhn, A., 2002) allowed me to probe the family archive as a multi-layered, philosophical, emotional and physic site that represented both what was visible and invisible as suggested by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis process and his explorations into the unconscious (Freud, S., [1925] 1990) ). Informed by Bergson's approach to time and memory, specifically, his concepts of 'durée' and 'pure' memory (Bergson, M., 1992) my intention was to create a methodological approach that could encompass the counter-archival aspects of the family archive.

## 2.1 Integrated research methodologies

My methodology was guided by the need to put ‘the family archive’ at the centre of the research project and be attentive to its multiple, conceptual, imaginative and material layers. This loose collection of artefacts, that I designated ‘the family archive’, consists of twenty eight letters written by my father to my mother in Ireland<sup>47</sup>, in the early 1950s, when he first emigrated to England: the letters were held in safe-keeping by my mother for over fifty years. In addition, there are two large spools of home movies made during the early 1960s, produced after my parents marry, set up home in London and start a family. Set against the back drop of annual visits ‘back home’ to Ireland, these home movies continued to play an integral role in family life for twenty years and somehow gave us a glamorous standing among our relatives in Ireland. Also, there are several items of home furniture whose design reflects the period and the family’s changing cultural and economic status, which became an integral part of familial identity and came to represent a visible trace of the family’s adopted lifestyle in England. Their importance is confirmed when the family return home to Ireland ‘for good’ in 1966, bringing with them many household items which are thereafter referred to as the ‘English furniture’. For the project, I appropriate the original family radiogram, circa 1961, and also creatively re-work a second-hand bedroom dresser (from a charity shop) from the same period (more details to follow).

My study had two main methodological objectives. Firstly, to approach family memory as something that is shared and passed on, continually supporting or conflicting with

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<sup>47</sup>There is one more short letter addressed to the recipient’s mother while both were dating and living in Ireland, which is in the form of a formal apology for keeping the recipient out too late on a date the evening before, which seems to demonstrate both my father’s individual propriety but I think also reflects the accepted social standards of the time and the constraints of family life. In addition there were a handful of birthday cards that I do not address as part of my study.

personal identity in subtle, unconscious as well as tangible ways (Bergson, M., 1896; Hirsch, M., 1997; Kuhn, A., 2002). Secondly, I needed to find the most appropriate means to explore the family's archival process as a site of shifting and complex temporality and give it an imaginary form that responded to a range of issues.

My research project is also informed by ethnographic and oral history methodologies which combine with sculptural art installation processes. An ethnographic approach allowed me to study in depth and contextualise the social and cultural meaning of these family artefacts, in order to understand the underlying beliefs, customs and traditions associated with them in the time period. Oral historiography gave me the research tool I needed to ground the project in the human and subjective experience while also providing me with a source of many, diverse, voices and perspectives. Processes associated with contemporary installation art practice, such as appropriation, film-collage and deploying objects alongside other sensory elements like film and sound offered me the tools to create a public, imaginative, conceptual and multi-sensory environment that situated the viewer/participant as an active agent in artworks for an imaginative encounter with one family's memories and stories that mixes fact and fiction.

To summarise, I designed a flexible, accumulative methodological approach that was sensitive to the creative needs of a practice-based project that was emergent. Unfolded and developed slowly over time, this mixed, integrated methodology allowed different participants, elements and techniques to be called on and modified as the needs of the project demanded. In an essay titled, 'The Qualitative Researcher as *Bricoleur* and Quilt Maker', Denzin and Lincoln outline a specific methodological approach to qualitative research that fits with the creative and experimental nature of the project. They suggest that,

The qualitative researcher as bricoleur, or maker of quilts, uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, and

empirical materials are at hand (Becker, 1998, p.2). If the researcher needs to invent, or piece together, new tools or techniques, he or she will do so. Choices regarding which interpretative practices to employ are not necessarily made in advance...these interpretative practices involve aesthetic issues, aesthetics of representation that go beyond the pragmatic or the practical. Here the concept of the montage is useful...

(Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln, 2005, p.4)

### **2:1:1 Experimental ethnography**

Ethnography sits within the discipline of Anthropology and is generally understood as the part of an anthropological research that refers to collecting data. Increasingly however, ethnography<sup>48</sup> is viewed less as a scientific method and more as a critical methodological approach employed to understand the lives we live and the context we live them in<sup>49</sup>. Influential cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) deploys 'thick descriptions'<sup>50</sup>, which he termed 'interpretative anthropology'<sup>51</sup>, to describe a way of explaining in as much detail as possible the reason behind individual actions and to acknowledge that human actions can mean many different things depending on the context, for example, depending on the perspective or different social or gender group

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<sup>48</sup> Ethnography (from Greek  $\epsilon\theta\nu\varsigma$  ethnos = folk/people and  $\gamma\rho\acute{\alpha}\phi\omega$  grapho = to write) is a qualitative research design aimed at exploring cultural phenomena. The resulting field study or a case report reflects the knowledge and the system of meanings in the lives of a cultural group. An ethnography is a means to represent graphically and in writing, the culture of a people, that is, to describe people in their everyday surroundings. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnography> (accessed 23/02/2013).

<sup>49</sup> Like many other major disciplines, over the past few decades Ethnography has been critically reappraised through key philosophical movements of the second half of the twentieth century, such as Feminism, Post Colonialism and Post-Structuralism. See for example Geertz idea of "thick descriptions" in his attempt to understand the culture from across social groups, and claiming that the anthropologist should present a Culture from the point of view of its members. 'Geertz's thick descriptions may seem to move from the external focus of earlier approaches into a more psychological arena, but he does not take interpretation to centrally involve psychological testing.' URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/culture-cogsci/> (accessed 20/05/2013).

For an excellent example of Clifford Geertz's 'thick description' method see 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' an essay included in the book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Geertz, [1973] 1977, pp.412- 455). Considered one of the most seminal works of Geertz, this essay addresses the meaning of cockfighting in Balinese culture.

<sup>51</sup> Geertz developed his own term 'Interpretative Anthropology' to describe his approach to ethnography where basically the ethnographer goes beyond reporting events and details of experience. Specifically, he attempts to explain how these represent what we might call "webs of meaning" (Geertz) i.e. the cultural constructions, in which we live. Sourced URL: [http://www.brianhoey.com/General%20Site/general\\_defn-ethnography.htm](http://www.brianhoey.com/General%20Site/general_defn-ethnography.htm) (accessed 25/09/2013).

the practice emanates from. Geertz advocated that a culture should be presented from the ‘bottom up’, that is from the point of view of its members and he stressed that culture is public in the way that ‘meaning’ is public (Geertz, C., 1973). Geertz’s ethnographic method demonstrates a way to approach the personal records that my family self-generated as a part of their everyday life practices. Approaching these records in collaboration with the family and looking for individual details rather than generalities helps me to interpret the many familial, social and religious contexts to better understand the underlying aspirations, fears and belief systems that ultimately produced much of the content and meaning of the documents.

### ***Ethnography - the senses***

As mentioned above, Ethnography increasingly is seen more as an ‘approach’ to understanding how we live and experience the world and this has led to an opening up of the discipline into several new sub-genres. ‘Sensory ethnography’ is a term used by Sara Pink to address the importance of the senses for grounding us in a different understanding of the material we research and how we research our environments. Drawing on the work of the acclaimed philosopher and phenomenologist, Merleau Ponty<sup>52</sup>, in her book, *Sensory Ethnography* (2009), Pink outlines the importance of acknowledging that we live in our environments as embodied, sensual individuals (Pink, S., 2009, pp.26-29). Her ideas acknowledge an earlier and similar proposition initiated by the sociologist Georg Simmel. Pink quotes from his *Sociology of the Senses* (Simmel, G., [1907] 1997), to elaborate on what is to be gained by acknowledging the role of the senses in the social sciences, highlighting two key roles the senses play in human interaction,

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<sup>52</sup>Merleau M. Ponty (1908 – 1961) was a French phenomenological philosopher, strongly influenced by Karl Marx, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger in addition to being closely associated with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. At the core of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is a sustained argument for the foundational role that perception plays in understanding the world as well as engaging with the world. Like other major phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty expressed his philosophical insights in writings on art, literature, linguistics, and politics. He was the only major phenomenologist of the first half of the twentieth century to engage extensively with the sciences and especially with descriptive psychology. Extract taken from, URL: [www.http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/merleau-ponty](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/merleau-ponty), (accessed 01/02/2013).

First, our 'sensory impression' of another person invokes emotional or physical responses in us. Second, 'sense impression' becomes 'a route of knowledge of the other'.

(Pink, S., 2009, p.17)

Pink's concept of 'sense impression' was helpful during the interviews where I sought to create opportunities for myself and the interviewee to engage emotionally and physically with the aesthetic and material qualities of the artefacts, responding to them as visual and tactile data and deeply-felt, emotional memories. Also I became more aware of my embodied and sensory responses in researching my father's letters, for example, responding to the more abstract and sensory qualities of his hand-writing offered me a another 'route of knowledge' (Pink, S., 2009) as I engaged with the change of script, mistakes, vigorous underlining and more romantic and playful doodles and drawings.

The writer, artist and theorist, Svetlana Boym uses the term 'ethnographic memory' to highlight an ethnographic approach to the way we record everyday experiences and demonstrate how these are linked to way social and collective memories get constructed (Boym, S., 2001, p.310) and this term was helpful in approaching and repositioning my family record. As I mentioned previously, the material was produced during the period that the family emigrated from Ireland to England circa 1950-1966. The emigrant relies, more than most, on conserving his/her identity through memory and this process is often aligned to feelings of nostalgia for the previous 'homeland' which is further complicated by the necessity of memory's ongoing process of erasing as well as conserving past events. In approaching the home movies as cultural artefacts I wanted to show the ethnographic qualities inherent in the way the family depicted in detail their everyday rituals, cloths and environment but also in that process to emphasise the navigation between two terrains, that is, the new and old way of life.

Boym has written extensively on nostalgia and her use of the term ‘reflective nostalgia’<sup>53</sup> enabled me to engage with the inherent ‘nostalgia’ and ‘backward glance’ of home movie footage on another level, to try and unearth other values, such as, the idea that they represent a more general ‘ethnography of memory’ and, in turn, remove them from the constraints of private and personal references and move them into a more public context.

### **2:1:2 Intrinsic case study**

This research project has at its core an investigation of a specific collection of material artefacts, produced by a very particular group under certain circumstances. A case study approach, with its emphasis on (a) contextual information and (b) embracing a variety of data sources which allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood, provides the project with a primary focus and helps to bind its scope and remit, which is essential to any rigorous enquiry.

The ‘family’ that participated in the project ultimately constituted a group of ten members - nearly all female, these were namely: The researcher, her mother (deceased 2012) and father (deceased 2007), eldest sister, niece and five maternal aunts. As the study group is the researcher’s own family, there is a self reflective and autobiographical strand to this enquiry that both complicates and enriches the findings and, as previously

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Reflective Nostalgia’ is a term Boym introduces in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). It proposes an approach to nostalgia that acknowledges that the human desire to return can be often retrograde and even promote over determinising ideas regarding national identity but suggests that nostalgia still has an important role to play. To explore this, Boym coins the term ‘reflective nostalgia’ that explores this ‘longing to return’ through time and space (with an emphasis on the spatial) to reconnect with past experiences while acknowledging that things can never be the way they once were, i.e. fixed in time. Instead, she argues, we must accept the fragmentary, personal, collective and fluid nature of memory that should allow for further negotiations and discussions ‘of the past’ to ensue. I return to this term in Chapter Three where I discuss the term and its relationship to my research project in more detail, through an analysis of the work of the contemporary artist Renée Green.

mentioned, informs the approach taken to interrogating the material. As the second child, I was born in London in 1958, and returned to Ireland ‘for good’ with the rest of the family in 1966. This early, seminal experience continues to contribute to my overall sense of national identity and life script, leaving me with an odd sense of ‘outsiderness’ - never entirely confident of my claim to ‘total’ Irish Identity<sup>54</sup>. One of the fascinations with the archival material was that it offered a means to explore and engage with this ‘uncertain sense of belonging’, bound closely to negotiating my family memory and identity.

The choice to extend the research process to a wider family network – outside of those who were immediately involved in creating the archival material – allowed access to a range of opinions that in turn allowed me to access many contradictory points of view, which is typical of memory’s fallible processes. The group, with their varying opinions and observations, depending on gender, personal ideologies and life experiences, demonstrated that, although they shared the same genealogical roots, they also held a range of individual responses in attitude, emotion, and intellect to the material and the questions posed that informed the research.

For the purposes of the enquiry the family archive was approached as an ‘intrinsic case study’. Essentially, this means that the study is bounded by my personal connection to, and interest in, this singular family archive. From the outset, my curiosity about ‘family archiving’ was not generic in nature but specific to the material under review, therefore, approaching the enquiry as, for example a comparative study or multiple case study of several family archives was never a viable option. Instead I focused on doing an in-depth

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<sup>54</sup> There are broader and important issues here at stake in what constitutes ‘Irish identity’ that are outside the remit of my research enquiry but that are important to note. I acknowledge that the term, ‘Irish identity’ is not static and is constantly being reconsidered to reflect changing circumstances. For example, the influx of immigrants in the past decade and their children who borne in Ireland, immersed in their ‘original’ culture (at home) and constituted as Irish citizens, also totally embrace a sense of ‘irishness’.



analysis and contextual interpretation of the mixed-media cultural artefacts that resonate with one particular family to foreground a subjective position and acknowledge the tangible and sensory qualities in the archival process.

My intention was to design a research project that could embrace the fragmentary, often contrary and individual subtleties in remembering, storing and retrieving shared accounts of the past, questioning how we individually and collectively recollect through the familial gaze.

## **2:2 Remembering and listening in research**

The struggle is now, the past is made in the present.

(Kuhn, A., 2002, p.19)

In his *Arcades Project*<sup>55</sup>, Walter Benjamin writes about ‘recollection’ and our place within it, that is, a moment of potential reconstruction that holds within it different possibilities in the present to engage with past events and through this gesture find a type of redemption (Benjamin, W., 1999a, pp.211-244.). Finding the appropriate way to return to the past that was fluid and would allow a range of diverse reflections to emerge – so they could be studied and witnessed - was central to the approach.

My father passed away in 2007, which meant certain stories were now lost, so my mother’s recollections became an important link to this period of our history. I also have

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<sup>55</sup> The *Passagenwerk* or *Arcades Project* was an unfinished project of German literary critic Benjamin, written between 1927 and 1940. An enormous collection of writings on the city life of Paris in the 19th century, it was especially concerned with the iron-and-glass covered "arcades". Benjamin's project was never completed due to his death under uncertain circumstances on the French-Spanish border in 1940. The *Arcades Project* has been posthumously edited and published in many languages as a collection of unfinished reflections.

an elder sister, who shared this past and my mother also has five sisters, all close in age. The sisters' lives were closely intertwined and many of them either appear or are referred to, in the archival material. To open up the project to multiple perspectives I decided to involve them in the project by asking them to talk to me about their recollections of my mother and father's emigration and their own first hand experience of this topic, as I knew many of them also briefly emigrated to England during the 1950s. These one to one conversations were critical in collating original, first-hand, personal accounts and demonstrated, as Benjamin suggests, that our memory of the past is never total and absolute but emerges in fragments and discontinuities: formed in the moment and space of recollection.

### **2:2:1 Deploying oral history**

Who speaks in oral history? Alessandro Portelli answers this question in his notable essay, 'What makes oral history different' when he suggests that... 'Oral history has no unified subject; it is told from a multitude of points of view' (Portelli, A., 2006, pp.32-42). This distinction informed the research project in the way it emphasises new and often competing accounts from multiple perspectives. As Portelli explains,

Oral sources are credible but with a *different* kind of credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no 'false' oral sources. Once we have checked their factual credibility with all the established criteria of philological criticism and factual verification which are required by all types of sources anyway, the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that 'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true' and that this truth may be equally important as factually reliable accounts.

(Portelli, A., 2006, p. 37)

An oral method of eliciting accounts was critical for the enquiry because in oral history the narrator not only recalls the past but also asserts his or her interpretation of the past, ensuring that the value is placed upon how the participant processes the event, rather than upon a 'true' or factual account. Later, I explore the idea of trespassing across the borders of fact and fiction through a range of artistic strategies to explore the conflict between memory and the archive (refer to chapter four). The oral method of collecting experiences influenced the exploratory and experimental nature of the art research processes; for example, the interviews became sound data that I then developed into experimental sound tracks that were later incorporated into new film and sculptural works.

All the interviews were treated as extended conversations and were modelled on oral histories to encourage the potential of intimate detail found in first person narratives. These exchanges took place in a variety of locations including the participants' homes, hotels, and gardens, and spanned approximately three years of the research project. The interviews were conducted one-to-one to create a comfortable and relaxing environment and recorded by me with a discrete but high quality hand-held recorder. The family members, ranging in age from 58 - 89 years were all female as it happened that any male members that would have been relevant, such as uncles, were now deceased or too unwell to participate.

My initial intention was to explore oral forms of narrative but as I progressed I started to become interested in the potential of the human voice as an entity in its own right with its capacity to communicate through other sounds beyond the spoken word. I became aware of more abstract sounds embedded in the tapes, such as the pauses, hesitations and laughter, and I started to explore these as palpable traces of connectivity and valuable human transmissions. As Benjamin reminds us, the space of reminiscence is different to

the space of lived experience, and in the interview process, odd and fascinating slippages were often palpable through such minor hesitations and interruptions. Later I experimented with these ‘discontinuities’ through a range of artistic strategies using experimental editing techniques, voice over and multi-track layering.

The kinds of interviews undertaken took several forms and performed different functions. When interviewing extended family members, a focused, semi-structured interview approach was applied. By contrast, I felt the encounters with my mother needed to be handled differently in order to maximise the potential of the long term, intimate relationship we shared and furthermore I felt that this process needed to be unfolded carefully over time, for my mother to reconnect with the archival material in any depth.

I was concerned to give the participants autonomy and enable them to lead the conversation and feel in charge of the stories emerging and, in doing so, allow them to be, as John Brewer<sup>56</sup> remarks, ‘not the object but the subject of her own history’ (Brewer, J., 2010). One way of assuring this was to approach all the participants as ‘respondents’ and not ‘informants’; constructing the questions in a particular manner ensured this. For example, the questions were always directed to personal experience, “Can you tell me about your own experiences of emigration?” This method did require an element of self-monitoring, becoming aware of my own transference and counter transference<sup>57</sup>, as well as listening closely for hesitations, avoidances, and gaps in

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<sup>56</sup> John Brewer is a well know scholar of microhistory. This sub-topic of history began in the 1960s in Italy – known as “Microhistoria”, with Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginzburg being the main proponents. It is the intensive historical investigation of a well-defined smaller unit of research (most often a single event, the community of a village, a family or a person), believing that this form of study complements the great narratives of history, which tends to ignore such details.

<sup>57</sup> The terms ‘transference’ and ‘counter transference’ as they are used in interviewing techniques refer to Sigmund Freud’s original findings through the psychoanalytical process. Freud first defined both phenomena publicly, circa 1910. In psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, or interviewing situations generally, transference is where the patient, analysand or interviewee transfers her/his feelings onto the analyst,

answers, while paying attention to any physical or emotional reactions required a lot of attention. For example, at one stage, I became aware of how, since my father's death, I was more protective of him, and how this was affecting my reaction to certain comments made by my mother.

## **2:2:2 Durational conversations**

From the outset of the research, I began to initiate regular conversations with my mother and her contributions were key to the development of the project. As I saw it, she was the original archivist and keeper of the cache of letters (held in a straw bag in the bottom of her wardrobe all those years) before she handed them over to me in 2007. My mother features in all the core material, that is, she is continually on screen in the home movies and she was the recipient of the 'love letters'. Her participation enabled me to access the primary source material in a unique and personal manner. Through her willingness to speak frankly about the many topics the archive referenced, I was quickly able to identify some key topics, such as familial tensions, gender issues, desire for material and social success, and emotional and sexual repression. This influenced the kind of questions I put to other interviewees, for example in speaking with the five aunts.

Over time, listening to my mother and later my elderly aunts began to resonate with certain observations made by sociologists Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack in their essay titled 'Learning to Listen: Interview techniques and analyses' (Anderson, K. and Dana, C., 2000, pp.157-171). They suggest that women's recollections are structured differently to those of men and often contain conflicting accounts...

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doctor, and interviewer. Managing transference starts with the acknowledgment that all relationships are objective and subjective, real and symbolic at the same time. By contrast, 'counter transference' is defined as redirection of a psychotherapist's feelings toward a client—or, more generally, as a therapist's emotional entanglement with a client. Extracted from online article, URL: <http://www.individualpsychotherapy.co.uk/articles04.htm> (accessed 12/12/12).

A woman's discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting, perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men's dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience. Where experience does not 'fit' dominant meanings, alternative concepts may not readily be available. Hence inadvertently, women often mute their own thoughts and feelings when they try to describe their own lives in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions.

(Anderson, K., and Dana, C., 2000, p.159)

This seemed particularly relevant in the context of the timeframe of this research project. The 1950s to mid-1960s was a period in Ireland greatly influenced and often controlled by such patriarchal institutions as: Family, Church and State. During the many conversations with my mother and my aunts there were several references to, for example, a domineering father, repressed personal desires, family commitments, keeping secrets, feelings of guilt, being kept innocent and uninformed, and unequal work opportunities. Therefore 'learning to listen' attentively allowed me to recognise certain evasions and contradictions which became another way to understand what was being said or not said, which I took to be a reaction to conscious and unconscious underlying forces influencing and shaping the women's accounts.

In the interviews with my mother, I deliberately used a lot of different locations - on holidays; in cafes, as well as in the family home to highlight the way I wished to frame the enquiry as a continuum in the present tense. Conversations were either recorded on a hand-held recorder or if this was not viable, I kept notes in a series of notebooks, maintained throughout the research as a form of reflexive journal. By using this open-ended approach, I tried to maintain my mother's interest while avoiding the intense one-on-one approach adopted in more traditional interviewer to interviewee contexts, which can present difficult power relationship issues and might have caused me to miss the more subtle resonances. Instead, I perceived our existing relationship, which was

naturally close and playful, as an advantage when dealing with more sensitive material and, because of the extended time-frame (three years), if things got difficult or tiring, I could leave the conversation and return to it when my mother's mood changed and she seemed more prepared to speak about things.

My autobiographical position within the investigation was never consciously foregrounded as a priority, as this was not the intended purpose of the research project. However, I soon realised, specifically through many of my conversations with my mother, that I was self-consciously and unconsciously encountering my childhood self, as an adult, through my mother's commentary. And, in the context of only having one remaining parent to question about such childhood details, this did begin to take on a kind of urgency. The particular challenges of exploring one's family archive is expertly managed in Annette Kuhn's intertwining of professional, personal and private voices in her distinguished text *Family Secrets* (2002). In her professional pursuit of 'memory work', she deploys autobiographical case histories and suggests that creating spaces for her child and adult self to speak to one another 'allows the adult to recapture the child's spirit of bravery and sense of possibility' (Kuhn, A., 2002, p.45).

Kuhn's observations helped me to overcome the uncertainty I felt in aligning my adult-self with the child I was encountering in the home movie footage or maybe even denying that this was happening. This process of reviewing my childhood took place quietly, mostly within and through my mother's recollection of her life story, where I began to see my life script from a range of newly contextualised and different perspectives. For example, thinking of my mother's role as 'a working mother' during the 1960s with two small children allowed me to temporarily inhabit different perspectives and interpret the material through her experience, though all the time retaining my own subjective position and personal memories.

I reviewed the archive with my mother using many different formats. For example, we watched the original home movie footage together, either on my laptop or on a couple of occasions when the material was projected at specially held collective family events. I found the one-to-one personal viewings were more intimate and productive and brought forth reflective, often complex observations and revelations, while the more public family events predictably evoked an array of superficial collaborative and conflicted opinions on identifying dates, locations and people as the images flickered briefly on and off the screen.

These conversations spanned three years. They mostly revealed contradictory, not clearly defined, reasons for emigration for both men and women at that time. The decision to emigrate, or not, was seemingly never completely autonomous and the attitude of parents and siblings to emigration was very highly regarded, even if not followed through on, and seemed to remain in the memory for a long time. These conversations also gave an insight into the means by which people coped with separation from their family, loved ones and friends. I began to recognise that during this period the three hundred mile boat and train trip across the Irish Sea was viewed as a considerable undertaking, even if paradoxically, the event was often described and understood as only a form of temporary emigration due to the proximity of Ireland to Britain. It has been observed that because of the closeness of the two islands there did exist an attitude and sense of ‘only going to check things out over there’ though as emigration scholar and Irish historian Liam Ryan remarks, in reality this was hardly ever the case (Ryan, L., 1990, pp.45-67).

### **2:2:3 Semi-structured interviews**



As previously mentioned, Anderson and Jack (2006, pp.129-142), explain how they developed a specific methodology when interviewing women. The approach is primarily about shedding prior agendas, in order to create an environment for women to speak so that we hear 'the weaker signal of thoughts and feelings that differ from conventional expectations' (2006, p.130). These observations proved helpful when I came to conduct the interviews with my mother's five sisters who are all now in their late seventies to late eighties. I took a semi-structured approach to ensure that there was enough openness to make them feel comfortable, relaxed and unthreatened in responding to a list of loose questions; mostly informed by my ongoing conversations with my mother. My intention was to use the stories of these five women to validate, interrupt or confound my mother's version of events. All of these women had been a strong female presence throughout my childhood and, as mentioned previously, many of them feature in the family record. All of the sisters had at one stage either attempted to emigrate or felt they had played a role in the narrative of other family members' emigration experience.

I was curious about my mother's insistence that 'emigration was different for a woman' which she referred to on several occasions. One example she gave of how this played out in the family was the observation that while she had to have her father's permission to leave home and travel that was not the experience of her two brothers who had earlier emigrated to America. She told me that her father viewed emigration for a 'young woman' – especially to England - negatively; claiming that it would bring shame and 'talk' on the family - implying that a women might have something to hide or run away from, like an unwanted pregnancy, affair or broken marriage.

The conversations with my five aunts explored the ramifications of my mother's observations and expanded into the broad domains of, for example, family relationships and social and cultural expectations and constraints of the period. Furthermore, the

multiple viewpoints enabled me to experience the operations of collective and social memory first hand. Subsequently, what emerged were many contrasting and conflicting views on emigration and leaving home from within one family's experiences, with gender, often playing a significant, if covert, role. For most of the sisters this was, surprisingly, their first time ever speaking about emigration and specifically my mother's emigration to England and their own relationship to it.

This resonates with Ryan's observation that many middle class Irish were reluctant to have themselves associated with emigration to Britain during this period as there was a certain shame associated with family members going to such a non-catholic, progressive country that might lead to associations with the wrong class of people, i.e. non-catholic or promiscuous. Worse again was the idea that people might think they were escaping to England on the foot of some perceived social 'wrong doing', i.e. an unplanned pregnancy or a marriage break-up,

And the threat of a son or daughter taking the boat train was a threat that the family name might be tainted with the mark of emigrant and coupled with the labourers and others who somehow weren't good enough to get work at home.

(Ryan, L., 2002, p.50)

These semi-structured interviews were deliberately recorded on a high quality, small, discreet, digital recorder. From the outset I had the idea that I might want to use the texture, tone and 'grain' of the voices of these women as material for experimental sound-works so it was important that the recordings were of very high technical value for editing in the studio later on. Before I recorded them I sought the women's permission to creatively edit extracts of the recorded sound tracks for new artworks. I explained the creative use of the recordings as potential sound material that would be mixed and layered with other archival sounds to create new sound artworks for public exhibition and they all gave their consent.

The majority of these interviews were conducted in the women's homes, where they would feel most comfortable and at ease. Unlike the conversations I had with my mother that took place over several years, each of these interviews was organised as a one-off encounter, lasting approximately sixty to ninety minutes. In one or two cases, interviews also involved impromptu photo elicitations, where searches for a family album, artefact or the resurrection of a stray photograph momentarily stopped the interview. Echoing Kuhn's observations on 'memory work' (Kuhn, A., 2002), such spontaneous gestures informed the interview process; supporting and giving rise to other memories and trajectories of thought that sometimes yielded unexpected background information.

To summarise, an 'oral history' approach ensured that the interview processes were always less about collecting facts and accurate accounts of what really happened and more about researching a range of perspectives on events while acknowledging the contribution of each person's unique voice, accent, intonation and choice of words. This approach aligns to poststructural challenges to metanarrative and the concept of a singular, verifiable, stable 'truth' (Foucault, M., 2002a; Derrida, J., 1998) (see chapter one for further analysis). Instead the emphasis here is on collecting 'different truths' that were frequently interwoven and interchangeable in the same account and also reflected in the individual sisters' frequent contradictions of each other's separate statements.

This approach also highlighted the constant interplay between past and present, and the shifting subject positions present in all oral accounts (Portelli, A., 2006, p.39), where my aunts' reflections on my mother's experience of emigration would frequently side-track into a first person account of their own lives during this period. Or my mother's desire to not just recall the people, places and events we were watching but rather to tell me how her life had been shaped by wider social and cultural forces, such as Church and family, while watching the home movies with me.

My intention was always to highlight a subjective experience; an oral history methodology was complementary to this objective. However, the autonomy I sought for the participants was not without its boundaries, and related only to certain processes in the enquiry. For example, it did not extend to the artistic decisions that I made in creatively exploring the data generated from these interviews back in the studio. Here I made all the necessary editorial decisions that I felt critical for the sound files that become autonomous artworks to interrogate the concerns of the research. Which, in short, meant I was constantly reconfiguring the sequence and the content of all the original material, blurring fact and fiction to create original contextualised narratives. So in that sense, I had the final say in how the oral narratives were finally reconstructed and encountered in the site of the gallery.

These glimpses, recalled in a fragmentary way, revealed a family back-story fraught with cultural, social, familial and individual tensions, decisions, disappointments, anxieties and minor heroisms, and recall Kuhn's observation that 'memory work', as a methodology, permits a decisive shift from 'just' telling stories about the past to constructing identities for ourselves (Kuhn A., 2002, p.2).

### **2:3 'Memory work' - finding our identities through others**

Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narrative of the past.

(Hall, S., 1994, p.225)

Above, renowned cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall, while acknowledging the importance of a sense of identity, also emphasises its fictive nature. Previously I described how the interview encounters were either durational or semi-structured, taking a deliberately broad approach – beginning with questions, such as, “and how did *you*

feel about this...” in order to allow the individual’s own perspective on events (fictive or otherwise) to emerge. I believed that there were other stories linked to other possible identities embedded in the family home movie footage, letters and a small collection of old snap-shot photographs. I hoped that by applying Kuhn’s method of ‘photo and text elicitation’ (Kuhn, 2002) these images and texts would become potential gateways to a range of memories and open up further discussion. Kuhn links this method with processes of identity construction. She argues that the movement from a private world out into public discourse enables us to make wider associations from our personal experiences.

Memory work presents new possibilities for enriching our understanding not only of how films work as texts, but also of how we use films and other images and representations to make our selves, how we construct our own histories through memory, even how we position ourselves within wider, more public, histories.

(Kuhn, A., 2002, pp.45- 46)

Kuhn’s method expands the terrain of the enquiry that allowed me to explore different ‘structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender’ (Kuhn, 2002, p.5).

In chapter one, I examined how Derrida asks us to consider the ‘personal presence’ tied up in the archival process through deploying Freud’s writings on the unconscious forces of ‘Eros’ and ‘Thanatos’ (Derrida, J., 1998). Methodologically speaking, his approach helped me to acknowledge the influences and underlying, unconscious forces at play during the interviewing process. Derrida views the archive as something unstable, organic and fragile, constantly shifting temporal sites and creating new associations. Merging Derrida’s more abstract theorisation with Kuhn’s method of ‘Memory Work’ acknowledges the power of memory as a form of performative trace that continues to inform our ‘fragile’, shifting, individual identity and links this to the identity that our

family constructs for us. By drawing on both of these viewpoints, I intended to explore the ongoing and shifting dialogue and ensuing tensions that exist in personal and family memory and how these can be captured by deploying home movies and other family documents.

### **2:3:1 Text elicitation**

By recording and then listening back to my mother re-reading a selection of the letters originally sent to her approximately sixty years ago, it was possible to assemble through her reflections and personal responses a greater understanding of the social expectations of the time.

Through this embodied performance - reading the letters out to me - my mother actively re-engaged with the past. Her memories ranged across events and ideas pertaining to before, during and after the family's emigration to England and, most critically, her perception of herself now. I observed her as a mature woman reflecting on my father's images and words in the present tense or slipping back into remembering her emotional, 18 year old self receiving these letters in the early 1950s and what they represented in terms of her own life's script. Kuhn's method allowed me to retain a supportive, subjective and emotional role throughout the sessions where, instead of stepping back and objectifying the process, I became 'a witness' to my mother's memory process in action and began to realize first-hand how much negotiation and a shared subjectivity were key features of memory work. Below, Kuhn explains the role of the practitioner in 'memory work'.

The task of the practitioner in memory work is not merely to analyze but also to understand - that is, to try to enter the memory-world of the text, the account, the

performance though not of the informant - the task is not to psychoanalyze people but to helpfully be at hand at the birth of a new insight and fresh understanding.

(Kuhn, A., 2002, p.9)

### **2:3:2 Video and photo elicitation**

My older sister and I spent our early childhood growing up in England as children of Irish emigrants. We are central to the home movies and my sister is integral to my childhood memories from this period. During the research process I found myself frequently discussing the material with her, in an informal way. But to critically expand this process, I decided to organise some semi-structured interviews with her. The approach I took was different to the other interviews in that, from the outset, I deliberately only used the visual material of the home movies, in which we both featured, as a form of structured elicitation and 'memory work'.

Informed by my work with the five aunts and their contradictory accounts of events. I arranged for both my sister and I to watch an edited selection of film segments together - on my laptop, while recording our spontaneous commentary. I knew my sister had not watched the films for many years and had mostly forgotten them, whereas by now, I was very familiar with all the footage. Similar to my approach in the interviews, I decided not to follow a prepared script but instead kept to general questions and observations that would allow the conversation to take its own course, this time prompted by the images on screen. However, I had the advantage of knowing what was coming up next, which I sometimes deliberately used to introduce certain topics that steered our informal conversation. These tapes were later edited and made into sound tracks.

This method of film elicitation with a sibling allowed me to explore the different operations and slippages in memory and the way this allows families to construct their identity. Here Paul Connerton's essay, 'Seven Ways of Forgetting' (Connerton, P., 2008) was insightful in pointing to the complexities and consequences involved in 'forgetting', when viewed as a social, cultural and even political tool<sup>58</sup>. Using the film as a research tool opened up a new space for me to examine the structural meaning of how and why we remember and forget certain things, which later led to more experimenting with film and sound editing techniques in the studio and resulted in a new short film, where this sound-track was edited and became a voice over for the short film, *Remembering is a Form of Forgetting*.

While I had a lot of film footage I only had a few photographs from this period and because one proved to be so poignant in relation to the research I concentrated on this black and white snapshot.

We should start with our domestic cameras and family snaps. Those innocent little bits of paper or plastic which fill albums, wallets, mantelpieces, drawers... through them we are initially stitched up, then into, the vast networks of surrogate identities on offer. Positioned, placed, fixed within our family structures.

(Spence, J., 2005, p.13)

Photographs can more easily show us what we wish our family to be, and therefore, what, most frequently, it is not.

(Hirsch, M., 1999, p.8)

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Connerton's essay 'Seven Types of Forgetting' (2008) was published in *Memory Studies*, 1:59, pp. 60- 71. Available URL: <http://intl-mss.sagepub.com> (accessed 01/12/ 2011). In it Connerton outlines a preliminary taxonomy of forgetting and, of its various functions, values, and agents: repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; and forgetting as humiliated silence. In an interesting interview with Jeffrey Kastner and Sina Najafi in *Cabinet*, issue 42, Summer 2011. URL: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issue/42/kastner-najafi-connerton> (accessed 20/09/2011), Conner ton elaborates on his theories by noting that, "It seems the question is how to calibrate forgetting so hat it in fact has value for proceeding to the next phase of history" (p.10).



Emanating from two perspectives - namely, the controversial artist, Joe Spence<sup>59</sup>, and cultural and film theorist, Marianne Hirsch - the quotations above demonstrate the critical role family photographs can play. What follows is a brief synopsis of the methods applied to an individual photograph, which was selected from a cache of snapshots loosely arranged in a family album.

The image was taken by a street photographer<sup>60</sup>, a popular genre of the period, who unwittingly captured a significant moment for my mother and her mother and sister, on O'Connell Bridge as she made her way towards the Dublin Docks to get on the boat to England. Kuhn's memory work methods allowed me access this photograph beyond the anecdotal and personal. A close study of this one photo offered a different view and image of Irish women during a period in Irish history that offered little encouragement for women to exercise their own personal views or ambition. Here, three women appear striding together confidently across a bridge. Even without knowing the back-story I'm drawn to this image – perhaps it is because they are moving, active and going somewhere: unusual enough for images of women from that period.

When I first showed the photo to my mother during one of our many conversations, she immediately spoke out... “Here I am escaping,” she announced to me, somewhat defiantly, but with a sense of humour and a little irony. As mentioned previously, the

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<sup>59</sup>Joe Spence (1934 -1992) was a British photographer. Many of her works were self-portraits about her own fight with breast cancer. Spence was born of working class parents in London, 1934. After beginning work as a studio photographer she began documentary work in the early 1970s, motivated by her political concerns. Both a socialist and feminist, she worked to represent these issues through her practice of photography. She was involved in setting up “Photography Workshop” (1974) and “Camerawork” magazine (1976) and was a founder member of the “Hackney Flashers” (1974), a collective of broadly feminist and socialist women who produced exhibitions such as *Women and Work* and *Who's Holding the Baby*. Accessed 12/12/12, URL: [www.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jo\\_Spence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jo_Spence)

<sup>60</sup> There was no studio address or photographer's name of initials on the photo - just a code, however by speaking to people who lived in Dublin in the 1950s, I was able to track down who were the most popular street photographers in Dublin during this period. My research led me to a couple of brothers, originally from Easter Europe, who had both worked as street photographers, but in different areas of Dublin city. The brother who probably took this photograph was one, Alfred Ball. I was able to contact his son who has a website dedicated to his father's life and photographic work and check the dates and photographic formats he used. This additional information was then woven into the concept and presentation of the final artwork.

1950s saw thousands emigrate from Ireland and although there were also other destinations, the majority ended up in Britain, with a reported 292,608 alone travelling from the Republic during the decade 1956-1966 (Ryan, L., 1990, p.47).

However, quoting statistics does not give an adequate reading of what was, for so many, a deeply felt personal and family experience. Applying Roland Barthes' concept of 'the studium' of the photograph, that is, the general intention of the picture's setting - observing the faces, gestures and actions (Barthes, R., [1980] 2000b, p.26) - reflects the level of family involvement in (Irish) emigration and a glimpse into the role gender played. The prematurely elderly looking but stoic mother making the journey to say goodbye – all the way from Cork to Dublin - the gaily dressed sister watching and waiting for her turn to follow (which she does), her young eighteen year old sister, fresh-faced; poised and ready to take on the future, plainly dressed, pretty, unassuming and innocent looking.

As Roland Barthes persuasively argues in *Camera Lucida* (1980), there is a belatedness of photographic looking, a temporal disjunction that occurs between the moment an image is taken and the moment it is developed and viewed. By this he means that the time lapse between the moment the picture is taken and the time we view it creates a space, a void, and influences the photo's potential meaning. According to Barthes, referring to a particular photograph of his mother, there are even more inherent problems when seeking intimate knowledge from family photographs, which he discusses tenderly in his treatise on his mother in *Camera Lucida*,

Alas, however hard I look, I discover nothing: if I enlarge, I see nothing but the grain of the paper. ... Such is the Photograph: it cannot *say* what it lets us see.

(Barthes, R., 2000b, pp.99-100)

Barthes' conclusions in *Camera Lucida* are seminal and radical and make us reconsider how we understand photography's role and its limitations as a representation of reality. My concern was less about their perceived meaning and more about the potential in the moment of reception of these photographs, the questions we pose in examining it, the needs and desires that shape our viewing, which I believe inevitably exceed the image's small size and its limited ability to serve as evidence.

In the project, photographic images acted as more than visual links to the past, though they had this power also. By deploying Kuhn's 'memory work' they became important hinges to other sites of consciousness, in the present and the past. They were used in the interviews and in my creative process where they became research tools for exploring concepts such as the interface between 'private and public' and the archive. This was achieved by conceptually reframing the image to highlight its mode of production and origin and deploying techniques such as digital magnification, resulting in a new artwork, titled, *Street Portrait* (see chapter four for details).

## **2.4 Artistic strategies - tools of the imagination**

INSTALLATION ART is a broad term applied to a range of arts practice which involves the installation or configuration of objects in a space, where the totality of objects and space comprise the artwork.

(Moran, L., 2010, p.3)

Installation as an art form or process comes to the fore during the 1960 and 1970s. It emerges against the background of experimental forms, such as 'Environments and Happenings'<sup>61</sup> and 'Performance art' which radically challenged the concept of what

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<sup>61</sup> Duchamp's 'Mile of String', 1942, is often cited as an early 'event'. It took place in the context of the exhibition titled *First Papers of Surrealism* in New York, 1942. Here he took criss-crossed the space with a mile-long string which, in turn made viewing of the paintings on display very difficult. Alan Kaprow (b.1927) influenced by the drip and action paintings of Jackson Pollock maintained that by working on the

constituted art, previously represented by traditional modes of artworks, such as, painting or plinth-based sculpture. Similar to these art processes, installation art highlights context and display with a focus on experience and communication over the production of a finished artwork. Many argue it is ‘mode of production and display of artwork rather than a movement or style’ and can take the form ‘of cluttered to minimal’ (Moran, L., 2010, p.4).

Site, location or space in installation art is also - to varying degrees - an intrinsic element, offering additional and layered meaning. This focus on location may take the form of a ‘site-responsive’ approach where the site becomes a thematic for the entire installation or, it may be that the installation is created in the site as an ephemeral event, destroyed after the period of the exhibition is over. In addition, in the case of discussing some individual installations the concept of the ‘site’ seems to become blurry as its meaning expands to previous installations (of the artist) and equally the other ‘sites’ within the frame of the work itself, for example locations explored in video works on display<sup>62</sup>. However whatever degree the site informs the installation, at the very least, ‘the entire space is treated as a single situation into which the viewer enters (Bishop, C., 2005, p. 10).

For the project the processes associated with installation art are a fundamental and central research tool because of the many specific qualities it offers the concerns of the enquiry. For example, installation art is not about a private, fixed, encounter with one object (artwork) instead its focus is on the relationship of artworks to each other and to the space they are situated in. This alignment of space, visitor and art experience offers a

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floor allowed a multi-perspectival approach to the canvas, also the action of painting was performative, and finally the space of the artist and the outside world was blurred. Developing these strategies Kaprow turned his back on commercial galleries, the market place of art and began to work and stage ‘happenings’ and ‘immersive environments’ in alternative venues, such as loft spaces downtown in New York or in the basement of the progressive Judson Church. These happenings emphasized immediacy and instead of representing objects through paint on canvas employed objects in the real world directly. For an excellent discussion of these processes and their evolution see Claire Bishop’s *Installation Art* (2005) pp.22-35

<sup>62</sup> ‘Site’ and its meaning and function in installation art is returned to in the discussion with artists’ practices in Chapter Three.

dynamic, multi-perspectival role for the visitor/viewer, who is actively encouraged to physically enter the site of the exhibition, move around and engage with the artworks through embodied, physical, multi-sensory participation.

Installation art offers me the opportunity to create a unique kind of dialectical relationship between the viewer (public) and ‘the family archive’ that blurs the boundaries between object and subject and gives the spectator a range of opportunities to get physically involved, for example, through positioning themselves in the space and triggering soundtracks or choosing to pull out and read a set of perspex, vinyl records. The encounter between the viewer and the artworks is no longer passive but instead depends on the viewers’ interpretations and interactions in order to realise the work. Niamh Anne Kelly observes that installation art ‘as a mode of production and display affects ‘the works’ reflexive identity’ (Kelly, A., N., 2003, p.8). It is also associated with particular forms of practice, many of which are deployed in this enquiry, for example: appropriation, film-collage, found objects and the juxtaposition of sound, objects and moving image are central to the creative process<sup>63</sup>. Such methods are deployed to explore key conceptual themes of the enquiry, such as, exploring the borders of subjective and objective experience. As Kelly observes the Russian artist, Ilya Kabakov<sup>64</sup>, ‘has remarked that installation is a genre of art that takes note of a “shift from object knowledge to subject experience”’ (Kelly, A., N., 2007, p.8), and for the research finding formulations that allow both the experience embedded in ‘the family archive’ and the viewer’s encounter with this (at the site of exhibition), was a key concern.

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<sup>63</sup> For further reading on the theoretical debates underpinning the development of concept of ‘expanded sculpture’ and installation art processes in a postmodernist context, see the essay ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ pp. 276-290, in *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths* by Rosalind E. Krauss, Publisher: The MIT Press; Reprint edition (July 9, 1986), [1979]; or two essays relevant to the enquiry’s concerns by another notable art critic and theorist Hal Foster, ‘The Return of the Real’, pp. 127-170 and, ‘The Artist as Ethnographer’, pp. 171-205, in *The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge: MIT Press, (1996), and also *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* by Arthur C. Danto (1997), published by Princeton University Press.

<sup>64</sup> The Russian artist, Ilya Kabakov (1933 – present day) is considered a leading, veteran installation artist. For more details on his life and collaborations with his wife Emilia Kabakov see URL: <http://www.ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/> (accessed 17/09/2013).

This theoretical position resonates with Nicolas De Oliveira who, writing in *Installation Art* (1994), points out that installation art is when ‘the artist and the artwork (*and I would add here - the viewer*) are together in a discursive environment’ (De Oliveria et al, 2003, p.14). This idea of installation art as a site of experience is taken up by Claire Bishop, who has written the first comprehensive critical appraisal of ‘installation art’ titled ‘*Installation Art*’ (Bishop, C., 2005). Bishop argues that the way installation art radically redefines the relationship between viewer and artwork has important consequences. For example, the viewer enters the installation from no fixed point, therefore the encounter with the artworks takes place from multiple perspectives rather than a single perspective and this alters the traditional belief that there can be one correct way of comprehending the artwork.

As I mentioned previously, Bishop is one of the first scholars to rigorously theorise installation art as a process (Bishop 2005). She argues that ‘installation art’ does several key things, for example, it de-centers the artwork and the subject and it presents a self-reflexive, fragmented approach and in doing so, could be aligned to ‘the poststructuralist project’, that is, as a way of viewing and making sense of the world we live in that acknowledges a modern, fragmented subject (Bishop, C., 2005, p.131). Visitors to installations are ‘decentred’ because they are not held by any fixed position or object – instead they encounter a plurality of experiences, which they are encouraged to wander amongst. However, on the other hand, as Bishop remarks, things are not so simple, as everything about installation art ‘valorises and instates the subject as crucial component to the work’ (Bishop, C., 2005, p.130). Bishop concludes that the situation is nuanced and complex and, consequently, ‘what installation art offers, then, is an experience of centring *and* decentring: work that insists on our centred presence in order then to subject us to an experience of decentring’ (Bishop, p.131). In this project, Installation art practice allows me to explore subjectivity and identity presupposed in the artworks and to problematise – as Bishop suggests – ‘the production of this model in the viewer who experiences it first- hand’ (Bishop, p.133).

As a process, installation art emphasises multi-media - as opposed to prioritising one form or material – and, in my enquiry, this is articulated through a range of objects, films, sounds and photographic works coming together in one immersive site in a non-hierarchical manner. This sensory encounter suggests that sight, sound and a tactile experience - all holding equal sway – may hold a special connection to memory and the past that is unfolded in time through ‘the family archive’ in a public space in the moment of exhibition.

Such embodied experiences where ‘senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision (Bishop, C., 2005, p.6) requires that the viewer’s experience of the artwork is central to the realisation of the artworks, in order for the story to be fuller revealed or ‘made sense of’. Moreover, this ‘discursive environment’ (De Oliveria et al, 2003) is also in a state of flux as it is constantly renewing and reconfiguring itself depending on who enters the space.

I expanded on a set of skills already developed over many years through sustained studio practice and as the need arose I acquired new ones, for example, by exploring digital possibilities. Core artistic interventions included: (a) appropriation, (b) using sound - including voice-over, (c) reconfiguring home movie footage through experimental editing techniques, and (d) exploring digital photographic and design processes.

While research often involved following a systematic, logical approach, this was not always the case. Sometimes, serendipity played an important role. Just being out and about in the world informed the research investigation and brought its own unique rewards that could not have been encountered any other way. For example, while walking the streets nearby my home I happened upon the sound of classical instruments flowing out through the public grid system in the façade of a local music conservatory. These sounds, of invisible musicians practicing, were recorded live and later edited and incorporated into a multi-layered soundtrack for a short film *Rehearsal*, the first in a film

triptych.

## **2:4:1 Employing appropriation**

Appropriation has a long history in modern and contemporary art and as an artistic process it continues to evolve and take many forms. It is applied to describe a wide range of strategies, though generally, it is associated with ‘scavenging, replicating, or remixing’ (Evans, D., 2009). Stretching back to the use of newspaper clippings in Cubist collages, or Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) famous urinal, renamed ‘fountain’ (1917), it took hold as a dominant artistic strategy in the latter half of the 20th century. Unlike copying or forgery, which attempt to trick viewers into believing they are looking at something unique, appropriation hinges on the ability of the viewer to recognize the original source of the image and all of its connotations and it is in this context that it is applied in the enquiry.

Appropriation strategies range from the use of pre-existing objects or images with little or no transformation applied to them, for example Duchamp’s ‘Fountain’ to more overt transformative gestures. For example, by the 1960s and 1970s artists like Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) and Andy Warhol (1928-1987) were using appropriation to comment on Western consumerism in works such as Warhol’s now famous ‘Campbell Soup’ paintings. In contemporary art it is associated with the postmodern and poststructuralist positions, with their underlying conceptual premise to challenge authority, originality and accepted norms of creativity.

In the research project I deploy a range of ‘appropriation’ strategies with various intentions. These strategies range from, for example, combining my father’s original letters into an element of a sculptural work. This involves forging certain pages to undermine the legitimacy and transparency associated with conventional archival process in order to explore the idea of the role of contingency in the archival process (Foucault, 2002a, p.147; Spieker, 2008, p.43). Another appropriation gesture is



reconfiguring my father's original silent home movie material and creating a filmic triptych complete with sound track. This then allows me to trespass between fact and fiction and to move the material from private to public context, and to undermine the singular, authoritative voice present in the original 'family archive' by introducing many diverse perspectives.

I also appropriate a piece of 'original' 1960s family furniture, as well as finding pieces in charity shops to 'pose' as family furniture, to create hybrid archival cabinets that blur the lines between domestic and public terrains in order to probe the very origins of the archive or what Derrida refers to as 'the consignment of the archive' (Derrida, J., 1998, p. 4).

The blurring of personal and wider social public domains is one of the core artistic strategies of the research project. Through creating these new formulations I hope bring new associations of the archival process to the viewer's imagination to enable them to ponder the way, for example, we store and preserve records of the past, what constitutes objectivity or what and whose truth is being recorded? In the research project this is dramatized and emphasised by creating for example, alternative, hybrid archives that seek to parody the outward appearance of traditional, archival cabinets complete with labels, brass signs, leatherette coverings, mirrors, pull out files and glass.

Through bringing an intimate piece of bedroom furniture and the official and public rhetoric of the museum into relationship I wanted to emphasise the public nature of family archiving, that is, the influence of social and public life on the family, and, by comparison, the private or 'secluded' nature of official archival process (Derrida, J., 1998). This juxtaposition allowed me to suggest that these sites are not as mutually exclusive as we might like to think but are actually much more interchangeable and dependent upon one another.

## 2:4:2 Why sound?

In her book *Contemporary Art and Memory*, (2007) Joan Gibbons suggests that sound, music and lyrics have ‘... a particularly tenacious hold on memory, which, as with photography, is in a large part, due to its indexical nature’ (Gibbons, J., 2007, p.48). In the research project sound is deployed as a way to investigate a range of issues, such as, how is it possible to evoke memory through sound (not the ‘sound of memory’) in order to explore the interplay, gaps and struggle between personal and social archiving. Gibbons claims that sound, in addition to being an acoustic and sensual experience, exists as a memory trace, and by this she means not the memory of sound but ‘sound memory’, that is, as a sensory trace rather than the representation in sound of a precise phenomenon (Gibbons, J., 2007, pp.48-51).

This alignment of memory and sound informed my approach to sound and my investigations into the medium as an aural trace that has the potential to evoke memory and transport listeners to other temporal and spatial sites. Also the fact that both sound and music are elements that don’t take up space, are fluid and therefore can easily travel with people - especially ordinary people - was essential in the project, allowing me to explore its associations with emigration and oral history. As Gibbons notes, ‘sound is a medium that can invisibly occupy and transform our relationship to space by transmitting to audiences intimately or collectively, and because of it can be linked to the voice and agency’ (Gibbons, J., 2007, p. 50). This observation allows me to explore core themes in the enquiry, such as, exploring the competing memories in ‘the family archive’ and how our memories are intimately linked to place through sound.

In the introduction notes to the exhibition catalogue for *Acts of Voicing* 2012, at the WKV Stuttgart Gallery, the author notes that ‘The voice always simultaneously exists both inside and outside the body, and its immateriality weights just as strongly as its

social and political import.’(Christ, H. D. et al, 2012)<sup>65</sup> In one sculptural sound work, *Singing Letters*, I set out to investigate the human dimension produced by the alignment of archival processes, embodied memory, agency and gender.

Responding to the ‘orality’ of the interviews was another important artistic strategy. My concern was to capture and harness the voices to work ‘as material, sound traces’ (Gibbons, J., 2007, p.49). By creating my own sound tracks I also wanted to explore Foucault’s interpretation of the archive as a site where material traces left behind by a particular historical period and culture fundamentally represent ‘who it is gets to speak’ more to do with agency, power and representation than an objective and true account of events (Foucault, M., 2002a).

For example, in *Radiogram*, I re-mixed and over-laid multiple archival tracks, consisting of: popular music, old radio noises and environmental sounds with snippets of interviews, including momentary lapses and hesitations. My intention was to articulate a different, sensory space that emphasises a fragmentary identity by exploring the relationship between sound and embodied memory to potentially offer direct and imaginary links to the past (Gibbons, J., 2007).

### ***Voice over***

Voice over is employed differently depending on whether the film is presented as a documentary or drama (fiction) - though in recent times these categories are increasingly being re-examined. For example, similar to documentary format, we could argue that most fiction films are also very personal, have some sort of moral or even ideological viewpoint and build their characters, action and location, and as artistic and aesthetic products try to make the world a little better and the audience a bit more enlightened about human life <sup>66</sup>, It is now accepted that the documentary film genre can be a slippery term applied in many different ways. However, in traditional documentary

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<sup>65</sup>Source: URL:<http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/2012/exhibitions/acts-of-voicing/introduction>. (Accessed 08/10/2012).

<sup>66</sup> For an in depth discussion of the multiple and complex role of ‘voice’ in documentaries see Chapter Three “What Gives Documentary Films a Voice of Their Own?” in Bill Nichols *Introduction to Documentary* (Nicols, B., 2001, pp. 43-60))

approaches the voice over is often used to establish an authoritative tone - usually that of the filmmaker – which, speaking directly to the viewer, explains and provides contextual and factual information to those images unfolding on scene. Because this voice is anchored to actual, real-life events and, because of the disembodied nature of the narration, this form of documentary is sometimes known as ‘the voice-of-God’. The interview is also another common documentary technique, prompted by the questions asked by the filmmaker, it allows people being filmed to speak directly about events; this may take place on screen, or off screen even on a different set. Interviews imply realism, suggesting that the documentary maker’s views are mutually shared by another person or source and consequently, more valid.

By contrast, in drama films, voice over may be deployed for more imaginative and subtle effects, for example, as a personal ‘inner voice’ that narrates shares memories, dreams and fantasies. This internal voice is often that of a character speaking to herself - replicating her mind and consciousness<sup>67</sup>. They may also be a voice that comments on characters and actions and provides a broader context for what we see happening on scene. A lot of early experimental filmmakers, like Stan Brakage (1933-2003) or Hollis Frampton (1936-1984) consciously avoided any use of voice over, because it becomes so enmeshed in conveying a certain reading and ties visual imagery down to a particular reading.

My intention was to explore the creative potential of ‘voice over’ as a form of additional and contradictory narration and not just apply it as a didactic formula that related directly to the film’s imagery or visa versa. For example, I experimented with the

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<sup>67</sup> Voice over as a strategy has many discrete sub-categories, for example, there are still further distinctions within each of the two basic forms, that is, ‘the voice that narrates’ and ‘the voice that comments’. These are, for example, the voice that tells (usually an authoritarian tone in ‘documentary style’ film formats) and in addition there are two forms of the voice that tells: (a) the voice of a narrator who is not a character in the story or who is outside of the story-world, and (b) the voice of a character within the story-world who tells his experiences. There is a further distinction between kinds of first-person narration, (a) the voice-over of a character speaking to other characters within the story-world, and (b) the voice-over of a character speaking to those outside the story-world. And finally there is the ‘Voice that thinks’. There are three major forms of voice-over that simulate what is going on inside a character's mind: interior, monologue and reading.

archival voice of Margaret Mead, the famous Anthropologist, to employ a famous ‘voice that tells’ delivered in a classic radio documentary style format alongside other invisible players or narrators who were not characters in the filmic story but rather were outside the story. With this technique I wanted to suggest the circulating and complex range of contingent social discourses that may not be visible but greatly influence social and cultural understanding. The viewer is allowed to make their own conceptual connections between the scenes unfolding on screen of a family enjoying a 1960s holiday park and the voice over narrations (details to follow in chapter four).

The artist Sophie Calle also employs the narrative voice as a means of testing and playing with the parameters of what constitutes storytelling, truth and personal identity by switching back and forth between narrative registers. For example, in works such as *The Sleepers* (1979) and *Suite Vénitienne* (1980) <sup>68</sup>she creates a complex interweave of factual narratives with fictional overtones. As critic Christine Mecel points out by employing “I” “we” and “he”, in the same work and often recording the words of other people Calle is able to redefine the notion of author, and even fiction itself, inventing double games and appropriations in order to extend the authors notion to the twosome, or even to the collective and anonymity.<sup>69</sup> The cross over between my approach and Calle’s lies with with her enigmatic commingling of fact and fiction in exploring ‘who’s speaking’ and the exploration and playfulness in introducing a narrative structure onto the haphazard nature of everyday lived experience.

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<sup>68</sup> For *The Sleepers* (1979) she invited people to sleep in her bed for eight hours while she observed them, later combining the photographs with her own writing and snippets from interviews with the subjects. In *Suite Vénitienne – Venetian Suite* (1980) she pursues a fleeting acquaintance to Venice, observing his movements like a private detective. By deploying fact and fiction and the material, sensory properties of installation art. Her work offers alternative ways to revisit the past and in the process allows us greater agency in deciding what to believe. more recent work, titled *True Stories* (1994) is a photo book that gathers together a series of short autobiographical texts and photos by the artist. This is part book, part visual memoir and part meditation on the resonances of photographs and belongings and though it closely resembles an autobiography, it is a highly poetic and fragmentary one. These very small stories accompanied with parts or entire pictures are intimate portraits that have global resonance.

<sup>69</sup> For these ideas I am indebted to an in depth examination and unique perspective on the role of autobiography, multiple narratives and the blurring of subject and object divide in Sophie Calle’s oeuvre in Christine Macel’s online essay “The Author Issue in the Work of Sophie Calle. *Unfinished*” (pp.17-28), available url: [http://artpdf.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/christine-macel\\_the-author-issue\\_2003.pdf](http://artpdf.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/christine-macel_the-author-issue_2003.pdf) (accessed 29th April 2014).

To summarise, the artistic strategies employed in relation to sound in the enquiry were intended to investigate many core trajectories, for example: (a) to find new ways to explore how memory works in relationship to time and place; (b) to challenge conventional ideas of what constitutes an authentic record by introducing different kinds of fragile, disjointed, organic, aural records; (c) by deploying several different voice-overs, from different periods, interwoven into the structure of the home movie footage I try to show the multiplicity of discourses that underpin and inform the past to disrupt the authority of the singular perspective; (d) emphasising the fragmentary and deploying montage techniques to suggest diverse sources of sensory modality in lived experience - from banal traffic sounds, popular songs, private conversations and radio static - that challenge the idea of a fixed spatial and temporal site of the archive.

### **2:4:3 Experimental film editing**

While spending many hours transcribing each of the twenty-nine letters enabled me to get intimately close to the tone and texture of those first months of my father's emigration experience, likewise, watching and re-watching over two hours of the original collection of three-minute reels of silent home movies in the studio allowed me to understand and trace a family's experience over time and from many perspectives. For example, revisiting these filmic sequences allowed me to: (a) explore the visual content and the film's materiality, colour, form, and texture; (b) explore new social and cultural contexts by reviewing the visual signifiers, information and associations in the film sequences; (c) engage my adult self with the many unsummoned childhood memories that inevitably ensued.

By comparison to the interiority and personal register of the letters, the films were a seductive, dynamic, techno-colour, visual account of the early 1960s, albeit from the perspective of a particular family group. They contained fascinating glimpses of the world of fashion, design, and social and cultural mores in two distinct locations, Ireland and England. As a medium, the filmic bears the most similarity to memory's structure. For example, the editing technique of alternating, interweaving or interspersing one

narrative action (scene, sequence, or event) with another - usually in different locations or places - is reminiscent of how we remember.

My intention was to experiment with a range of editing techniques to deconstruct the film in two ways: (a) reclaim it from my father (the past) and resituate it (in the present) through my own voice, and (b) explore the fragmentary processes of the home movie record as a strategy to talk about time, order and loss in the archival process. For example, the juxtaposition of two scenes together may be suggestive of over-lapping memories, a technique also known as inter-cutting or parallel editing.

My decision to transfer the analogue film to a digital format meant that there would be much greater access to experimental editing techniques. In addition, as discussed previously, 'sound' was an integral creative and conceptual tool. Therefore, layering multiple sound tracks onto these silent movies only became possible after I transferred them. In addition, in terms of presenting these film works later, in a public context, projecting them as sound videos allowed more freedom in deciding how I installed the work, as opposed to setting up specialist 8mm projectors - that tend to over-heat (if left running too long) and need constant supervision.

Unlike other film formats, the integrity of the home movies' original footage is never an issue as it is collated out of and within this ongoing state of fragmentation. By transferring to digital, I still retained the quality and aesthetic of the regular 8mm film but the need to conceptually explore and 'deconstruct' the archival material took precedence. In short, I needed to have the creative freedom to really explore the intricacies and opportunities of remixing, cutting, splicing and reconfiguring the

material, in imaginative ways that were not otherwise possible with analogue and that I knew digital editing would offer me.

Audiovisual media are a complex amalgam of meanings, images, and techniques, shot framing, shot sequence and much more... Every step in the process of analyzing audiovisual materials involves translation. And every translation involves decisions and choices. There will always be viable alternatives to the positive choices made, and what is left out is as important as what is present.

(Rose, D., 2000, p.247)

Diane Rose's observation comes from her essay, 'Analysis of Moving Images' (Rose, D., 2000, pp. 246-262), and points to the particular concerns of capturing a 'singular truth' in the filmic process. In the enquiry I approached the home movie footage not as sites of 'reality' or 'truth' but rather as potential discursive spaces. As mentioned previously, blurring fact and fiction in the enquiry is critical and so I intended to approach the archive as a factual family archive *and* as a set of images that were fictional operations in so far as they were 'constructions' from a particular view point (predominantly my father's) and perspectives informed by the cultural and social mores of the day. This concern informed the choice of a range of editorial strategies that allowed me to, (a) reinterpret the original material, and (b) create new texts from other historical perspectives to intertwine with the original documents.

Specific editing techniques such as: use of voice over, layering of sound tracks, inter titles, fade in and out, cutting and splicing frames out of sequence, playing with the speed, colour manipulation of the original material allowed me to create alternative filmic sequences that though they retained the old stories reconfigured them through a critical lens that refracted concerns informed by my position as a contemporary woman, researcher and artist.



#### **2:4:4 Approaching ‘the letters’**

While I spent many weeks analyzing the film footage using Clifford Geertz’s methodology of ‘thick descriptions’ (refer to earlier analyses) I also applied this technique to the transcription of each of the twenty-nine handwritten letters that eventually enabled me to get intimately close to the tone and texture of those first months of my father’s emigration experience (see appendix for examples). There are many ways to analyse personal letters, for example, for their linguistic and phonetic attributes, their handwriting technique, and for information on literacy and gender studies. Approaching them ethnographically allowed me to understand the broader social, political and cultural context of the time. Essentially, the letters analysed here consist of a cache of 29 letters; of which, twenty-eight are love letters – plus one formal letter to the recipient’s mother (my mother’s mother). Most of the letters are remarkable for their mix of factual data and very personal content. They are punctuated – often in the same letter - by a range of emotions including: jealousy, anger, loneliness, pride, frustration, protectiveness, romantic attachment and longing that is made visible through the writing script.

I engaged with the cache of letters in two ways, firstly I formally typed out the handwritten letters and secondly I arranged for a singer to perform eight of the letters. I did this to explore (a) how material and medium dictates and alters the way we perceive the content of original documents, and (b) remediation from one medium to another, like text to sound, significantly alters our embodied and sensual relationship to the content, creating a shift from individual to collective consciousness and memory.

Exploring the tactile and material qualities of memory is a recurring theme in the enquiry. Susan Stewart observes in her essay titled 'Prologue: From the Museum of Touch in Material Memories: Design and Evocation' that,

The senses are also a powerful source of material memories. Such memories are material in that the body carries them somatically – that is, they are registered in our consciousness, or in the case of repression, the unconscious knowledge, of our physical experiences.

(Stewart, S., 1999, p.17)

In a typical anthropological gesture, I laid out all the letters for inspection in the studio so that I could visually access them as a collection and study what is now the outmoded aesthetics of the handwritten letter. Carefully unfolding and refolding the letters along their well-worn creases gave me a feeling of sharing invisible, embodied, memories, passing through my father to my mother and onto me as I touched these now fragile, paper fragments which were an integral part of my (as yet unwritten) life story.

Transcribing the letters using a digital word processor aided in the analysis but created a tension in the form of a new set of observations by starkly highlighting the risks in the transferral process. Firstly, the letters were now in a uniform format and consequently, I was able to comprehend easily the flowing narrative, capturing all the minute details and observations of everyday life, events, and people. This established a different and more intense rapport with the internal dialogue, tonal range and play of emotions (directed primarily to my mother) all of which had been harder to decipher with the eccentricities and mistakes of hand-written letters. However, something fundamental had been erased in the process and that was the presence and uniqueness of the letter-writer apparent through the indexical trace. A unique connection with a particular shared space and time was now lost, and the archive had been fundamentally changed as had the content - erased through the transference of one recording medium to another or what Derrida

terms the ‘archivization’ process (Derrida, J., 1998). This observation, could also be said of the transference of the original home movie footage from its original analogue 8mm film format to video but, as I previously discussed, this process also allowed me to add more layers of effect, that is, through sound and editing techniques, while still deploying the original home movie sequences.

However, I was now able to read the content of the 29 letters carefully to bring me to a closer understanding of the individual concerns and forces at play in the social and cultural terrain in Britain and Ireland as seen through the eyes of one Irish emigrant. Broader issues relating to immigration studies in general came under scrutiny, for example, (a) why people choose to move, (b) how they organise their movements, (c) how they respond to changing environments, (d) how their actions affect others. This study resulted in a list of key topics, which then became the basis for central or inherent interests in the final art interpretation (see chapter 4 for an analysis through the artworks)

However the loss in remediating the letters was a palpable disjuncture from the emotional and sensory aspects of the original documents. No longer was there a connection to the immediate human performative trace in the original handwriting. The typed document was uniform, understandable and impersonal but it no longer was an indexical trace betraying the emotions and decisions of its creator; instead it has become a piece of detached, anonymous data. This reflects Derrida’s claim that through a process of ‘archivization’ different meanings are created (Derrida, J., 1998, p.16). I explored the experience of this loss by creating a separate set of laminated texts that reflect my own experience and contradictory feelings in remediating the letters. These new documents are included as a counter-point to the original letters reconfigured as a

sculptural work for the viewer to encounter in the installation (see detailed analyses in chapter four).

Experimenting with digitally reconfiguring the letters and the transformational quality of this process led to more explorations in remediation. This time, through a move from written text to sound I explore the ‘private and public’ boundaries in the archive by remediating a selection of the letters into a new sound artwork. Transformation is often at the core of artistic process, imagining the known into a new form; by switching mediums I was making a fundamental change, from the visible and tactile into the invisible and ephemeral. To quote the well known American sound artist, Bill Fontana...

The advantage of the invisible is that it has the ability to alter our perceptions of the visible.

(Gibbons, J., 2007, p.49)

The resulting artwork, titled, *Singing Letters* explores the transformation and alteration that takes place with shifts in media. The letters, frozen in time by the handwriting of my father in the early 1950s, now move as liquid, invisible form to move freely in other temporal and physical spaces, released from their original format. Choosing a female voice to chant the words was another remediation, this time of gender, and allowed me to explore ideas surrounding objective and subjective divides, agency and authorship. Transforming the letters into song investigated the borders between private and public, that is between the interior action that happens within both writing and reading letters to a more collective and social listening and hearing experience; this concept was explored and emphasised in the artwork by choosing to broadcast the text-songs through a public address system (details in chapter four).

The integrated methodological approach outlined in this chapter drew strongly on ethnography and oral history and used an intrinsic case study approach in addition to

installation art practice. Studio practice allowed me to experiment with artistic strategies to find innovative ways to reinterpret and reconfigure ‘the family archive’ in response to recent theoretical reconsiderations and a series of processes developed out of this methodological approach. By utilizing these processes I have created a body of mixed-media artworks that reveal the underlying structures that inform archival processes by examining their operation from a number of different perspectives. In the final iteration of the artworks in a public place (see chapter four for more details) a creative synthesis is achieved by presenting the various functions of family memory from multiple perspectives while parodying the underlying presumptions and display mechanisms associated with archival processes to engage the viewer/listener as an active participant in that process through installation art practice.

To conclude, this chapter outlined why certain methodological approaches, both critical and creative, were taken for the enquiry and demonstrated how these were appropriate and sensitive to the kinds of issues under review. The main objective in choosing and working with combined methodologies was to bring this family archive into a new set of relationships to, (a) offer a way for private experiences, memories and records to transfer into the public realm, (b) experiment with traditional boundaries between fictional and factual accounts in constructing these new narratives, and (c) use a range of experimental, artistic strategies, like sound, sculpture and film in an immersive, installation, environment and a new shared, public encounter.

I used particular strategies, such as, derailing the viewer/listener’s expectations by blurring fact and fiction, appropriating everyday objects and reconfiguring them into sculptures, counterfeiting material and remediating mediums in order to reveal a different sensibility in an encounter with the past and in particular one family’s contextual experience of the time period 1950-1966. My intention was to create a

discursive, immersive space where visitors could experience a collective or social memory reinterpreted through my original family material. The methodology enabled me to present an intimate, close-up, reinvention of a family archive that encourages the public to both reflect and have an embodied experience, highlighting the senses through the interactive, tactile nature of the artworks. In addition, allowing chance to play a role in the creative process by submitting to unexpected unconscious hunches and occurrences encouraged me as a researcher to become more aware of my senses in that process.

If this chapter outlined the research design and methodology of the enquiry, the next chapter develops these analyses to consider the wider, artistic context of the study by looking at a selection of contemporary artists. By examining their art processes and methodologies I hope to create a deeper understanding of the artistic decisions made in the research project.

Mine is an interdisciplinary methodology that draws on other methods, such as, the ethnographer, Sarah Pink's 'sensory ethnography'. She believes that the senses, being central to how we connect to, perform and remember life's experiences, must also be critically taken into account in researching such lived experiences (Pink, S., 2009). Art critics, such as, Claire Bishop (Bishop, C., 2005), Hal Foster (Foster, A., 1996) and Laurence de Oliveira (de Oliveira, L. et al, 1994) propose that certain contemporary art processes, and particularly those that deploy an amalgamation of processes and materials found in installation art are more apt for capturing current theoretical, social, cultural and political situations. For example, Bishop notes 'the rise of installation art is simultaneous with the emergence of theories of the subject as decentred is one of the basic assumptions on which this book turn'. She continues by arguing - as this enquiry does - that the correct way to view our condition is as fragmented multiple and decentred

human subjects beset by unconscious desires and anxieties contingent and separate to the world we inhabit caught up in ‘pre-existing social structures’ (Bishop, C., 2005, p. 13).

### Chapter Three

#### Contemporary Art Practice– Exploring Memory and Archival Processes

This chapter examines how – influenced by recent historical and social events<sup>70</sup> - a selection of contemporary artists continue to turn to memory and archival practice as critical tools in exploring how personal and national identity is formed and passed on. Methodologies range from, (a) drawing on popular or everyday archival material to unearth hidden, forgotten or suppressed cultural, social and political memories that once retrieved, have significant consequences for how national identity is constructed, (b) blurring borders between fact and fiction, and public and private domains and, (c) experimenting with a range of narrative registers to present alternative versions of the past often by challenging the concept of ‘linear time’ - often exploring the particular properties of ‘installation art’ as a process particularly appropriate for representing time and memory.

To contextualise the enquiry in the domain of international art practice, I focus on a series of specific concepts and methodologies by analysing a selection of artworks from three contemporary artists: Matthew Buckingham, Renée Green and Vivienne Dick. I

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<sup>70</sup> The past quarter of a century has witnessed a substantial remapping of the world, for example, the removal of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, and the collapse of Communism and dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR). This has led to histories and memories, as well as borders, being redrawn and reconfigured. In artistic terms, this upheaval is reflected in a new wave of global curating projects and a long awaited shift away from a Euro-centered, American dominated art world with artists now approaching their own histories from their own perspectives in order to both understand themselves and to bring these new meanings to a wider audience. The rapid development of online technology now plays a significant role in the practice of archiving and the ‘memory industry’ as curator and writer Frank van der Stok points out discussing how contemporary art questions history, ‘the rapid growth of online social forums and networks, with ever greater availability of data, is resulting in these new media also playing a major role in how history is mediated and translated’ (Stok et al., eds. 2009, p.6). Though it is outside the scope of the enquiry to explore the significant impact of internet technologies, I do try to acknowledge the growing and critical importance of such processes on our understanding of memory and archiving the past at certain points in the text.

For an excellent and recent account of the interplay between art, architecture and memorialisation and the changing face of political and social unrest, refer to *Present Past: Urban Palimpsests and The Politics of Memory*, USA: Stanford University Press (2003) by Andreas Huyssen, a critical theorist. He observes how, the changing monumental architecture of urban space serves as an index of memory politics, triggering debates about the meaning and relevance of versions of the past for the present and future (Huyssen, A., 2006).



chose to focus on these artists because their ideas and strategies have influenced the research project through the critical and often sceptical positions they adopt towards any pre-determined or dominant version of the past by, for example, applying different forms of ‘memory work’ (Kuhn, A., 2002).

Anchored in and through the content of archival material, these artists encourage a different kind of encounter with the past. Articulated through art practice, they highlight new possibilities that, rather than offering a closed-set of delineated events, prompt the viewer into considering the possibilities associated with more fluid, multiple, contradictory and open-ended accounts of the past. These artists question traditional approaches to linear-time and history-making by frequently adopting the ‘fragment’ as a strategy, often engaging the unique properties inherent in sound, moving image, photography, texts, materials and objects to do so. Their choice of artistic strategies encourage viewer/listeners to become active agents as they participate in unfolding stories in new and personal ways, allowing them to bring their own personal experiences into the reading of the artwork, suggesting other kinds of perspectives and broader historical connections.

An examination of selected artworks from each artist helps to articulate key trajectories of the enquiry. Firstly, I identify how Matthew Buckingham collapses boundaries between fact and fiction in order to approach the past in new and dynamic ways by repositioning the viewer/listener actively in the artwork to encourage greater agency. Then I demonstrate how Renée Green prioritises multiple rather than singular or fixed-readings and memories of the past. Primarily, she explores subjective, individual experiences and shows how personal oral and written accounts offer other thresholds into wider social, cultural, political events and histories. Finally, I examine how Vivienne Dick reclaims and re-contextualises her own and others’ ordinary, insignificant or forgotten past events and moments in history through creatively reshaping a family archive to address issues of competing conscious and unconscious personal and cultural identity.

### 3:1 Matthew Buckingham – Re-narrating the past

The idea of bringing the past into the present through narration relies completely on the existence of data; records and documents presumably classified and kept safely in an archive of some type. But this concept of the archive itself reveals a great deal about the stories that emerge from within.

Matthew Buckingham<sup>71</sup>

Walter Benjamin's quest to write a history from the 'memory of the nameless' (Benjamin, W., 1999a, pp.245-255), resounds in the work of contemporary artist Matthew Buckingham who sees in the everyday, the mundane and the domestic an opportunity to engage with history from other viewpoints, mostly 'from below', that is, from the ordinary person's experience<sup>72</sup>. This focus on the familiar is pertinent to my enquiry, which uses my family archive as a case study to draw attention back to the materiality, places, people and sites already existing in everyday life. Buckingham demonstrates ways to approach everyday situations by exploring and remixing narrative structures that permit different versions of social events to be laid bare. Often, he does

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<sup>71</sup>The entire text can be found on Buckingham's website listed under Public Talks: 'Archives Are Where You Find Them', URL: <http://www.matthewbuckingham.net/PT%20ArchivesACCText.html>, (accessed) 10/10/2012.

<sup>72</sup> 'History from below' seeks to take as its subjects, ordinary people and concentrates on their experiences and perspectives, contrasting itself with the stereotype of traditional political history and its focus on the actions of 'great men'. It also differs from traditional labour history in that its exponents are more interested in popular protest and culture than in the organisations of the working class. It emerges partly from the preoccupations of the Communist Party Historians Group *Past and Present* in the 1950s, and in the following decade, the founding of the History Workshop movement at Ruskin College that saw the emphasis shift from strict Marxism to women's history and oral history, as well as encouraging the participation of non-academics. It has been variously termed as 'grassroots history, history seen from below or the history of the common people', 'people's history', and even, 'history of everyday life'. By contrast, a more conventionally history about the great deeds of the ruling classes emerged from the great tradition of political and administrative historiography developed by nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke and his followers. 'History from below' is a major trend in twentieth century historiography and marks a reaction against the traditional histories almost exclusively concerned with the socio-political and religious elites. It is primarily an approach to history that is concerned with the activities and thoughts of those people and regions that were neglected by the earlier historians. Peasants and working classes, women and minority groups, unknown 'faces in the crowd', and the people lost in the past became the central concern of this historiographical tradition. This concept of history resonates in the context of the enquiry whose focus is an ordinary Irish family caught up in a moment of Irish Emigration History during the 1950s in order to focus on their lives as a group of individuals while exploring new sources and reinterpreting old ones.

this by blurring truth and fiction: in an attempt to make history and the writing of history (historiography) more transparent and in the process, more democratic.

In the past ten years, Buckingham has worked in a variety of media, including: film, video, photography, text, the internet, postcards, slide projections and audio. His interest in history and its representation is consistent throughout and within this he has developed many distinct themes, such as, the archive, narrative, installation, monuments, documentary. Buckingham deploys a range of artistic strategies, many pertinent to the enquiry, for example: voice over; creating multiple, often competing narratives that tell a matrix of stories and engage the viewer in playful and intricate installation processes<sup>73</sup>.

Although my project is not focused on examining the processes of historiography, what is significant is Buckingham's conviction that 'one of the key ways we have of defining the present moment is in how we value or devalue past events' (Buckingham, M., 2012d, p.2). Buckingham explores a variety of ways - including blurring past and present - to explore this domain. He seeks out competing narratives in order to examine the silences that inevitably surround fixed versions of the past and frequently deploys the archive to remove past events from their familiar everyday settings in order that ... 'we may be able to identify and establish other connections which, in turn, might generate new narrative possibilities' (Buckingham, M., 2012d, p.2).

I chose to analyse Buckingham's installation *Situation Leading to a Story* (1999), because it allows me to highlight the range of possibilities offered by creatively re-engaging with a specific event, group of people and moment in time. The examination focuses on two main conceptual and methodological concerns (a) the role of truth and

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<sup>73</sup>His archival and historical sources are many, for example: *One Side of Broadway* (2005), uses eighty-one 35mm black and white projected archival slide photographs and a narration at odds with those images to explore a section of Broadway; *A Man of the Crowd* (2003) (film loop and artist's book) deploys a continuous black and white 16mm film projection with sound and semi-reflective glass to re-stage a narrative from Edgar Allan Poe; *Muhheakantuck – Everything Has a Name*, (2003),<sup>73</sup> presents a continuous color 16 mm film projection with sound, projection screen and actual airplane seats, for the viewer to sit in, to explore the history of the Hudson river and the influences of colonial history, from two perspectives, shot from an helicopter.

fiction in creating new narrative possibilities, and (b) exploring alternative, non-linear approaches to time.

### 3:1:1 Exploring truth and fiction

The installation is configured in two small adjoining rooms. A 16mm film is projected from one room into the other through a small opening in the wall between them. The two spaces are constructed so that the viewer approaches the projector first, then the projection, which appears at floor level in the corner of the second room. The film is a copy of a set of four short amateur movies made in the 1920s. Audio speakers in the room broadcast the artist's account of finding and investigating the films, which includes the history of home movie production and the filmmakers' family's possible connection to an imperialist copper mine in Peru.

Matthew Buckingham<sup>74</sup>

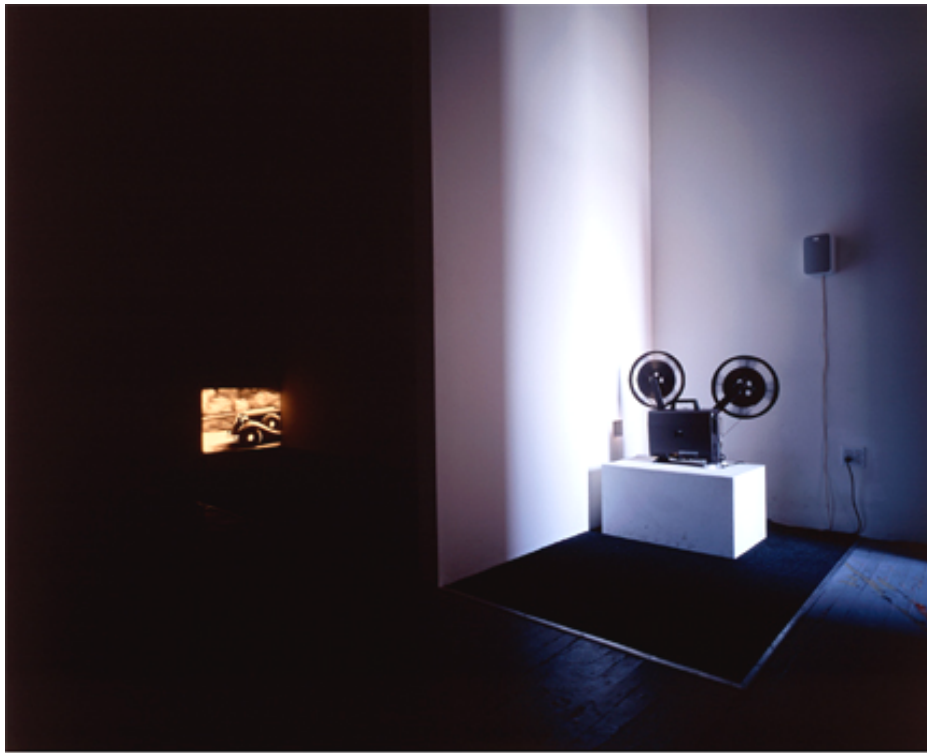


Fig. 1. Matthew Buckingham, installation shot of *Situation Leading to a Story*, 1999 black and white 16mm film projection with sound, 21mins, looped, dimensions variable

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<sup>74</sup> Extract from the Artist's website URL: <http://www.matthewbuckingham.net/Situation.html> (accessed 12/03/12).

In *Situation* Buckingham employs a range of registers and narrative content that, while pointing to a coherent narrative story, simultaneously acknowledges the omission of other possible stories. In addition the artist's deploys the film's installation process to produce additional layers of spatial and temporal meaning. Through such strategies Buckingham seeks to highlight the gaps that occur between engaging with the past, memory and its interpretation, and to suggest instead an alternative approach. For example, he emphasises the need for an ongoing, more reflexive, dialogue between (a) an encounter in the present with past events and (b) the gap that inevitably emerges in the retelling of this encounter by critically revealing how history is 'ordinarily' constructed.

When we consider where we are – when we are confronted with a more or less conscious attempt at defining the present, in one sense memory is the only database that we have. And I think that in the various ways that we consider where we have been - and what was - these two questions of what if - and what was - are interesting in relation to each other.

(Buckingham, M., 2012c)

In *Situation*, Buckingham introduces a notion of 'the fictive' from the outset, employing a voice-over (the artist's), informing us that the film we are watching is 'found' film footage. Clearly, this suggests, that the audience has a choice, (a) to believe the narrator is telling them the truth, or (b) to assume that what he/she is listening to is some kind of artistic fabrication and creative strategy. With this initial intervention, the artist instantly raises 'the question of proof' and the construction of 'truth' in history or indeed any story telling. Buckingham applies a multi-layered storytelling method, but through the singular voice of the artist, he brings the audience on a journey by telling them 'a story within a story' based on the found film footage. By deploying this type of disruptive narrative structure he creates the effect of derailing the more typical, passive role of the viewer/listener in the reception of the artwork. It gives back to the viewer/listener the opportunity and the responsibility that comes with interpreting the version of events they experience and/or choose to believe and this is the conceptual heart of *Situation*.

Challenging pre-determined and fixed readings of the past is deployed in the enquiry in several ways. Unlike Buckingham who employs only his own voice as narration, I allow many different family members to re-engage with the archival material and employ a range of voices from different sources to complicate a more conventional reading of the scenes unfolding on screen (refer to chapter four for an analysis of the artworks).

I am interested in how Buckingham plays with the viewer's assumptions, not regarding history per se but in relation to the gap that exists in how we receive and interpret historical information and this relates to this enquiry in how it seeks to find new ways to consider how a family narrates its own past. There are comparisons to be drawn here between Buckingham's approach to time and the past and the filmmaker Bill Morrison<sup>75</sup> *Decasia* (2002) explores film's material presence and its links to time. And, similar to Buckingham the artist skilfully avoids 'nostalgia' in this case by using irony and, through a careful juxtapositioning of images. In an online interview the artist explains his methodology and how concepts of time and decay are interrelated. "...In the end (Decasia) is not a film about preservation. It delights in the process of decay, and deals with it not in a nostalgic way, but rather matter of factly"<sup>76</sup>. Like Buckingham, Morrison uses artistic strategies such as, the soundtrack - to complicate the images the viewer sees unfolding on screen. In *Decasia* we hear a musical soundtrack that features several out of tune pianos and an orchestra playing out of phase with itself, adding to the fractured and decomposing nature of the film.

In *Situation*, Buckingham draws our attention to the 'processes' underlying the artwork in two key ways. Firstly, by telling us how the new work came about - but this could also be a fiction – which contributes to how we engage with the work's meaning. For

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<sup>75</sup> Bill Morrison (1965) is an American, experimental filmmaker and artist, based in New York. He is best known for his film *Decasia* (2002). This is a found film footage that examines the genre of the silent movie and includes a shot that demonstrates how that footage is processed. Both Morrison and Buckingham include in the finished works a meditation on the artistic process and its conceptualization. But whereas Buckingham 'tells' the audience how the movies were 'found' by him on the ground, Morrison highlights the inherent vulnerability and process of time in the materiality of the film media itself.

<sup>76</sup> This interview is available at " Url: <http://www.erasingclouds.com/02april.html> (accessed 24/04/2014).

example, at the very beginning of the artwork we hear Buckingham narrate how he ‘found’ the films, which date from the 1920s, together in a box on the street in Manhattan. They were of different durations, and except for slowing them down and editing part of the third, they are shown in their original form. There is an address on the box and we hear next how the artist looks to locate the home of the owner and, misremembering the address, he gets lost. Secondly, this affects the value we ascribe these documents ‘found on the street’, by linking them to ‘contingency and chance’, two descriptors, after all, not normally associated with reliable historical research. Orla Ryan suggests that Buckingham does not only use what is visibly available to communicate to his audience but crucially,

Buckingham’s negotiation of lost histories, memory, the archive and the ways in which narrative and fiction are intertwined are arguably dependant on what is excluded from view.

(Ryan, O., 2001, p.1)

In *Situation* this is exemplified by another thread of the narrative where the narrator, in an effort to make links between the four movies, finds date codes on their edges (not visible on screen) and in turn, this prompts a meditation on the early film industry and Kodak’s marketing of movie cameras, circa 1920s. Soon the narrator turns to the subject of the Peruvian film, commenting on the images of construction: its impact on the environment and economy of Peru. Finally the voice over returns to the beginning of the ‘story’ and his final attempts to locate the owner, which fail.

If amateur film is archival footage that creates new stories, Ryan argues that Buckingham’s work occupies history in a radically different way by creatively encouraging the public or viewer to fill in the blanks in the story for themselves – to literally imagine for themselves ‘what is excluded from view’ (Ryan, O., 2001, p.1). The result is greater personal agency for the audience while seriously questioning the concept of ‘belief’ that is at the core of history’s strategic traditional role as the authentic record of the past.

*Situation* demonstrates what happens when we explore archival imagery, only to then complicate how we are to interpret these images or, in Ryan's words, '...to disrupt its immersion as a form of visual evidence of a past that we supposedly have privileged access to' (Ryan, O., 2001, pp.1-2), while derailing our expectations of 'truth of history'. This harks back to Walter Benjamin's constant search to find a way to conceptualise the past 'without the aid of tradition' (Benjamin, W., 1999a, p.253). Benjamin used the terms 'Historical Materialism' and 'Historicism'<sup>77</sup> (ibid, pp.254-255) to denote a dichotomy in our reading of history. This taxonomy offers two distinct ways to approach the past, 'Historical Materialism', which describes a 'fragmentary' past - unstable and in a constant state of renegotiation in the present, and 'Historicism', which conceptualises the past as a series of fixed chronological events. Benjamin was suspicious of latter view of the past, that is, as a source of historical evidence. Rather he perceived the past as a series of fragmentary events or moments that are continually encountered, defined and renegotiated in the present tense.

Translated through artistic strategies, *Situation* engages with Benjamin's philosophical concerns, by interpreting both an historical event and the retrieval of the event using the possibilities inherent in mixing and blurring what we hear through the voiceover and

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<sup>77</sup>What is significant for this enquiry is how, in his seminal essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History", Walter Benjamin focuses on the differences between what he terms 'historicism' and 'historical materialism' in his greater discussion of what it means when we talk about history. This categorisation is helpful in understanding the enquiry's main contention, that is, that the creatively reconfigured 'family archive' opens up new spaces in the present to speak about the past. Benjamin maintained that the tensions between 'historicism' and 'historical materialism' are found in their different approaches to the story that history offers to us in the present. The historical materialist views history as a series of non-linear, fragmentary events, folded into different moments of time where the event is no longer isolated within itself. Furthermore, 'historical materialism' opens a space for the pain and suffering of the event to come to light and thus supply us with a unique experience of the past. By contrast, 'historicism' remains concerned with understanding the past in relation only to itself, formatted in sequential time, it creates an understanding of the past that allocates history to a specific time, an era. Benjamin believed that this dominant view of history offers an 'eternal' enduring image of the past from one fixed position that excludes 'the powerless' (ordinary people) in any discourse. Whereas, 'historicism' takes the victor's story as the story of the era itself, by contrast, in 'historical materialism' there is the possibility of a redemptive story because it rejects the historicist's position of only seeing the past always from a set position. The historical materialist takes the present seriously; his/her appreciation of time makes the present and informs the past and vice versa. This summary was extracted from the Hannah Arendt's excellent introduction to *Illuminations*, where she discusses Benjamin's "Theses On a Philosophy of History", pp.225-255, published by Pimlico Press (1999).



what we see on screen, casting doubt on the veracity of the material and its context. By mixing narrative styles, though everything is narrated in one seamless voice, the text shifts between registers, for example, first person and anecdotal, to third person and a more objective-informative dialogue. Furthermore, we cannot assume that Buckingham's own position corresponds to the position of the speakers, though he reads the entire voiceover. Therefore the viewer/listener must work with the text, rather than submit to any one, 'true' coherent authoritarian voice. This links to one of the trajectories of the enquiry, that is, exploring the authoritative voice often latent in familial accounts by employing multiple narrative formats that through the processes of memory blur the borders between factual and fictional accounts.

Another artistic strategy involves the listener in additional layers of meaning by stretching the viewer/listener's imagination beyond the fixed point and time of the original material we are watching on screen. For example, at one point the archival film is running and Buckingham describes getting lost looking for the owner's address. There have been earlier influential artworks that explored similar terrain, for example, English photographer Hollis Frampton created an innovative narrative form that collapses the time and space of the cinematic screen, in an oft cited short, black and white, film titled *Nostalgia* (1971).<sup>78</sup> Likewise, in *Situation*, Buckingham manipulates 'the visual evidence of the past' to suggest the need for a more open attitude in understanding the meaning of events, how they unfold in time, and crucially how and in what context we receive or encounter them.

### **3:1:2 Creative approaches to time**

Buckingham explores the issues at stake in the relationship between memory and

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<sup>78</sup> In the film, we see a series of still photographs, most of them taken by Frampton, slowly burning one at a time on a hotplate. On the soundtrack, we hear Frampton's comments and reminiscences about the photographs. However, as we watch each photograph burn, we hear the reminiscence pertaining to the subsequent photograph. The sound and image are on two different time schedules.

identity in terms of excavating personal histories. As Stuart Comer<sup>79</sup>, curator of Film: Tate Modern, observes, by playing with ideas of memory and narrative ‘Buckingham, uses the cinematic space of film and video to stage personalized narratives that question the relationship between the living presence of the viewer, the phantasms of history, and the politics of institutions and archives’ (Comer, S., 2007, p.1). Drawing on ideas outlined by the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Henri Bergson’s treatise on memory (refer to detailed analysis in chapter one), *Situation*, articulates one of Bergson’s key preoccupations (and one of the enquiry’s key concerns) that is, an investigation into the constant negotiation - through memory - between past and present temporal states of being; a concept Bergson develops in *Mind and Matter* (1896) (Bergson, H., 2004).

In *Situation*, Buckingham demonstrates how artistic strategies can be successfully deployed to explore memory’s state of ‘durée’ or duration (Bergson, H., 2004, pp.259-267) and Bergson’s belief that memory disrupts temporal and physical worlds by shifting us back and forth between virtual and actual states, ensuring we are never completely virtual or completely actual (refer to chapter one for detailed analysis). Consequently, the instability that ensues suggests that the divide between what we perceive as ‘in the past’ and remote from us and the immediacy of remembered experience is harder to maintain, suggesting that a more fluid approach to how we experience time seems a reasonable, alternative strategy (Bergson, H., 2004, pp.86-105).

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<sup>79</sup> Stuart Comer is Curator of Film at Tate Modern, London. He oversees film and video work for the Tate Collection and Displays and organises an extensive program of screenings, forums and lectures focusing on current cultural issues and the history of artists’ film and video. He has contributed to numerous publications and periodicals, including, ‘Artforum’, ‘Frieze’, ‘Afterall’, ‘Parkett’ and ‘Art Review’. In 2007 he curated an exhibition of Buckingham’s work at The Camden Arts Centre, London, titled “Play the Story”, with an accompanying catalogue titled, *Matthew Buckingham: Play the Story*.



Fig. 2. Matthew Buckingham, *Situation Leading to a Story* (1999)  
5 x black-and-white film stills: 16mm, 21mins, sound.

Another strategy for disrupting our reading of the artwork is the way Buckingham uses ‘simultaneous interpretations’. For example, throughout the film his reading (from his own script) suggests other pictures and possible scenarios for the viewer’s imagination, continually flipping back and forth amongst different formats from ‘subjective’ and diaristic to more ‘objective’ or factual descriptions of the images.

What stands out in *Situation* is the way Buckingham uses the telling of the story as a unique access point to glimpse into discrete, temporal and spatial sites while ensuring that the viewer/listener becomes an active agent in that journey. He employs the device of the telling of two stories that intertwine. For example, at the beginning of the film, we hear the artist explaining that what we are viewing is ‘found film’. Buckingham then proceeds to tell the story of how he came to ‘find’ the films – all told in the first person by the narrator (the artist). And secondly, we have Buckingham’s musings on the possible, imagined narratives, emanating from the content of the found film footage,

narrated in a more objective documentary third person style.

What is relevant for this enquiry is how artists like Buckingham recognise opportunities in these kinds of minor, uncertain narratives. It appears that these gaps suggest other, real or imagined, versions of events from different, often multiple perspectives which, though not posing as ‘historical’, contribute to debates on what constitutes an historical event, ensuring more than one interpretation.

Such multiple approaches to narration suggest an attention to a greater sense of ownership of history and the past, giving more than one ‘true’ account and leaning towards a philosophical or ‘interior’ approach to historical events. As Walter Benjamin reminds us, history also plays a critical role in supplying ‘inner’, metaphysical evidence that we have existed which reminds us of our continued humanity; and this also suggests an utopian aspect to certain kinds of remembering ‘...The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present’ (Benjamin, W., 1999a, pp. 245-246).

Buckingham frequently uses ‘the voice’ as a critical tool in the telling of the story, suggesting the importance of oral accounts (although Buckingham has in some works been known to experiment with subtitles). We would all accept that the role of ‘the voice’ in history, or at least acknowledging ‘who speaks’, is critical in any representation of the past (refer to chapter two: oral history) and Buckingham frequently uses voice-over as a key artistic strategy<sup>80</sup>.

In contrast to the way Buckingham nearly always privileges his own voice (as primary narrator), this project does not (though it does include snippets of my voice). Instead I

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<sup>80</sup> As an integral aspect of his art practice Buckingham maintains an ongoing theoretical interest in sound, narration and the voice. For example in 2005 he presented “Voices Over, Voices Off”, a series of workshops and reading seminars at The Royal Danish Art Academy, Copenhagen, Denmark. The following description of the content of those workshops, from Buckingham’s website, gives a sense of the broader implications of the concept of ‘the voice’, “Focused on investigating and evaluating the use of spoken text in art, film and video work. Part history, theory, and practice, students participating in the course read a variety of texts from different fields with the politics of the human voice as a common point of departure.” (Buckingham, M., 2012a, p.1), URL:<http://www.matthewbuckingham.net/WS%20Voice%20Over.html>, (accessed 10/01/2011).

employ other voices to create traces of the body, subjectivity, gender and power. This gesture allows the respondents to speak for themselves, while referencing local accents, gender and age as embodied sites of experience. By creating multiple narratives and songs that overlap, complement and disagree, I hope to deploy the materiality of each individual voice and mobilise its inherent social memory (more detailed description of this approach in chapter two).

### **3:1:3 Installation processes**

An installation of art is secondary in importance to the individual works it contains, while in a work of installation art, the space, and the ensemble of elements within it, are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity. Installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality.

(Bishop, C., 2005, p. 6)

As the writer and critic, Claire Bishop remarks above, in an installation context all artworks are considered in relationship to each other in the gallery space and in relation to the space itself, with ultimate consequences for viewer interaction. Below, Stuart Comer comments on how Buckingham installs his work in the gallery in very specific ways.

Seeking to amplify an awareness of the spectator's surroundings by avoiding the 'placeless' nature of the darkened cinema, Buckingham has situated his installations in galleries and other sites that encourage mobilized viewing and 'unpredictable' encounters.

(Comer, S., 2007, p.1)

According to Mark Godfrey, curator, at Tate Modern, *Situation* was the first installation for which Buckingham predetermined installation criteria for the work (Godfrey, M., 2007b, p.45).

Buckingham's spatial and auditory layout of the installation actually positions the viewer in very specific ways to then encounter the artwork. From the outset, on entering

the space, the viewer/listener is implicated and relating in an ‘embodied’<sup>81</sup> and sensory way to the work – without having seen its content yet - suggesting that Buckingham values such attributes and furthermore that they mean something. Buckingham creates a physical relationship to the space that involves the viewers encountering the work in a certain way. The artist Tacita Dean writing about *Situation* remarks,

Buckingham deliberately guides his viewers through the installation in only one direction until they find themselves, as the title suggests, in a situation that leads them to a story.

(Dean, T., 2004, p.2)

This suggests that in *Situation* Buckingham offers both a ‘psychologically absorptive’ and ‘physically immersive’ kind of experience (Bishop, C., 2005, p.36) that seeks to return agency to the viewer/listener.

Crucial for this project is how Buckingham employs materiality in his installations to reference absent but crucial ‘sites of memory’. As Godfrey remarks, quoting from Buckingham’s own rationale for installing *Situation*,

According to Buckingham, the carpeted rooms were meant to recall the domestic setting in which we watch home movies, while the projection of the film at ground level recalled his finding the films shown in *Situation* on the street.

(Godfrey, M., 2007b, p.29)

Godfrey also reminds us that Buckingham works in an art historical context occupied by several 1960s and 1970s artists, for example, Richard Serra, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman who, though trained in sculpture, turned to film and brought with them new understandings of film regarding questions of surface and space<sup>82</sup>. And, according to Godfrey, like the work of these artists, *Situation*, cannot be simply reduced to,

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<sup>81</sup> ‘Embodied’ refers to an expression of or, to give a tangible or visible form to, (an idea, quality, or feeling). Here I use this term here in the sense of emanating from or involving the body.

<sup>82</sup> Likewise, I graduated with a degree in sculpture. In the past decade I have turned to the possibilities that other media offer such as film and sound and brought into this progression the sensibilities learnt from

...A sequence of images accompanied by a voiceover; the installation, the viewer's entry points, the placement and sound of the projector, the choice of the wall for the screen, and the size and position of the image all matter.

(Godfrey, M., 2007b, p. 31)

Physically encountering Buckingham's installation in a group exhibition at the PS1 Centre for Contemporary Art in New York (2002), Godfrey reconfirms the critical effect the artistic methods that Buckingham deployed through the installation process had on him,

I could hear the projector's whirring and a voice from the loudspeaker, but to watch the film I had to exit and find the room beyond the wall ... I was conscious of moving through space from one room to another, of feeling lost, and of eventually finding the film.

(Godfrey, M., 2007b, p. 29)

The discussion of *Situation's* installation process above highlights three key artistic strategies that inform the enquiry. Firstly, the way Buckingham lends importance to the activation of material memory, demonstrated by installing the domestic carpet in a gallery context to reference 'home'. Secondly, the sense of movement and spatial awareness proposed in the installation mirrors both the physical finding of the films and also, for Buckingham, his 'artistic journey' with the material. Thirdly, the sensory way the viewer is engaged by initially only hearing the sound of the 'whirring' of the projector and the sound of the narrator's voice before encountering the visual image – creating a behind-the-scenes presence.

To summarise, in this section I outlined and discussed a series of concepts and methods, such as, blurring fact and fiction, using narrative ambiguity to play with perception of time, and finally an approach to installation art that brings the viewer on a kind of journey, implying – perhaps ironically – that by forfeiting 'the truth' the viewer is put

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three - dimensional creative process. A crucial aspect of this development is the opportunities offered by installation art in terms of (a) the viewer's involvement in the work and (b) presenting a range of media art forms, like film, sound and objects in the same space with no one medium dominating.

into a more active relationship with the past. Buckingham's work allows me to argue that rather than clinging to absolute and finite versions of the past, we should explore how we approach the past in a more interpretative frame of mind that embraces the non-linear, the fragmentary and simultaneous narrative formats that may or may not be based on pure 'factual accounts'. The complexity of the relationship of image to text in this or any artwork derives in part from the temporal differences between the viewer's encounter with the images and the narrator's encounter with the same images. And, as demonstrated by Hollis Frampton's influential film *Nostalgia*<sup>83</sup>, it is usually the case that the text anticipates or follows the image rather than coming together with it in the 'now'.

It is, perhaps in Buckingham's approach to the conceptual and spatial dimensions of the installation process that he is ultimately able to frame our reading of the work and how we publicly encounter it in the site of the gallery. In this way Buckingham demonstrates the criticality of the installation art process and the way it determines how artworks can be viewed. As Godfrey remarks, Buckingham through *Situation* makes us realise, 'that it always matters how a story is told, where it begins and whose voice it is told in' (Godfrey, M., 2007b, p.33).

Through *Situation* I analysed a range of strategies and discussed how they provide more varied, expansive, inclusive kinds of encounters with the past while, at the same time, acknowledging and even demonstrating the under-lying narrative construction of all historical accounts. Applying similar methods in my project offers the viewer the space to bring their own memories to the stories unfolding on screen. While Buckingham's

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<sup>83</sup> Hollis Frampton (1936-1984) was an American filmmaker, photographer, writer and theoretician. An icon of the American avant-garde, Hollis Frampton made rigorous, audacious, challenging, thought-provoking films, leaving behind a substantial body of work. In the 1960s, having already been a poet and a photographer, Frampton became fascinated with the possibilities of 16mm filmmaking. *Nostalgia* (1971, 36mins, and 7secs: Black & White: Mono) is now considered a seminal piece of experimental filmmaking. In the film, we see a series of still photographs, most of them taken by Frampton, slowly burning one at a time on a hotplate. On the soundtrack, we hear Frampton's comments and reminiscences about the photographs. However, as we watch each photograph burn, we hear the reminiscence pertaining to the following photograph. The sound and image are on two different time schedules. See URL: <http://hollisframpton.org.uk/> (accessed 12/01/2013).



project suggests that perhaps the new subject of history is history itself, I am enabling a family's story to be retold in the present by members of the same family while questioning the veracity and limitations of the original account in order to expand the experience into the domain of collective or social memory (Halbwachs 1950).

### **3:2 Renée Green - the fluid nature of time, memory and identity**

Time present and time past,  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
Time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.

T.S. Eliot <sup>84</sup>

Renée Green is a contemporary artist, writer, and filmmaker working in a range of media. She makes complex, large – often densely packed – multi media art installations in the US and abroad that examine ideas, events and narratives as well as cultural artefacts from multiple perspectives.

Within her work she has developed certain themes and devices that are relevant for the enquiry, such as, frequently using history, popular cultural artefacts and other archival elements to explore such things as identity, social and personal memory, and (Black American) history. Using the recurring themes of contingent and parallel temporal sites, multiple identities, repressed memory, contested histories and the archive, Green's powerful critical projects unravel difficult political, intellectual and philosophical themes. 'But her underlying subject - the formation of the individual consciousness and

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<sup>84</sup> These lines come from the 'The Four Quartets' and appear as the first lines in Quartet No. 1: Burnt Norton. Subsequent quartets are namely; Quartet No. 2: East Coker, Quartet No. 3: The Dry Salvages. Quartet No. 4: Little Gidding. The quartets were first published individually over a period of six years; the poems were not collected until Eliot's New York publisher printed them together in 1943. They were first published as a series in Great Britain in 1944 towards the end of Eliot's poetic career. *Four Quartets* are four interlinked meditations with the common theme being man's relationship with time, the universe, and the divine. Refer here for copy of all four quartets. URL: <https://www2.bc.edu/john-g-boylan/files/fourquartets.pdf> (accessed 11/01/13).

the fluid nature of human subjectivity – has remained consistent throughout’<sup>85</sup>. Fundamentally, Green draws on historical records, while rejecting any traditional historicist view or ‘Historicism’ (Benjamin, W., 2002a, pp.211-244).

I employ an installation titled *Partially Buried Continued* to discuss two specific key concerns of the enquiry, namely, (a) exploring family narrative, memory and identity and (b) how personal memory relates to the wider social, cultural and political domains. This video installation is contained within a larger installation known as, *Partially Buried in Three Parts*. The larger, expansive installation includes a vast range of items, such as, popular paperback books, fragments of concrete, documentary style photographs (including aerial photos), slides, computers, vinyl records, photo-copies, posters, domestic furniture, a record player, maps, as well as TV monitors.

### **3:2:1 Exploring family narrative, memory and identity**

*Partially Buried Continued* (1997), is a prime example of how to open up new discursive spaces from the past by overlaying a personal history on broader social and even political domains. Alongside this Green demonstrates the advantages of multiple viewpoints and bringing into play different sites simultaneously. The video references Green’s childhood experience because, as a young girl, the family slide show was the artist’s first introduction to Korea. Several decades later she has been invited to go there and make a site-specific work for the 1997 Kwangju, South Korea, Biennial. This prompts Green to return to the site of her father’s experience as an African American Soldier in the Korean War 1950 -1953 (known in America as the ‘Korean conflict’) through the original set of home movie and colour slide projections.

*Partially* is a complex and layered video work, containing several conceptual and

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<sup>85</sup> Quotation is taken from an introduction to R. Green’s practice on the “SA+P MIT School of Architecture and Planning” official website where Green was appointed ‘associate professor’ in 2011. Full text available at URL: <http://sap.mit.edu/resources/portfolio/green/> (accessed 19/06/2012).

geographical sites deploying still slides, photographs, and video and several different speakers and registers, shifting across time and space. The video revolves around a set of slides from a 'family slide show' depicting the artist's father on his tour of duty as an American soldier in Korea circa 1950 and a scene depicting the artist in modern day Kwangju, Korea. At one point we see the artist with a young Korean photographer looking at a book of photographs of a fatal 1980s student protest in Kwangju. We also see images of historical footage of 1960s protests in Berlin and Paris and contemporary images of Kwangju that the artist has taken on her trip. Interspersed, there are still photographs of Robert Smithson's 'land art' titled, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, created in 1970 at Kent State University and other 1970s artworks and, as previously mentioned - a strategy that Green deploys often - is that many of these images loop back to other videos, documents and artefacts contained and articulated in the broader surrounding installation.



Fig. 3. Renée Green, detail: *Installation Partially Buried in Three Parts* 1996-1997  
Mixed media, dimensions variable.

As previously discussed, multiple narratives are an integral aspect of the way this video is structured, with each contributing different perspectives. For example, throughout, we hear a disembodied voice that 'stands in' for the artist's thoughts and feelings. Delivered through the third person, this allows Green - directly/indirectly - to share her opinions on a variety of issues and events we see unfolding on the screen.

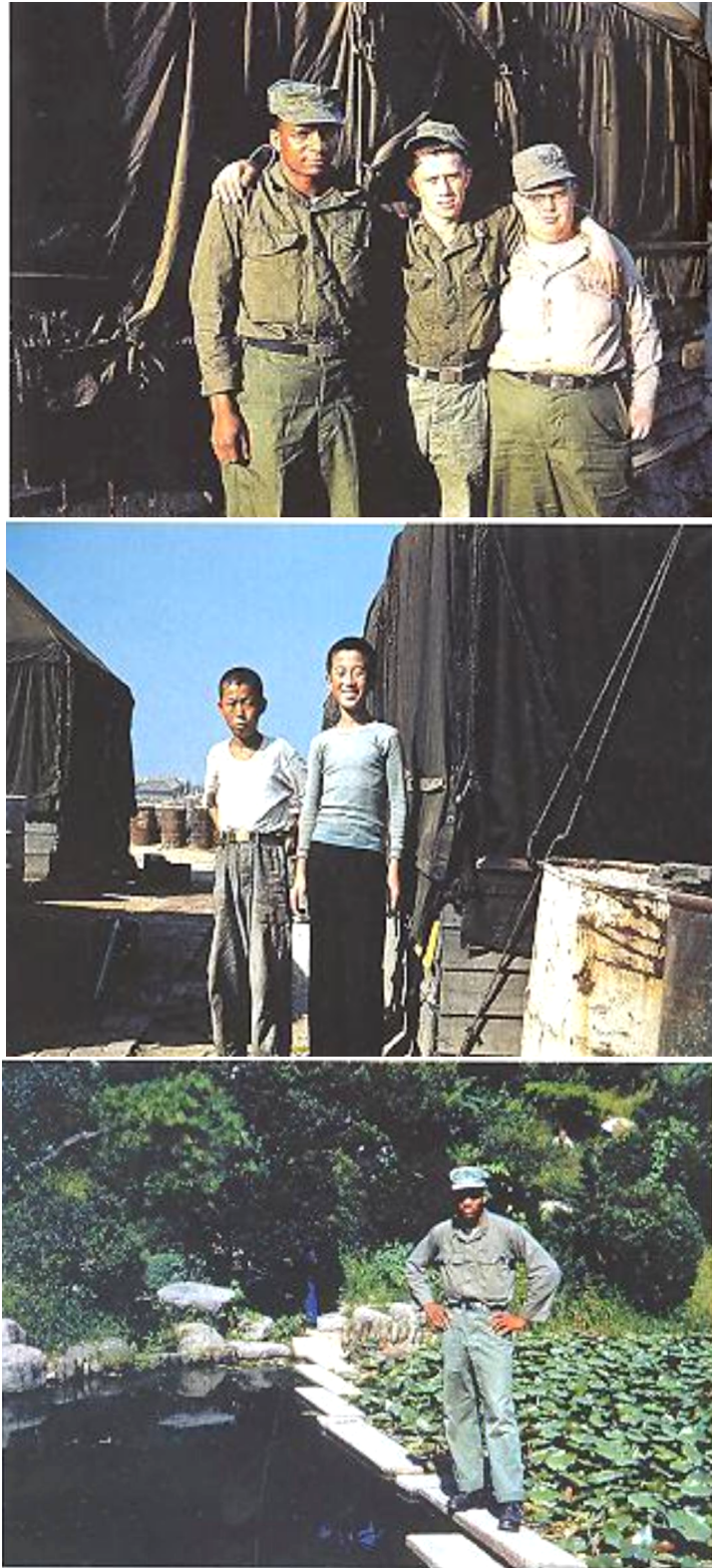


Fig. 4. Renée Green, *Partially Buried Continued* 1997, 3 x video [slide projection] stills  
Dimensions variable.

*Partially* articulates the artist's interest in revealing how accounts of the past are constructed from many different reference points influenced by a range of subject positions.

In *Partially*, Green reinterprets the carousel of her father's slide images into a personal narrative framed within wider official political and historical narratives. For example, at one point we hear the narrator telling us how Green, as a child, first experienced Korea, through these colour projections. Now she finds herself remembering them again, returning as an artist to exhibit in The Korean Biennial (1997), an experience that creates a temporal as well as a spatial collapse, as this is the artist's first time visiting Korea. Similarly in my project revisiting the site of childhood home movies as an adult,

Green inserts her father's recorded commentary as he recalls his time deployed as a soldier in Korea which re-contextualises the slide images. And, in another process of personal remapping, we see an image of the air force base where American planes landed for refuelling and we are told this is where the artist's plane now lands some forty years later.

Renée Green's 1997 video *Partially Buried Continued* opens with a familiar but now outmoded private ritual. We hear the whir of a slide projector as the image of a bird flying in a blue sky comes into focus. The slides click and change while a narrator's voice explains the circumstances of this scene. This slide show consists of snapshots that the artist's father took during the Korean War.

(McTigue, M., 2007, p.441)

Green deploys an out-moded piece of photographic technology in *Partially*, to revisit and scrutinise a specific period in her own family history. This strategy allows a discussion of the thorny concept and issues surrounding nostalgia as it is deployed in the enquiry. An integral element of Green's video installation is an archival set of Kodak slides that were taken by her father on his tour of duty as a private in the American army during the Korean War for family viewing on his return. No doubt Green was well aware of the implications of deploying a nostalgic, analogue technology. In *Partially* the

Kodak slide projector, is both conceptual in orientation and a physical presence (distinctive soundtrack). I return here to Svetlana Boym's term 'reflective nostalgia', as it appears to reflect Green's approach to this analogue and nostalgic device. Boym argues that...

Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols. At best, reflective nostalgia can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholias.

(Boym, S., 2001, p. xviii)

Addressing the negative associations attached to nostalgia, Boym coined the concept 'Reflective nostalgia'<sup>86</sup> (Boym, S., 2001, pp.49-55). By creating a new topology for nostalgia, Boym theorises an approach in returning to the past (nostalgically) to potentially activate its material traces in order to reflect on human longing and belonging, with all its contradictions. Boym's theory of re-engaging with the past through 'multiple zones' and 'detail' resonates with Green's deployment of the slide projector. Boym and Green both appear to be implying that a reframing of nostalgic longing, rather than being a longing to return to fixed ideas of home or belonging, puts the individual into a narrative that is 'perpetually deferring homecoming itself.' (Ibid, p.49)

This typology of nostalgia allows us to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory.

(Boym, S., 2001, p.xviii)

Likewise it seems Green's strategy or intention is not to use the phenomenon of the slide

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<sup>86</sup> In her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) Svetlana Boym, artist and writer, creates a new typology for thinking about nostalgia, namely 'Restorative nostalgia' and Reflective nostalgia. Emerging from her interest in post communist history and the recent remapping of Eastern Europe, her book revisits Nostalgia as a concept and creates a new taxonomy. Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory (Boym, 2001, p.49). What is important for this enquiry is her intention to set the past free so 'it can open up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historic development and where 'reflective nostalgia has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness (ibid, p.50).

projector to reconfirm the past but rather to refer to a moment in time – through the presence of this device – and open it up for discussion to examine, for example, how we recall and capture the past, its ‘truth’ value and how such processes shape our identity. As well as confirming a certain timeframe for the artist’s own private memories - she was born in 1959 - Green’s use of a slide projector acts as a subtle but critical signifying device. In the site of the gallery, it provides a physically present and evocative opportunity for a shared memory of an aspect of American history and its military involvement in a remote country to emerge through the home movie images and memories, not least, through the sound of the slide projector.

It is interesting to note that Green has made particular reference to the use of sound in her art practice, and many of her installations explore sound as a core methodology. In works such as *Wavelinks* (1999-2002) she addresses the global circulation of people and of cultural forms via electronic music<sup>87</sup>. She explains that for her ‘sound is more than music or dialogue; it is the audible world that we inhabit and to which we are often deaf.’ (Alter, M., 2009, p.95). The bringing together of sound, environment and memory is taken up in the enquiry to explore concepts of place, gender, belonging and social memory. For example by exploring what happens when a selection of the letters are transformed through the medium of singing and how this might transform the way the content is received or creating a new interactive sound track for a family radiogram that

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<sup>87</sup> *Wavelinks* (1999-2002) “Green’s video-installation series that explores the different interactions people have with sound—electronic sound and music, in particular. Using many sources of original and sampled film footage as well as her own interviews with individuals who produce, write about, and listen to music, she weaves her commentary about the power of manipulated sound on listeners at the conscious and unconscious level. The seven videos, located in a series of simple, generic display units, sample ideas about electronic music, cultural theory, and media and communication in a complex examination of overlapping themes. They include *Into the Machine: Laptops*, an investigation of computer music; *The Aural and The Visual*, which probes the relationship between visual and auditory experience in the history of art and criticism; *Activism + Sound*, an illustration of the various ways sound is used to prop up and undermine political regimes; *Spectrums of Sound*, a description of the visceral impact of different types of sound; and *A Different Reality*, which elaborates strategies for creating alternative realities through soundscaping. Green asks us to consider, How is aural attention managed, and How is this process disrupted? What are the limits of aural perception, and How we are affected by sound, both artificial and natural? How do we react physically and emotionally to sound and images? Each of the video installations combines factual historical information with fictional narrative elements to paint a broad picture of the aural aesthetic experience”. Extract taken from URL: <http://artdaily.com/news/17638/Ren-e-Green--Wavelinks--1999-2002-at-the-Neuberger-Museum/> (accessed, 01/02/2013).



captures emotional as well as physical experiences of a certain period and events through sound and spoken word (refer to an analyses in chapter four).

The work pivots on the conscious or unconscious association or memory of the slide-projector as a popular preserver of family memories during the 1950s and the 1960s, a period that coincides with many individuals' first-hand involvement in and memory of the Korean War. This would also apply for a second-generation audience who would only have experienced the conflict through archival footage or the memories of their parents (like Green) – constituting what Marianne Hirsch refers to as 'postmemory'<sup>88</sup>.

### 3:2:2 Aligning the personal to the political

A strain, which recurs in my work, has involved the probing of in-between spaces, which can appear to be holes, aporias, and absences. For example between what is said and what can be comprehended; between an event and its reinterpretations; that which takes place between the process of importing and exporting products, people, ideas; between organizing systems and their confoundation; between what is seen and what is believed; between what is heard and what is felt.

(Green, R., 2002, p.49)

In an essay for *Contemporary Art and the Archives* (Merewether, C., 2006), Green

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<sup>88</sup> Marianne Hirsch's term 'postmemory' has attracted a lot of attention in the past couple of decades. Here she describes the concept's origins and meaning. "I first used the term "postmemory" in an article on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in the early 1990's. Since then I've been trying to define and refine it, on the basis of personal experience and my reading and viewing of the work of writers and artists of the postgenerations. A number of my essays over the last two decades, several co-edited volumes as well as the three books featured here, have been devoted to this project. Much of this work has been done in collaboration with Leo Spitzer. "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present." Extract taken from URL: <http://www.postmemory.net/> (accessed 19/04/2102). See also Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'Postmemory' outlined in Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, (1997), Chapter I, 'Mourning and Postmemory' pp.17-41, published by Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

contributes a series of meditations based on the installation *Partially Buried in Three Parts*.



Fig. 5. Renée Green, *Partially Buried Continued* (1997) 3 x video stills.  
Dimensions variable.

Green speaks about ‘the holes, aporias and absences’ that she believes are inevitable in the process of retrieving and interpreting the past and how this relates profoundly to our sense of personal and national identity.

The images that Green’s father took turn out to be those familiar and typical shots we come to expect from home movies, making absolutely no direct reference to the devastation or even the environment of war-torn Korea. However, by deploying the technique of a ‘stand in’ artist’s voice-over, Green provides a context that critically engages with her father’s and the wider American experience by superimposing another story, a creative interpretation of the nostalgic images of the family slide show that trouble the innocence of the original ones by creating new sites of critical, public discourse.

Green produces a counter-public sphere that allows voices and sounds other than those reproduced by the dominant mass mediatized spectacle to emerge.

(Alter, N., 2009, p.95)

Pertinent for the enquiry is how Nora Alter suggests that Green’s artistic strategies create new sites (in the gallery) which activate a dialogue or ‘counter-public sphere’ which lies between the personal and the political, where the artist mobilises different voices to enable personal and public domains and experiences to overlap. In my project I explore how multiple narratives using different formats enable a more complex reading of the home movie footage by referencing wider social, cultural contexts.

Monica McTighe believes there is another unexpected reading of this outmoded mechanism and points out that the slide show also has other properties and subtle associations that the artist would be quite conscious of. That is, the slide projector’s frequent use in art history lectures and classrooms adds additional meanings, suggesting a ‘common space’ of communication, comparisons, and history (McTighe, M., 2007, p.443). This suggests a social or collective space of encountering knowledge as

previously discussed in terms of social memory<sup>89</sup> (Halbwachs, M., 1980; Connerton, P., 1989).

The images flicking through the machine show her young father as an army cadet. However, through the use of third person narrative we learn Green's own perspective on these 'home movies' and this reading further complicates our reception of the images.

The narrator in the videotape notes that from the artist's perspective, the war seemed to have been incidental in Mr. Green's images. And there is little sense of trauma, violence or conflict in any of them. Mr. Green recorded only leisure-time images and relatively happy moments [...]

(McTighe, M., 2007, p.445)

In the same article, Monica McTighe observes that slides have a special relationship to time, they offer a type of temporal narrative continuum but one that is also constantly interrupted and fragmented – being neither self-contained photograph nor sequential film (McTighe, M., 2007, p.442). This fits perfectly with Green's belief that the past... 'can only be partially discovered through excavation and the collecting of fragments: it can only be represented incompletely, through fictions, maps and artifacts' (Wallis, B., 1997, p.5).

Clearly, if the slide carousel is a metaphor for Green's perception of 'historiography' it is a very good one and appears to bring Green into relationship with Walter Benjamin who observed that, 'a true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and never seen again' (Benjamin, W., 1999a, p.247). Green's position in relation to how she views the past, the way we experience time and memory's role within that, is aptly demonstrated through the mechanism of the slide show, which she employs to show fleeting fragmentary

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Connerton has written several publications exploring social and collective memory, see for example Paul Connerton *How Modernity Forgets*, (2009) Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 'Seven Types of Forgetting in Memory Studies', 2008; 1; 59, pp.60- 71, accessed: 01/12/ 2011, URL: <http://intl-mss.sagepub.com>, *How Society Remembers*, (1989) Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

moments of the past. 'Green recognizes the past as that which is best understood as a series of fragmentary archives' (Wallis, B., 1997a, p.5).

A useful insight into the artist's approach to the photographic document and how Green originated the idea for this project is included in Graham Coulter Smith's *Deconstructing Installation Art* (2006),

In a talk at Secession in Vienna, Green noted that *Partially Buried in Three Parts* began with a reflection upon Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970, which like many earth art works is no longer physically extant and is available solely through its photodocumentation. Instances of these photodocuments are reproduced here. Green's *Partially Buried in Three Parts* grew out of a consideration of the year 1970 and, as with all her works, the associations became increasingly dense as she delved deeper into the project {Secession, 1999}.

(Coulter - Smith, G., 2006a, p.45)

Therefore by using the slide show as a recording mechanism, Green deliberately chooses a medium that highlights a specific kind of relationship to time and narrative in both its form and content.

Slide shows were attractive to the artists of the late 1960s because, unlike film, the sequences could be edited at any time. In a slide show, there can always be one more slide.

(McTigue, M., 2007, p. 442)

As McTigue points out, it is the slide show as travelogue that is the connector between Mr. Green's slides and Smithson's work of the late 1960s. In the former we see selected images from an outsider's position - an American solider, unable as a foreigner to get inside the culture, partly due to people's reluctance to be on camera. Smithson's slides however present different difficulties with the medium, such as the artist posing as critic and historian in interpreting and documenting his ephemeral artworks (McTigue, M., 2007, p.7). By including an image from Smithson's slide show Green raises the question of interpretation and documentation; not only does she make associative links to another video work in the installation but she reminds us of the fact that site-specific art was the

first to break with the canon of the artwork as object with these works only preserved as sites of memory through photography circulated in catalogues and exhibitions long after the artworks cease to exist. The photographs are in fact the displacements of the actual sites in the same way that Green displaces the concept of the 'original site' in her methodological approach, for example, by juxtapositioning past and modern day images of Kungju reflected through different experiences.

I am particularly interested in the artist's deployment of a piece of nostalgic, home entertainment equipment, allowing her to immediately locate herself chronologically within a genealogical mapping system, thus weaving a private life onto a larger canvas, which in Green's case is the American involvement in the 1950s Korean war. Similarly, the use of home movies in my enquiry materially locates the project to the heart of the family home and chronologically corresponds to a major, 'second wave' exodus of Irish emigrants to Britain during the decade of the 1950s.

In her installations Green attempts to collapse any divide between physical and conceptual worlds, preferring instead to explore the subject in all its totality as that which is both present in and a producer of the artefacts that she is surrounded by. This concept resonates with this enquiry, which also seeks to explore how the social, cultural and political is subtly bound up in a collection of familial cultural objects as they come to represent different kinds of identities.

It is a feature of Green's output to make exhibitions that continue to reference or expand on each other, back and forth in time. Clearly this demonstrates a particular attitude to her exhibition rationale, wherein she constantly reframes and reconstitutes earlier works into new projects that deal with her ongoing issues and concerns. This suggests that Green's relationship to time does not adhere to a traditional progressive, logical, linear chronology reading. This is often demonstrated in the way she conceptualizes, designs and even titles her exhibitions. For example seeing them as 'parts' or fragments contained within, relating back to, but still not prescribed by larger events.

In the final installation of the artworks in this project, I too employ the potential of the fragment and its relationship to memory processes. One example is where imagery appears in different formats. Where the viewer encounters a three dimensional piece of domestic furniture, and later in the installation sees the same object as a fleeting moving image in a home movie. This suggests a fluidness between past and present time zones that the viewer is permitted to discover for him/herself as they make their way around the exhibition (more details in chapter four).

Throughout this section I have been discussing the specific video work *'Partially'* but the singularity of Green's site-specific installations becomes strained by her consistent re/use of certain motifs and visual cues. In the case of *Partially*, the specific context of discussing an individual installation seems to become blurry as its meaning expands to the other installations in the larger site and equally the other 'sites' within the frame of the work itself. For example the slides depict her father in Korea and also images of a Korean photographer looking at a photo album (another site) showing images of student demonstrations during the war. While all the time a disembodied narrator reminds us of the original site of the artist's childhood where she first encountered the family slide show. Therefore, for Green the 'site' - of the installation - cannot be seen as a contained unit that can be evaluated or critiqued from a singular vantage point, it expands into all these other conceptual sites too.

To summarise, analysing Green's video installation *Partially*, allowed me to highlight a range of concepts pertinent to the enquiry. Echoing Henri Bergson's concept of 'durée' (refer to chapter one), the structure of this video aligns time to memory in order to construct a moving image montage of broken and discontinued temporal and spatial planes that deliberately derails the viewer's expectation of a linear narrative. Green seems to be suggesting that any re-engagement with the past must acknowledge multiple, layered sources: a mixture of fact, fiction and remembered events. Another strategy is the way Green utilises gaps and shifts in what survives in public and private memories to bring together a range of narratives from different decades, perspectives

and experiences to create alternative perspectives on the past. This viewpoint resonates with Michel Foucault's arguments (previously analysed in chapter one), that conventional archival processes have the ability to omit or even erase particular individuals, groups and events from the record (Foucault, M., 2000a, pp.55-61). Instead, Green like Foucault focuses on the gaps and fissures of the record which she contends offer the opportunity to explore the gap between 'what is said and what can be comprehended; between an event and its reinterpretations'. (Green, R., 2002, p.49)

I also draw on Green's methodology that acknowledges the importance of recognising and responding to the many layers that contribute to a contemporary sense of identity and subject formation, such as gender, class, education, entertainment, politics, and history. In her approach Green reflects the viewpoint of scholars Marianne Hirsch (Hirsch, M., 1997; 1999) and Annette Kuhn (Kuhn, A., 2002) who theorise new approaches for reengaging with family imagery (refer to chapter one) by suggesting that personal narratives are a gateway to wider social cultural or political events.

Green adamantly rejects the dominance of linear narrative and this informs and is evidenced in the fluid form and content of her installations. Finally, her practice highlights the role that self-reflexivity plays in her methodological approach as she traces a personal genealogy over broader social and political histories. By inserting her own narrative history into the story line, she challenges the strictures of conventional notions of a strict divide between object and subject positions – which is also an aspect of my research approach (refer to chapter two).

In the top left hand corner of the foreword to the catalogue *Renée Green: Ongoing Becomings 1989-2009*, appears the following quotation from Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet<sup>90</sup>

We think too much in terms of history, whether personal or universal. Becomings belong to geography, they are orientations, directions, entries, and exits

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<sup>90</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, (2002 [1977]) *Dialogues*, p.2, New York: Columbia University Press.



(Green, R., and Schweizer, N., 2009, p.4)

I contend that Green's projects invite us to approach past events and people not as phenomena fixed in a specific temporal, chronological period, but rather to experience them as spatial sites where individuals find themselves in a constant negotiation of orientation.

Another point of interest for this enquiry is how Green draws her inspiration from many fields of study, such as history, geography, anthropology, politics, art history and literature, allowing her to draw on a range of personal, social and political subjects for her complex interwoven installations. In academia these activities may be bound by official categorisation, but in day-to-day life they cross and overlap as we immerse ourselves in our individual, social and political worlds. And, as Green's work demonstrates and this investigation sets out to testify to, in our everyday experience of making 'unofficial' or 'alternative histories' such borders are apt to dissolve.

### **3:3 Vivienne Dick – reclaiming the subjective voice of the past**

My ambition is to choreograph images and sounds that breathe

Vivienne Dick<sup>91</sup>

This section examines a short film by Vivienne Dick. It combines a montage of super 8mm home movie and video footage, text boxes, inserted photographs and voiceover. The work is approximately thirty minutes long, experimental in structure and eschews a traditional chronological reading as it flips back and forth in time. It is enigmatically titled, *A Skinny Little Man Attacked Daddy* (1994). I chose the film to examine the possibilities in deploying a range of narrative strategies using a montage of family records. In the film the artist directly employs home movie footage

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<sup>91</sup> Artists quote found on URL: [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/vivienne\\_dick/index.html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/vivienne_dick/index.html), (accessed 09/01/2013).

interspersed with still images, accompanied by her own and her family's narration to derail any expectations of a conventional reading of events. For example, by blurring autobiographical, biographical and abstract musings on her parents' lives – in particular her mother's - Dick reclaims the past through the sensibility of the subjective experience that still remains anchored in larger social discourse.

Vivienne Dick is a contemporary, Irish, video artist; she has a reputation internationally for her low-tech film work that operates on the margins of society and frequently features her friends and sometimes her family members. Born in Donegal, Vivienne Dick moved to New York in 1975 where she became a key figure of the 'No Wave' movement in New York in the period between the late 1970s and early 1980s. Lecturer and author on contemporary Irish film, Maeve Connolly has written several essays on Dick's work, situating her practice in recent studies on Irish Cinema (Connolly, M., 2002; 2004; 2009). She argues that Dick's films are...

an alternative, and distinct, perspective on the relationship between 'national cinema', experimental film and artists' cinema, both in Ireland and elsewhere.

(Connolly, M., 2009, p.72)

Contemporary practitioners like Dick, who use the genre of home movies or deploy diverse strategies to reconfigure archival footage, ultimately move it away from its origins to reside elsewhere<sup>92</sup>. This interference with the ready-made or 'found' footage, allows viewers to take a position with it that goes beyond the passive and/or aesthetic. Such artists also choose different sites to show their work and engage with a public

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<sup>92</sup>Another example is Scottish born Luke Fowler (b.1978). He is a contemporary artist, filmmaker and musician based in Glasgow and known for his experiments with different film genres (lyrical, documentary, journal) and filming methods. Often using hand-held cameras like super 8mm or 16mm to get close up to his subjects, he also cuts and splices old archival footage to become the subject of new works deploying many experimental film techniques, such as voice over, jump cuts, inter titles. You could describe his films loosely as documentaries, although their approach to the forms and conventions of the genre are as densely layered and ambiguous as the subjects they excavate. Like Dick he prefers to show his films projected in galleries rather than cinemas. See URL <http://www.ica.org.uk/32711/Film/AFC-Luke-Fowler.html>, accessed 09/01/2013, for a review of the artist's recent film, titled "All Divided Selves" 2011, which was nominated for the Tate Britain 2012, "Turner Prize".

audience; for example, Dick chooses to use both cinema screening and gallery installations for her work. Dick is currently based in Ireland and has recently moved into installation practice with *Excluded by the Nature of Things* (2002).<sup>93</sup>

Connolly notes that Dick is critical in the way she explores Catholicism and the Irish landscape in such films as *Liberty's Booty* and *Visibility Moderate: A Tourist Film*. In *Visibility* Dick features scenes of the Ring of Kerry as an atmospheric exploration of memory and place (Connolly, M., 2009). Both of these themes are subtly present in *A Skinny Little Man*, articulated through the meanderings of a collective, family narrative that, by evoking absence, manages to highlight what is not being said.

A discussion of this film allows me to examine two issues relevant to the enquiry. Firstly, Dick deliberately adopts both an 'insider' and 'outsider' subject position in approaching the theme of 'the family', giving her greater scope to open up the story to multiple readings and secondly, she aligns a personal family story to wider social and metaphysical issues – like Irish emigration and references to the cycle of life and death. The piece is unusual for the artist in that much of the content was shot in Ireland and features her immediate family members. Though, as Connolly points out, Dick has explored explicitly Irish themes before, most notably in *Rothach* (1985), *Trailer* (1986) and *Images/Ireland* (1988), (Connolly, M., 2009, p.73).<sup>94</sup>

### **3:3:1 inside and outside family narratives**

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<sup>93</sup> *Excluded by the nature of things* was Dick's first three screen installation exhibition held in the Limerick Art Gallery, Ely Place, Limerick at the Limerick City Gallery in 2002 and at the Galway Arts Centre in 2003, was funded by Bord Scannán na hÉireann and by the Arts Council. For a contextual article read, Connolly's 'Excluded by The Nature of Things? Irish Cinema and Artist's Film,' published in *Circa* 106, winter 2003, pp.33-39. URL: <http://www.maeveconnolly.net/> (accessed 03/01/2013).

<sup>94</sup> Connolly has also made associations between the work of Thaddeus O'Sullivan and Vivienne Dick who both studied film at art school. O'Sullivan's films *A Pint of Plain* (1975) and *On A Paving Stone Mounted* (1978) are both set amongst London's Irish community. And, as Connolly notes, 'both films are characterised by a fragmentary, episodic structure and were developed through improvisation' (Connolly 2003, pp.36-38). Another difference is that Dick often participates in (gallery-based) festivals and exhibitions of Irish cinema.

*A Skinny Little Man* is an experimental, self-reflexive, genealogically-framed work that maps the artist's early life and her family background, subtly woven together with a broader historical, social and cultural background. It focuses on the passage of time through familial relationships.

In an essay, written for a large mid-career international retrospective at The Crawford Art Gallery, Cork in 2009<sup>95</sup>, the video artist and lecturer, Rachel Garfield draws attention to the complex formal language of the film. She notes that, though the short art film contains 'a more gentle disturbance' compared to the artist's early 'No Wave' films, nonetheless, there is still a sustained use of... 'jump-cuts, dramatic shifts in location, tempo and imagery that we have come to associate with Dick's artistic language. This approach, builds from a range of fragmentary composites, a sense of disruption and seamlessness' (Garfield, R., 2009, p.42). These strategies contribute to the way Dick presents the family narrative as a series of disjointed yet fluid encounters – reiterating an attitude to time which bears a close resemblance to Henri Bergson's concept of *durée* or duration (examined earlier in chapter one).

Here I concentrate on the concept of 'insider-outsider' as portrayed in the video. Dr Maeve Connolly, who has written substantially about Dick (Connolly, M., 2002; 2003; 2004; 2009) observes that her films often represent the concept of 'outsider-otherness' and that clearly this language contributes to her own sense of being an immigrant for a long period of her career (Connolly, M., 2009, p.70-77). She moved back to Ireland to live around the time she made this film and this adds another layer of meaning to the work. In the introductory notes to Dick's week long film screening programme at Tate Modern in 2010<sup>96</sup>, filmmaker Lucy Reynolds also refers to the subject position of the artist in the work,

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<sup>95</sup> 'Between Truth and Fiction: The Films of Vivienne Dick', exhibition ran from 18<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> November 2009 at The Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, Ireland, curated by Treasa O'Brien. There was a catalogue published with DVD co-produced by Lux (London) and The Crawford Art Gallery, titled, *Between Truth and Fiction: The Films of Vivienne Dick*, editor, Treasa O'Brien.

<sup>96</sup> 'Vivienne Dick: Tate Modern', held as part of The Tate Modern Film Programme One - Six, running from 10<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> Sept 2010, organised at Tate Modern by Stuart Comer, Curator: Film, and curated by Vivienne Dick and Treasa O'Brien.

In her most clearly autobiographical work, *A Skinny Little Man Attacked Daddy* (1994), Dick charts her diasporic journey with a portrait of her own family, returning to the landscape of Donegal and a generational tangle of siblings, cousins, nephews and nieces. Now based primarily in Ireland, could Dick be considered to be reconciled to her place of birth? For whilst the familial portraits of *A Skinny Little Man* are warm and funny, her film also hints at family grief and grievances unspoken, perhaps accentuating the uneasy and unresolved nature of this return home.

(Reynolds, L., 2010)



Fig. 6. Vivienne Dick, Two Video Stills: *A Skinny Little Man Attacked Daddy*, video/colour /1994 /28mins

Dick returns from New York, where she is then still based, to make this film and this fact situates her as an ‘outsider’ at least in terms of her family as we soon learn that she is the one that left Ireland, in her early teens, to initially go to London, looking for

freedom and to forge her own identity, during the 1970s. Her ‘outsider’ subject position critically informs Dick’s initial desire to make an artwork that deals with her identity and the complex emotional ties to family filtered through memory. Similarly, in my project, I revisit the early days of childhood which coincides with the family’s emigration to England from 1950-1966, to understand more fully how this experience affected our personal and shared identity: continually renegotiated by memory after our return to Ireland. As Dick points out the film is,

A look at my family and the place where I grew up. So much of what is 'me' comes from attitudes, expectations, fears, habits and beliefs that I inherited from my parents (and they in turn from theirs). This video is about separation from the family. My work is to try to know myself - the only way to change inherited patterns.

Vivienne Dick (1994)<sup>97</sup>

Plaintive, Irish fiddle playing accompanies the initial series of frames in *A Skinny Little Man* showing a remote unpopulated landscape, close ups of stones and coastal water. The music fades, as there appears a black and white photograph of a young woman clearly from another era. We then hear the artist tell us in a soft but unwavering, matter of fact, voice that “my mother came from England” short pause “she married my father in 1940” longer pause – more shots of the seashore, “He was from Belleek, a border town in County Fermanagh” short pause “they settled in county Donegal by the sea. They had seven children”.

Dick chooses to shoot most of the action in the ‘interior’ of the family home and its immediate environs, where a sense of everydayness is used as a codified language for family tensions and familial relationships that the narrator alludes to. Slow panning shots of the worn out home furnishings remind us, physically, of the passing of time and our own viewing position as the film footage unfolds and we become witnesses to the lived and embodied experiences of others.

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<sup>97</sup>This quote also appears on Vivienne Dick’s home page: Link, ‘A Skinny Little Man Attacked Daddy’ on LUXONLINE Website where one can also view a 5.54 mins. Video clip of this film available at URL:[http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/vivienne\\_dick/index.html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/vivienne_dick/index.html) (accessed 09/01/2013).

Pertinent to the enquiry is how Dick deploys these kind of intimate, family images to trace through the shadows of materials and reminiscences to rediscover her mother's voice, her own private musings and others from the past. Throughout the enquiry, I argue that one of the key creative advantages of using archival imagery is its ability to engage the viewer with an image that operates on many levels. For example, by linking back and forth to the original 'family site', Dick suggests an indefinite, fluid encounter that transcends the boundaries of chronological time.

Rather than trying to encapsulate images for immediate consumption, the viewer is asked to suspend any interpretation through a process that involves a narrative structure that slips back and forth in time and in its use of narrative register, mirroring the processes of memory. An articulation of the fluidness of time that a century previously Henri Bergson coined as the concept of 'durée' where basically Bergson argues duration is not an objective mathematical unit, but the subjective perception of space-time. Bergson believed that the conventions of scientific practice and chronological time were incompatible with lived experience.<sup>98</sup>

Dick ultimately appears to urge us to recognise the importance of retrieving family memories while acknowledging the difficulties that lie in this process. The work seeks to deconstruct pre-existing narratives embedded in familial relationships as an alternative framework for historical construction. The work is a good example of the power of the individual human voice (within the group/family) to convey different perspectives and suggests a way of communicating that is subtly cadenced and nuanced within individual discourses, corresponding with the aims of my project.

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<sup>98</sup> In his "Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness" (1889) published as a book (*Time and Free Will*) in 1889, Henri Bergson argued that experience viewed as a succession of separate, thing like states is no less an abstraction from lived consciousness than time as measured by the hands of a clock. Both are fundamentally spatial. For an excellent and accessible explanation of Bergson's concept of 'durée' see subheading, The Concept of Multiplicity. Source URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bergson/> (accessed, 13/05/2012).

The ‘insider - outsider’ position that Dick inhabits while researching her own familial stories is achieved by deftly slipping from autobiographical to biographical registers, which enables her to contribute new perspectives on old stories - specifically family images that relate to Irish emigration. Dick explores the role of the self in relation to family identity by employing the voice as a personal indexical link to the human body and emotions, closely connected to our sense of identity and the expression of that identity.

From the outset of the film, voice is explored as a prominent tool, borrowing from feminist discourses, which would see women’s voices as being suppressed through homogenous and patriarchal historical discourses (Passerini, L., 2000, pp.65-72).<sup>99</sup> An exploration of the voice as an embodied, intimate and social tool of identity is one that is employed throughout the enquiry, in such works as *Singing Letters* and *Radiogram* (refer to chapter four).

Like me, Dick studies her family ‘mise-en-scène’<sup>100</sup>. What makes *A Skinny Little Man* so personal – as well as the obvious content of the familial images – is the use of the first person. At certain times throughout the film, we hear Dick’s voice narrating and remembering<sup>101</sup>. The artist is also the one conducting the interviews and obviously

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<sup>99</sup> In the enquiry I am informed by how women speak of their lives by an excellent essay contained in The Oral History Reader, revised edition, (2000), titled, “Women Speak Out” by Luisa Passerini who is a noted oral historian, writer, and professor of history. Her pioneering article on subjectivity and silence ‘Work ideology and consensus under Italian Fascism’ (History workshop, 1997, no. 8, pp.82 -108) is one of the most widely referenced contributions to the literature of oral history. She began her career as a researcher in Tanzania and Zambia. Returning to Italy, she became involved in the movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, particularly the feminist movement, about which she has written a memoir, *Autobiography of a Generation*.

<sup>100</sup> Mise-en-scène is originally a theatre term. However it has been adopted by cinema to mean the articulation of cinematic space; referring to almost everything that goes into the composition of the shot, including the composition itself: framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and general visual environment, even sound as it helps elaborate the composition. By using the term in conjunction with home movies, I suggest that an alignment of home movie content with films that depend on mise-en-scène asks the viewer to pause and examine the compositional spaces of the narrative differently. For example, the classical continuity style is directive whereas the mise-en-scène style can be regarded as contemplative. Adapted from, Robert Kolker’s text, *Film Form and Culture*. Source URL: [http://userpages.umbc.edu/~london/Local\\_Information\\_Files/Mise-en-Scene.htm](http://userpages.umbc.edu/~london/Local_Information_Files/Mise-en-Scene.htm), (accessed, 01/11/12).



holding the camera, all of which makes her control to the work and brings a level of subjectivity that makes the testimony naked and intimate. In my film project I employ close family members - particularly my mother - to contribute personal accounts that coincide with certain images unfolding on screen. By giving my mother and my five aunts their own voices in the work I intended to open up silent, narrative space (the original home movies are all silent) to allow them to speak their own experiences during a period (1950s-mid 1960s), when their voices were often suppressed.

Dick employs a range of creative strategies to disturb and disrupt an over-dependency on singular narratives, for example, she uses fragmentary narratives, multiple narratives, and montage. By shifting between private and documentary type registers she continually repositions the narrator. This seems to suggest that a single account of an experience is neither authoritative nor sufficient to tell this kind of intimate story. Also the range of counter-narratives deployed de-stabilises a passive relationship to viewership, which arguably extends to our relationship to history, memory, and the present moment. This multiple-voice strategy is also deployed in the enquiry as enables me to explore, the personal subjective voice (autobiography), documentary narrative or the (fictional) third person, to tell stories highlighting micro historical, oral and history from below approaches.

The first lines of the film point us in a certain direction and while the film has several layers, not least is the artist's musings on and questioning of her mother's life as a newly arrived wife from London to a remote part of the West of Ireland in the early 1940s. Now, contemplated in hindsight, from both an artist and daughter perspective, Dick, critically, brings her own experiences as someone who has herself become an Irish emigrant and an 'outsider' voice, geographically and in the pursuit of her art practice.

Vivienne's work seemed remarkable precisely because it articulated the experience of being in, but also *between*, several places.

(Connolly, M., 2009, p.70)

In *A Skinny Little Man*, Dick activates the role of autobiography and personal narratives to render alternative readings of the past. Here the artist describes her general work processes...

My own work is not script-led. I am interested in the person, the location, emotion, and by sound/music. I am interested in playing with rhythm and time – holding a moment for longer than would be expected. Unexpected connections and juxtapositions – the way our brains work.

(O'Brien, T., 2009, p.59)

Similar to my project, Dick draws on the power of subjective narratives to reengage with the home movie genre in order to bring the viewer into the very hearth and heart of an (Irish) family. The everydayness lures us through a series of material memories evoked by the ordinary kitchen table, a hallway where a dog loiters, an untidy sitting room and an unkempt garden. The deep familiarity of the imagery evokes a sense of national connection and shared social memories on behalf of the viewer that Dick – particularly in such works as *A Skinny Little Man* - strives to create.

### **3:3:2 The relationship between private and cultural identity**

In *A Skinny Little Man*, Dick brings home movies to another level by unpicking the all too familiar images that the camera pans across for their underlying meaning. By showing us, in some ways, clichéd home movie sequences we are all implicated in the story that unfolds, mapping onto these our own family and wider social, cultural and national personas as we go. For example, at one point Dick uses a series of images of a humble interior of a kitchen to tell its own story. By slowly panning around the room's furniture and fittings to capture its state of deterioration, she seems to suggest some kind of disappearing site of Irish, social, material memories - now one generation removed. Once considered to be the hub of family activity, the film depicts a kitchen in various stages of neglect and deterioration, partly depicted by an array of threadbare artefacts. As the camera pans the different surfaces, we hear an interview with the artist's brother, who now lives alone in the family home and appears withdrawn and disconnected.

Deploying the qualities of home movie footage, Dick connects the viewer in an almost visceral way to the scenes unfolding on screen, evoking our own memories of childhood in the process. The familiar, jerky, awkward, unrehearsed images of ‘family life’ and antics create a hybrid form of an everyday filmic diary. However in the way Dick has re-edited them into a montage of text, musings, still images and voiceover they now rely heavily on several different interpretations of memory, factual and emotional.



Fig. 7. Vivienne Dick, Video Still: *A Skinny Little Man Attacked Daddy*, video/colour /1994 /28mins

Important to my enquiry is how Dick retains the original function and texture of the home movie format, while using creative strategies like voice over and inter-titles to enable the images to also speak back to different, more suppressed, topics through the overarching concept of remembering. Through a strategy of ‘disruption’ and overlay, certain more sensitive topics - like the artist’s English mother and her original separation from her culture and ‘plantation’ into remote west of Ireland, or the ‘cold relationship’ between her parents - is explored in images, narration and text. To suggest other temporal and spatial sites, Dick frequently inter-cuts the movie footage with a series of

still images, such as: her mother as a young woman, stills of her parents together and images of the landscape and these are accompanied by the disembodied voice of Vivienne, who is now struggling to understand her mother's early life, and her parents' relationship, set against that remote, rural landscape.

This film offers a space to theorise the home movie as a site for familial tensions which is all the more powerfully articulated in a medium that was designed to preserve the quintessential happy family. Nancy West (2000)<sup>102</sup>, and others, such as Marianne Hirsch in *Familial Gaze* (2006), argue that these very the way this home entertainment apparatus was advertised throughout the 1950s and the 1960s produced the kind of nuclear family images that fully supported a conventional projection of happy families, while also seeking to collapse the strictures between private and public domains. Throughout the enquiry I argue these ordinary snapshots or sequences of family life are important because they are replete with public meanings of the personal lives they depict but that these are implied and not explicit. As Marita Sturken, writing in *Familial Gaze* (2006) observes,

...the capacity of these images to carry their poignancy into realms of cultural meaning indicates the ways in which the notion of a private realm separate from the public has always been a fallacy. For the so-called moments that they depict are, of course, already coded with social meanings about youth, childhood, marriage, family and the ideologies of American culture.

(Sturken, M., 2006, p.193)

In Dick's *A Skinny Little Man*, we watch a family's home movie played out in several locations, gently demonstrating the integral role of emigration and immigration deeply embedded in the culture and memories of Irish family life. Many different, 'far away' locations are represented, either with moving image or intercut still images. For example, we are shown the family home, in a remote part of the West of Ireland, next

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<sup>102</sup> For an excellent appraisal of Kodak's early development of home movie and slide entertainment systems see West, M. Nancy (2000) *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, Charlottesville, London: University Press of Virginia.

we are introduced to the artist's early emigration away from the West of Ireland through archival photographs of the artist after she emigrates as a young woman, hanging out and living an alternative lifestyle in New York and London. Mid-way we watch as several family members visit Dick's sister who has settled and is now dying in South Africa.

This is of interest for my enquiry because in terms of Irish emigration, these locations bring us into several different landscapes that, although not explicitly spoken of in 'emigration terms', are actually an alternative kind of personal topography of Irish emigration over many decades. At one point the narrator speaks 'about having to get away in order to be free and see something of life'. This strategy of presenting a different perspective, from 'the ground up', of Irish emigration is also explored throughout my enquiry.

Interspersed with these vignettes of different family members reminiscing, however, is a third voice, the presence of a narrator - not the actual artist – who recounts a parallel account of events in a different private register, containing conflicted personal and psychological remembrances; this narration complicates how we are to engage with the original familiar home movie sequences. Dick uses the lens of the camera and a carefully crafted script – with an anonymous voice narrating quietly and unemotionally - to bring us on a journey through her life which has familiar overtones for many Irish families in terms of the artefacts, landscape, portraits and stories of family tensions and emigration we engage with as the film unfolds.

Dick shares an emotional history through a series of scattered insights. However as artist Maximilian Le Cain points out in the online journal of experimental film, art cinema and video art *Experimental Conversations*, that however 'uncomfortably intimate the scenes we are presented with might become, Dick allows her family to preserve its human

mystery intact'.<sup>103</sup> In *A Skinny Little Man* we are given a sense of 'the space of family' as far-reaching, complex and layered, at once difficult and necessary.

Dick's film is a meditation on her family (and all families) and the artist's place within it, focusing in particular on re-engaging with her mother's life. For example, at one point subtitles tell us "my mother's fears became my fears". At one point, through photo-montage, we skip through black and white photos of Dick in her early twenties when she had left home and was 'hanging out' with friends in London and New York. These images are set in relationship to a series of images of the beautiful but empty, rural landscape of Donegal suggesting, as film scholar Rod Stoneman notes, Dick's treatment of these themes is never literal but 'a gentle investigation into inherited identity' (Stoneman, R., 1996, p.42).

Through revealing her family at home on camera, Dick reminds us of Freud's notion of the family as 'primal site', a place shot through with conflict and family tensions that are sometimes best remembered from afar – as indeed the camera allows Dick to do. At one point, the steady disembodied voice informs us – as the camera slowly pans over a black and white portrait of her father (with eyes closed) - that... 'we didn't spend all our time in front of the mirror because of vanity, but because of anxiety'. There is then a long pause before we see another sequence of archival blurry movie footage and hear the artist's brother Gerald's voice, speaking softly and briefly about his strained relationship with their father and reminiscing about their mother and her difficult relocation from England to Ireland.

Pertinent to the enquiry, is the fragmentary approach and the constant collapse of time frames, moving us back and forth in time, echoing the processes of what Bergson

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<sup>103</sup> *Experimental Conversations* is Cork Film Centre's online journal of experimental film, art cinema and video art. This website is operated strictly not-for-profit with all operating costs paid for by Cork Film Centre. This quote is taken from an essay in that journal by Maximilian Le Cain, titled, 'Vivienne Dick Now and All At Once' URL: <http://www.experimentalconversations.com/articles/484/vivienne-dick-now-and-all-at-once/> (accessed 10/03/2013).

referred to as ‘involuntary memory’ (Bergson, H., 2004, p.90), while seamlessly shifting registers across different family members.

*A Skinny Little Man* is a story that criss-crosses back and forth between the past and ‘now’ – when we encounter the same family home now, full of the next generation of kids ‘playing dress up’. Through these reconfigured images and words, Dick brings us from the early years and the innocence of childhood, “... I once asked my parents why they didn’t ever kiss each other, they looked at each other and said nothing”, through troubled adolescence, “I was uncomfortable with any display of emotion”, and into a more reflective mood of adulthood, commenting on her father that “he worked hard so he could send us away to school”.

Through a voice-over narration - in the first person - we are told the story of her parents’ meeting and subsequent relationship. Soon we get a series of old black and white photos of the house, the kitchen, her parents, especially her mother from those early days. Within a condensed, tightly framed half an hour, Dick offers a range of starkly contrasting images from everyday history, drawing an arc from the beginnings of life to death. We watch as her sister literally dies in front of our eyes, at home in sunny South Africa in 1987, where Dick and other family members have gone for one last visit. Sometime later, back in Ireland, we meet Dick’s brother, a vet in the local area out on his rounds in the meandering country back roads. At one point, we watch as he calmly delivers a calf in a small outhouse, artfully juxtaposing birth and death in the close proximity of the film sequences.

In summary, Dick must be aware of the difficulties in capturing the span of life on camera and, as if one life isn’t hard enough, she gives us a montage of people, voices and narratives from one family, caught up in a palimpsest that overlaps past and present. To do this, Dick does not deploy a linear narrative instead she allows the narrator to slip into moments where the past seems to just cut into the frame, and we are given a very personal and frank encounter with one family and its tensions. Through oral accounts,

snippets of dialogue, voice-over and subtitles, Dick lays out a play of emotions that involves much more than just a snapshot of a family montage created from archival fragments. Dick has also managed to convey some of the physical reality of that experience as Dick fully engages with the abstract language of colour, sound and composition. As Stoneman observes,

*A Skinny Little Man Attacked Daddy* represents a return, a settling of psychic accounts with her family and place of origin. The rural social landscape in Donegal contrasts with textures of 'big city' life in this gentle investigation into inherited identity and the route to mortality. The boundaries between the home movie and television social documentary are dissolved in an exploration of everyday life, as the film performs a devastatingly honest open-heart surgery and tries to understand an individual experience, a personal version of the 'family system' from the inside.

(Stoneman, R., 1994, p. 43)

In the opening sequences of Dick's film, the artist situates us in a particular site, a site of belonging - this is no ordinary landscape, it represents the artist's origins: the intimate place where she grew up with her family. We are presented with a rural Ireland nostalgically and romantically portrayed as wild, beautiful and remote. The narrator (not the artist) tells us how the artist's parents met, married and bought this house in 1953, and raised their seven children here. Thus reminding us that we taking part in a durational event – an actual moment in history and in a family's and a nation's memory.

Dick is always behind the camera and so she controls what we are looking at, it is her (constructed) view of her family we are sharing. By contrast, in my project, the original home movie footage is shot by my father and I am a passive, child-subject within the various narratives. Though various artistic strategies, I reconfigure the material into a new film triptych and consequently take on an active role, remediating their original form and purpose. Implicit in this gesture are my many personae: female, artist, researcher, daughter, niece and sister (refer to chapter two). Where my project is similar to Dick's is in how I set out to recreate another family history from the one given, and by doing so bring my world and experiences as female, artist, researcher, daughter, niece, sister into dialogue with my father's perspective.



To conclude, this chapter articulated a range of concepts and methodologies in approaching, occupying and questioning our relationship to the past through examining a selection of contemporary artists. I chose three contemporary artists, who have turned to the past as a way to speak about a range of topics that are pertinent to the enquiry, such as: agency, identity, historiography, gender, time, and family and social memory. Whether using the narrative structures of documentary, autobiography, biography or fiction, or a mixture of these, these artists explore the different intent and consequences in deploying such strategies. For example, they allow competing narratives, multiple narratives, oral histories or artist narration to exist side by side, they privilege a subjective account but frame it in larger, broader collective, political histories.

For example, Matthew Buckingham in his installation *Situation Leading to a Story* (2002) by deploying fact and fiction and the material, sensory properties of installation art, offers alternative ways to revisit the past and in the process allows us greater agency in deciding what to believe. In this way, he demonstrates the alternative readings of a 'story' that open up that consequently undermine and seriously challenge traditional views of 'truth' and 'linear time'.

Renée Green brings together a multitude of social and political references that, while occupying the same time period, are indifferent to each other to introduce multiple perspectives. Through a range of artistic strategies such as creating multiple (site-specific) sites and simultaneous narratives, she explores our relationship with the past not from a fixed viewpoint but rather as a fluid, discursive site that is described as much by its omissions as by what it contains. Furthermore, she contends that as memory collapses any strict divide between past and present tense, a fragmentary approach is more appropriate, which, subverts the idea of a single, fixed view point.

While Vivienne Dick's *A Skinny Little Man* reminds us of how our most intimate personal identities are so often mediated through a family narrative that, being constructed, also reflects dominant discourses that speak back to topics such as,

belonging and wider issues of cultural and social identity. Critical to the enquiry is how these artists argue and demonstrate - using a wide variety of creative techniques – what is at stake if we persist in seeing the past as fixed and moribund, instead, they show us how the past filtered through memory or recorded in the archive can be constantly renegotiated and questioned in the present with each new encounter bringing different knowledge and experiences. Their findings resonate with and contribute to the theoretical debates on memory and archival process that I outlined in chapter one. By analysing their individual artworks, I demonstrate how it is possible to mobilise individual and family memories, events and moments in history to contribute to ‘new’ or alternative readings of the past.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Articulating plural sites and voices from within a family archive through installation art processes**

In this chapter I present a series of artworks that bring together the conceptual concerns, methodology and practice-based activities of the enquiry. The works are a result of a process, a way of thinking through and re-imagining different responses to various strands of the core questions that constitute the enquiry. Throughout the studio-based research I deploy a range of artistic strategies and sensibilities, meanings and knowledge that includes intuitive ‘understanding’ associated with ephemeral, hard to rationalise experiences.

The artworks are informed by those theorists that challenge and expand the concept of memory and the archive, previously examined in chapter one; for example, agency, time and memory are explored by selecting and reassembling a selection of home movie footage informed by the idea of ‘personal presence’ and the concept of ‘timelessness’ in the archive (Derrida, J., 1998). I also appropriate real and ‘found’ family furniture and, by reclassifying a selection of my father’s love letters to my mother, I examine order and truth in the family record or what Foucault refers to as questioning the ‘truth document’ (Foucault, M., 2000a).

Several of the artworks explore different aspects of memory’s relationship to time and identity; deploying Bergson’s concept of ‘durée’ and ‘pure memory’ (Bergson, H., 2004, pp. 86-104), Maurice Halbwachs’ evocation of ‘social memory’ where he advocates that what we remember is conditioned by our society (Halbwachs, M., 1992), and Paul Connerton’s rethinking of ‘forgetting’ as a critical and necessary conceptual tool in negotiating the past (Connerton, P., 2008, pp. 60-71).

Previously I outlined a methodology that draws on both ethnography<sup>104</sup> and oral history approaches together with contemporary art procedures. This combined methodology stresses the value of ordinary, everyday experiences, oral accounts and artefacts in studying the many functions and forms of family memory. Agency is shared with those whose stories and memories are at the centre of the project to encourage multiple and even contradictory views thus eschewing a singular, fixed interpretation of events. This process depends on a range of access points, forms, materials and narrative structures that acknowledge the importance of the senses and arbitrary and unconscious processes in everyday life.

The artworks are created using a range of media and techniques such as: sound works, sculptural and ‘found’ objects, an enlarged family portrait and a series of short films created from pre-existing home movie footage. Annette Kuhn’s ‘memory work’ is interwoven throughout these processes as it offers the opportunity to approach the family archival material as a touchstone that contributes to personal and family identity and provides a sense of agency to ‘explore different structures of feeling’ and not just to secure a fixed account of the past and make it ‘known’ (Kuhn, A., 2002, pp.45 - 46).

In this chapter I demonstrate the potential of employing particular artistic strategies – especially those associated with installation art - to articulate and problematise certain conceptual concerns (refer to chapter two). As art critic and theorist Claire Bishop points out, there are several qualities associated with installation art process, for example, (a) active engagement (of the viewer) – the role of the viewer is an active one, necessary for the work to make sense, (b) the senses - installation art may engage many or all of the senses, (c) by entering into the space, the viewer encounters the artwork from multiple points of view, rather than from a single perspective (d) more typically Installation art

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<sup>104</sup> In particular I was informed by Clifford Geertz’s concept of ‘interpretative anthropology’. This concept was previously introduced in chapter two. In summary, ‘interpretative anthropology’ is a term coined by Clifford Geertz (1926 - 2006) and, is important to the enquiry, because Geertz emphasises the fluid and fragmentary nature of interpreting any culture – including one’s own. As Geertz notes, “The fact is that to commit oneself to a semiotic concept of culture and an interpretive approach to the study of it is to commit oneself to a view of ethnographic assertion as... ‘essentially contestable.’” Extract taken from: *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York: Basic Books, p.29, (1973).

foregrounds experience and communication as an integral aspect of art making and, (e) the site – is often an integral aspect of the way the space and artworks interact (Bishop, C., 2005).

The chapter is divided into two main sub-headings and a series of lower sub headings that guide the reader into more focused strands that deal with those issues that the artworks seek to address. The first section introduces a series of individual artworks and the second section addresses a large-scale, experimental installation of the artworks, titled, *Transient Retrieval* (2011). *Transient Retrieval* was conceived as a way to test out the research questions and allowed me to present the artworks in the form of an installation to a public audience.

To enable the reader to have a fuller encounter with the artworks as I unfold the story of their conceptualization, materiality and context, I present images in the body of the text and, when appropriate, moving imagery and soundtracks are presented on two DVDs. Both of these discs are enclosed at the back of the thesis and at certain key points in the discussion I will ask you to refer to itemised headings in, Disc One: *The Artworks* and Disc Two: *Transient Retrieval* (2011) which represents an example of a public exhibition and was an interim, experimental installation. There will be a final exhibition put up for viva examination which will represent the definitive iteration.

**Please note:** Disc two is intended to facilitate an encounter with the artworks in their own right.

#### **4:1 Re-assembling ‘The Family Archive’.**

In this section I present and critique a series of artworks that comprises three short films, one photographic work and three sculptures – two of these include integrated sound works. These particular works respond to several of the main trajectories of the enquiry, such as: exploring agency, identity and memory, examining; how forgetting works in

this process; how time is encountered in memory (time of the unconscious, the now, recent past, far distant past, the future); investigating the function of the material sites and objects that constitute a family record; and how these reflect the broader social and cultural context during the period under review, 1950-1966.

The section is divided under sub-headings that highlight specific, conceptual concerns through artworks that articulate them, such as: (a) time, memory and agency in home movies (b) transforming personal records (c) the struggle for memory.

#### **4:1:1 Time, memory and agency in home movies**

One of my first studio-based research activities was to undertake an in-depth, content analysis of the hours of home movie footage - sequence by sequence - to engage with its cultural and social context. I also watched a selection of these movies with my sister and mother to share and be informed by their memories. Over time I made a topology of sequences from this limited imagery, based on themes that emerged out of the original material, such as: time, identity, struggle, truth, forgetting, social and cultural rituals, material memories. My concern was to respond to the ideas latent in the original footage (created by my father) while reassembling it according to the key questions of the enquiry.

According to artist Péter Forgács<sup>105</sup>, the maker of home movies acts as the narrator, in a manner that recalls that of the silent film' (Ishizuka and Zimmerman, 2008b, p.48).

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<sup>105</sup>Péter Forgács is a well known Hungarian artist who has made an international reputation by creatively reconstructing amateur, privately made films, applying original sound tracks and focusing on historical footage from a period that spans the 1920s to Post-World War II. He primarily draws his data from the archives of "Private Photo & Film Archives Foundation" (PPFA, 1983) in Budapest. This is a unique archive of amateur film footage, which Forgács established in 1983. Some of his best-known works are *Wittgenstein Tractatus*, 1992, and his award winning *Private Hungary* – a series of films based on home movies from the 1930s to 1960s. He recently represented Hungary in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennial 2009, with a project titled, *Col Tempo – The W. Project*. Many of his works can be viewed on utube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/peterforgacs> or on his website: [http://www.forgacspeter.hu/prev\\_version/eng/main/cv/cv.htm](http://www.forgacspeter.hu/prev_version/eng/main/cv/cv.htm) (accessed 10/12/2012).

Applied to my enquiry, this makes my father ‘the silent narrator’ the family’s home movie footage. This then corresponds to the idea of prioritising a single authoritative voice, singular perspective or ‘truthful’ account of the past – positions that are investigated throughout the enquiry. I explore this idea through the home movie footage by derailing ‘the silent narrator’ with a range of narrative and abstract soundtracks. This new narrative is now in competition with the original ‘silent narrator’. This idea of challenging or competing with ‘the father’, which includes the patriarchal institutions of church and state, is a theme that runs throughout the triptych and recurs again in several more key artworks of the enquiry, such as the soundtracks of *Radiogram* and *Singing Letters* (discussed later on).

The result was a triptych of short experimental films created by appropriating and reediting a selection from the original sequences and adding new soundtracks. Each film of the triptych explores individual themes while engaging with the relationship between memory and identity by experimenting with various strategies. I discuss the triptych in the order in which each film was conceived as they culminate and evolve the enquiry’s issues over time.

(Please open Disc One: The Artworks: *Rehearsal*)

As the first film in the series, *Rehearsal* is intended to act as a conceptual and narrative primer for the two films that follow, therefore I wanted to make the structure abstract, open, fragmented and lyrical – like a visual poem. *Rehearsal* intends to explore the alignment of memory, time and identity on many levels. Firstly, by deploying certain strategies, I suggest the duality associated with the process of emigration – in this instance from Ireland to England (Ryan, L., 1990). Secondly, informed by my reading of Bergson’s theorisations on memory (Bergson, H., 2002, p. 96-97) I select certain images that suggest the complex weave individual and collective memory in relation to identity formation and, I also explore Derrida’s concept of time and the archive regarding the way unconscious fears and longings haunt the archive (Derrida, J., 1998).

As previously argued in chapter one, the issue of ‘time’ in the archive is a complex one; for example, (a) the time of the archive is ‘deferred time’ (in order to control access to information that maybe dangerous or compromising and, there is a slippage between the events and the encounter with those events through the record that affects the way we understand the original content), (b) the ‘real’ time of the archive is not the past but the future, (c) the presence of unconscious drives underlying the archival process forces a different relationship to time, that is, ‘timelessness’ (Derrida noted that for Freud, the unconscious was ‘timeless’ and, as the archive is underpinned by unconscious drives, it follows that the archive is also timeless, which in turn disrupts ‘the authority’ of the archive).

By reassembling selected film sequences as a ‘stream of consciousness’<sup>106</sup>, inserting words and adding a new soundtrack, I wanted to articulate a fractured landscape of unconscious time. The sound that accompanies the imagery is a composite of a faltering voice (singing scales) and instruments ‘rehearsing’, suggesting the difficulty in representing (perfectly) and the erratic nature of unconscious memory that, according to Derrida, underpins the archival impulse. Derrida, through Freud, reminds us that remembering – in the form of archival practice - is bound to unconscious longings and fears that Freud names ‘the death drive’. This force is a constant reminder of our own finitude and our compulsion towards chaos and disintegration or a desire to return to the inorganic from which we all originate (Derrida, J., 1998).

In chapter one I examined how Derrida’s concept of ‘personal presence’, that is, the presence of unconscious forces in the archive, has a correspondence with Bergson’s idea

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<sup>106</sup>The term ‘stream of consciousness’ is usually associated with literary criticism: characterised by a narrative mode that seeks to portray an individual's point of view by giving the written equivalent of the character's thought processes, either in a loose interior monologue or in connection to his or her actions. Stream of consciousness writing is usually regarded as a special form of interior monologue and is characterised by associative leaps in thought and lack of punctuation. Source URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stream\\_of\\_consciousness\\_%28narrative\\_mode%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stream_of_consciousness_%28narrative_mode%29) (accessed 09/09/2013). Applied in this creative context, I used this approach to create a loose narrative commentary implying all the fits and bursts of juxtapositioned imagery found in more unconscious and dreamlike states.



of those 'pure' underlying memories that, though difficult to account for, are a critical and constant stream of fragmentary visions that help to give shape to our lives and form our identities.



Fig. 8. Three film stills from: *Rehearsal*  
8mins/ regular 8mm film transferred to DVD /colour /sound/2011

In *Rehearsal*, I explore this conceptual terrain by experimenting with a range of film strategies, informed by artists, such as Stan Brakhage<sup>107</sup> and Luke Fowler<sup>108</sup>. These artists sought new filmic ways to represent time and the past, often by deploying a fragmentary, narrative approach. Some of the technical interventions I use include: collage-film, jump cuts, dissolves between frames, speed changes and text. By using a quick succession of jump cuts – switching from a selection of quintessential Irish to English images - I wanted to find new ways to articulate the forces that underlie identity formation and belonging, more poignant in the experience of an emigrant who must adapt to a new environment.

In the opening sequences we encounter ‘the family’ in a small back-garden, involved in a series of (obviously staged for the camera) activities, including: riding bicycles, pushing prams, walking and running. Soon we cut to a series of personal, archetypal images that include many images of ‘mother’. These were chosen to represent a particular kind of collective memory, ‘pure memory’ (Halbwachs, 1950) one that is enduring, determining family and nationalistic (Irish) symbols<sup>109</sup> - that is, part of our

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<sup>107</sup> Stan Brakhage was an American avant-garde, non-narrative filmmaker, 1933-2003. He advocated a new film language that favoured a deeply subjective, non-narrative approach. He influenced a generation of artists, for example, the English artist, Hollis Frampton. Brakhage was interested in exploring film in non-linear ways, using such techniques as: extreme close ups, painting the film’s surface, colour manipulations, fast-cutting, multi-superimposing, collage film. He often used images of himself, his family and everyday surroundings in his work. His career spanned fifty years and left behind a large and diverse body of work of more than four hundred films ranging in length from nine seconds to four hours. He referred to his films as “light poems”.

<sup>108</sup> Luke Fowler is a Scottish contemporary artist. He works in film and music, often combining his interest in both. His densely layered films are portraits of difficult, often marginal, individuals, where his documentary style plays with expectations of narrative and reality. Fowler's films revisit and repackage ideas from previous decades, in his case ‘Structuralist Cinema’ and politically engaged documentary making of the Seventies and early Eighties. He was short listed for the prestigious Turner Art Prize in 2012 for a new film, showcased in a solo exhibition at Inverleith House, Edinburgh, exploring the life and work of Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing.

<sup>109</sup> ‘In Irish history there is a multiplicity of female names that represent Ireland, for example: *Erin; Banba; Fodhla; The Cailleach Beara; Dark Rosaleen and Kathleen Ni Hualacain* Many of these also appear in literature, folklore and popular songs and, most surprisingly, in the speeches and declarations of political leaders. In addition, the idea of the existence of a marvelous island in which all desires will be satisfied is widespread in Irish mythology. This idea of an island paradise is also linked to womb phantasies and with unconscious feelings about birth, death and mother.’ Taken from Cormac Gallagher’s online essay: ‘Ireland, Mother Ireland’: An Essay in Psychoanalytical Symbolism’, available: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/AN-ESSAY-IN-PSYCHOANALYTIC-SYMBOLISM-Cormac-Gallagher.pdf>. (Accessed 20/01/13).

shared cultural social memory. Slowing down sequences at certain points emphasises the ‘dreamlike’ or ‘durational time’ of nature; for example, I depict natural environments, such as the sea, sky, shoreline, to suggest that this predicament is not ‘in conscious time’ but rather exists in a durational or even mythical time, associated with ‘the timelessness of the unconscious’ (Derrida, J., 1998).

Images of water appear throughout the film, acting as an expanded metaphor for the unconscious, the topology of Ireland as an island, physical separation or loss, while also representing adventure twinned with travel. For example, one recurring, intermittent clip shows a rushing waterfall that appears during those moments when the narrative flips from Ireland to England during the film, suggesting both a physical and psychological rupture represented through the employment of short film inter-cuts that also resemble the process of unconscious memories – rising up unannounced.

The soundtrack for *Rehearsal* is designed to merge with, but not describe, what is happening on screen. It is an amalgamation of a female singer practicing her musical scales, (deliberately capturing all the minute changes, errors and efforts in breathing during the performance), and the recording of musical instruments rehearsing. I made the recording of the instruments through a window out in the street in order to capture the simultaneous noises of the everyday, such as trucks, chiming clocks and mobile phones - suggesting the real life experience of a more entangled, fragmentary and fluid world.

(Please open Disc One: The Artworks: *Remembering is a Form of Forgetting*)

*Remembering is a Form of Forgetting* is the second short film created from re-assembling sequences from the home movie footage to explore the role of material memories and the many functions of ‘forgetting’ in familial archival processes. Referred to hereafter as *Remembering*, the opening sequences invite us into a particular space of intimacy through the particular aesthetic genre of the home movie. Positioned

in the middle of the triptych, it is tightly focused on the domestic, slightly claustrophobic interior, bringing us into the ‘heart’ of the family. It explores how material memories and emotional familial narratives are embedded in the places we call home, in this case a small Victorian terraced house characterised by a distinct 1960s, upwardly mobile décor – which cine cameras are part of.<sup>110</sup>



Fig. 9. Two film stills from: *Remembering is a Form of Forgetting*  
4.13mins/ regular 8mm film transferred to DVD /colour /sound/2011

There is already a quasi ‘ethnographic approach’ in the original structure of the home movie sequences that seek to capture and record a family’s life, rituals and key events. *Remembering* explores and expands on this by appropriating imagery but with added voice over complicates the more straight forward way the family uses the filmic record of their everyday material environment to reference their status and upward mobility as Irish immigrants in London circa 1960. Svetlana Boym uses the term ‘ethnographic memory’ (Boym, S., 2001, p.310) to describe certain types of processes that seek to construct new and alternative ethnographies and in the enquiry this is helpful in allowing

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<sup>110</sup>The genre of ‘home movies’ has contributed to the way we construct and produce social and particularly family memories (Ishizukak, L. K. and Zimmermann, R. P., eds., 2008). Home movies are a subset of amateur filmmaking. Historically, the availability and affordability of a portable, lightweight, hand-held camera designed by Eastman Kodak in America in the 1930s, made amateur movies attractive to a different clientele, that is, the ordinary consumer. The Home Movie genre reached its pinnacle during the 1940s - late 1960s (echoing the period this research is set in), before being overtaken in the early 1970s by the development of another ‘new’ technology, namely, Video Home System (VHS).

me to understand and expand the idea of a collective and family memory as an ethnographic memory. Boym notes that through this restructuring it is possible to make memory more expansive, contextual and freer and...

Freedom in this case is not a freedom from memory but a freedom to remember, to choose the narratives of the past and remake them.

(Boym, S., 2001, p.354)

At the start of *Remembering* we are guided through the images unfolding on screen by a voice-over of two females (myself and my older sister) discussing and competing for their childhood memories in the present, which resonates with Derrida's observation that the archive's time frame is always the future 'Not tomorrow, but in times to come, later on or perhaps never' (Derrida, J., 1998, p.36).

By slightly slowing down the footage, using the strategy of voice-over and not exactly synching the narration to the images (the speakers lag behind by a few seconds) I wanted to create a disjuncture for the viewer that suggests a slippage between the records we are watching and the act of recall that happens in the present tense. This strategy creates an odd disjuncture between image and sound that is only brought back into harmony briefly when my mother tells her story. This slippage immediately sets the tone for the work, suggesting a tension between the archive as 'truthful record' and lived experience, or at least how we remember lived experience.

My mother joins in the initial narrative mid-way through the film. Overlapping with her daughters' voices she begins to tell a personal story, representative of that era, that concerns one of her fellow Irish, immigrant, female friends. Deployment of a 'freeze-frame' device suggests that she may be the woman on the screen, although we have no way of knowing if this is true.

Walter Benjamin reminds us that there is also something 'redemptive' embedded in the indexical past. According to Benjamin, this is preserved in anticipation in the present,

and is then made available in future time only under certain circumstances – that is, only through spontaneous memories. He claims that... ‘the past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present’ (Benjamin, W., 1999a, pp. 245-246). Benjamin reminds us that the past is continually being recovered through such spontaneous memories, which he terms ‘virtual’ and which he believed had the potential to liberate us from the past and its moribund status. Benjamin’s view of retrieving the past informs this work and helps me to explore the potential locked in a minor, hidden, familial story, which, otherwise unspoken or passed over, is now given the opportunity to be retold in a public space - to be encounter by another generation.



Fig. 10. Film still: *Remembering is a Form of Forgetting*  
4.13mins/ regular 8mm film transferred to DVD /colour /sound/2011

Sociologist Paul Connerton cautions that there is something to be gained by critically examining 'forgetting' in order ...

to calibrate forgetting so that it in fact has value for proceeding to the next phase of history. It's almost like mourning – if it's done too quickly, in the wrong way, it might come back to haunt you.

(Connerton, P., et al, 2011, pp.1-11)

*Remembering* explores certain kinds of forgetting. Firstly, the innocent and self-generated kind we find the sisters engaged in when they relate differently to the images they are both watching on screen. Secondly, I introduce what Connerton describes in his essay 'Seven Types of Forgetting' as, 'humiliated silence' (Connerton, P., 2008, p. 61). Connerton argues that forgetting need not have *only* negative associations, suggesting instead that 'forgetting' can have a powerful and positive role to play in dealing with our past shames and allow new identities to emerge.

In *Remembering* I attempt to articulate this idea through aligning selected images from home movie footage, a personal narrative and collective memory. The film allows the viewer access to the private world of a family engaged in familiar activities that we can easily identify with. The interior shown is both a 'close' and 'closed' atmosphere, resonant with intimacy that could, however, easily tip into claustrophobia. The inclusion of the voice-over disrupts the 'cosy' scene making us think of the 'back story' behind this family mise-en-scene. By deploying techniques such as slow motion, close ups and voice-over, I investigate the interplay between private and public terrain at work in the familial archival process.

The film continues the thematic of water explored in *Rehearsal* but in *Remembering* we no longer *see* different types of water, instead, to suggest a more unconscious perception, we *hear* the sound of intermittent waves lapping against the shoreline. This shift from *seeing* and exterior vision - outside the body - to interior *hearing* – within the body - is meant to emphasise the intimate and the interiority of events unfolding, while



referencing unconscious drives and forces that reflect a chronology of events that owes more to memory and the timelessness of nature than to linear time.

In summary, *Remembering* expands on the approach I took to the sound track of *Rehearsal* (non-verbal and lyrical structure) by deploying a voice-over technique that explores the special quality of the human voice that is tied to our sense of family and belonging, while offering contingent and multiple perspectives that draw on social and family memories through the process of oral history. These narratives exist simultaneously, though not necessarily in sync, with the images unfolding on screen.

The film asks us to engage with autobiographical memory and also with those kinds of social memories that we have chosen to repress or ignore or are too ashamed to remember.<sup>111</sup> This also demonstrates how the process of remembering and forgetting is caught up in the broader sweep of time and social history, and how the unique qualities of material memories bring us back in time because they are non-verbal, tactile and activate the senses (Pink, S., 2009; Kwint, M., et al, 1999; Stewart, S., 1993).

(Please open Disc One: The Artworks: *Paradise*)

The final short film of the triptych is titled *Paradise*. In it I explore how a family's private records relate to public and social memories by articulating how 'a record' is always an interpretation by someone, always from a particular perspective, and that the authority of that perspective dictates how the content is received and presumed important or otherwise by others – concepts examined by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, M., 2002a).

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<sup>111</sup> I refer here to recent cases in The Republic of Ireland where there was a lot of publicity around the allegations and subsequent apologies from The Irish Catholic Church and The Irish State for deliberately forgetting about or ignoring the collective memory of those unmarried women and their babies incarcerated in the 'Magdalene Laundries Systems'; spanning the decades circa 1922 until at least 1983. Source: URL: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/MagdalenRpt2013>, (accessed 04/02/2013).

The work explores the formation of collective or social memories (Halbwachs, 1950), from the perspective a family creating a personal ‘family archive’. From the first sequence - taken from a moving train - *Paradise* asks the viewer to go on a journey, the signpost names its destination as the thoroughly modern “Bognor Regis” - a ‘Butlin’s holiday camp established circa 1960s in England,<sup>112</sup>. In contrast to the previous two films, I deploy a distant ‘neutral’ voice-over narration, drawn from documentary practices to re-examine this site. The title, *Paradise*, is meant to be ironic and refers to the way the holiday camp was marketed and anthropology’s historical preoccupation with studying ‘the other’ enjoying a more ‘natural’ pre-industrial way of life – which in this film I counter-act with my own self-reflexive, ‘ethnographic’ examination of my own family pursuing their everyday lifestyle.

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<sup>112</sup> ‘The golden age of the holiday camp was in the ‘fifties and ‘sixties. After the War there was a great rush to the coast. Many people had not had a holiday for years and could not wait to get away. The holiday camp provided what they were looking for. Prices were reasonable, food was plentiful - for the time - and there was plenty to do. Many camps used by the forces in the War quickly became holiday camps. Many holiday camps had, in fact, been taken over for military use and once again opened their doors to holiday makers. With the advent of these types of modern, organized leisure camp the British holiday was never the same again. Butlin’s is arguably a familiar part of British social history and collective for thousands of people from a particular era. It was famous for its ‘hi-de-hi’ catchphrase, which the camp redcoats used and the ubiquitous ‘Wakey Wakey’ breakfast call broadcast across the camps by a tannoy system set up at the end of each series of sleeping huts. There were also, somewhat ironically, barbed wire fences (built to stop non-payers getting into the camps), which contributed to their reputation as places of enforced enjoyment’. Extracted from URL: <http://www.seasidehistory.co.uk/camps.html>. (Accessed 20/09/2013). The memory of the loud-speaker system in the holiday camps is revisited in another work titled ‘Singing Letters’ which is discussed later in this chapter. For an excellent review of an exhibition titled, “Our True Intent is all for Your Delight: The John Hinde Butlin’s Photographs” held in The Gallery of Photography, Dublin, from Dec 6<sup>th</sup> 2003 – Jan 31<sup>st</sup> 2004, see URL: [http://www.recirca.com/cgi-bin/mysql/show\\_item.cgi?post\\_id=1910](http://www.recirca.com/cgi-bin/mysql/show_item.cgi?post_id=1910) (accessed 15/09/2013).



Fig. 11. Three film stills from: *Paradise*  
7.30mins/ regular 8mm film transferred to DVD /colour /sound/2011

*Paradise* introduces the idea of an ‘anthropological gaze’, both through the imagined presence of the famous anthropologist, Margaret Mead, and in the choice of the ‘authoritative voice-over’ to enable an exploration of the boundaries between official, academic, anthropological methods and the seemingly more, spontaneous, uncritical systems involved in creating a family’s ‘ethnographic memory’ (Boym, S., 2001).

I chose these sequences set in the ‘Butlin’s’ holiday camp because they are representative of social sites that grew out of burgeoning, post WWII consumerism and the beginnings of the commercialization and promotion of the ‘perfect’ nuclear family. This process of commodification is perfectly refracted and reflected through the nostalgic haze of the 8mm camera lens, also an integral component of this emergent consumer culture, designed to capture, for posterity, those intimate, ‘perfect family moments’. Through it I explore what happens when you simultaneously bring together different perspectives of the same site, for example: an Irish family’s emigration narrative in the context of emerging modern Britain in the early 1960s, the anthropological gaze, childhood and nostalgic longing.

Applying an ‘anthropological’ reading, the script permits a subtle, cultural and social analysis of the material to come into focus highlighting the thinking of the day. In the original footage the holiday park is seen through the eyes of ‘the father’ and we get a glimpse into an ordinary, 1960s, family at leisure. By adding a new voice-over script I set out to give these ‘innocent’ images a shift in meaning by disrupting the ‘father’s silent narration’ and - informed by Foucault’s writings - aligning the archive to power. Foucault maintains that ‘the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity’ (Foucault, M, 1986, p.24).

In contrast to the more lyrical, dreamlike tempo of the other two films in the triptych, from the outset *Paradise* assails the viewer with fast-paced, polyphonic, authoritative, documentary-style voice-overs. These extracts were all sourced from radio archives in ‘The British Broadcasting Company online Archives’<sup>113</sup> online access. In addition, the film montage includes a range of inter-titles and floating texts as well as the multi-layered soundtrack, incorporating interviews and songs.

Reminiscent of Renée Green’s experience in making *Partially Continued* (2002) (chapter three), *Paradise* explores the nostalgic site of childhood and personal autobiographical memories, which I attempt to weave into a broader context and site of social memory. During the 1950s and early 1960s, in both America and Britain, such organized leisure environments represented new sites, not only of individual, family and social memory, but sites in which new identities were being shaped. Family images and their relationship to wider historical contexts is the focus of cultural theorists like Marianne Hirsch, Roland Barthes, Patricia Zimmerman and Annette Kuhn, who argue that family images connect us to a sense of who we are, to a sense of our own mortality and to questions of ‘time’ in general.

*Paradise* introduces and explores the potential of a different narrative approach, as the family are *seen* but not *heard* and do not get to speak for themselves. Instead, they are represented imaginatively through the voices of a group of ‘experts’. These enunciators, all from slightly different perspectives, are heard discussing the personal life and work of Margaret Mead. I deliberately chose the character of Mead as she was one of the first in her field to popularize anthropology by using the communication tools of popular culture, such as TV and radio<sup>114</sup>, and she was known for studying family relationships.

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<sup>113</sup> URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/> (accessed 01/09/2010).

<sup>114</sup> Margaret Mead was a world-renowned American anthropologist, 1901-1978. Her theoretical perspective is critical for the enquiry on two counts. Firstly, she advocated and practiced a more human-centered methodology that brought her into close contact with her subjects through living and participating in their daily lives. Mead was the first anthropologist to look at human development in a cross-cultural perspective, advocating that individual “primitive” cultures and their relationships needed to be assessed on their own terms. Secondly, Mead was one of the first to use popular media, such as TV and radio chat shows, to introduce the scholarly insights of modern anthropology. Her own ideas on morality, sex,

The narrative shift in *Paradise* probes the relationship between personal and public archives. I collaged a series of voice-overs that represent a range of different perspectives, for example: the ‘authoritative voice’ of public and scholarly discourse, lines from Mead’s daughter speaking about her mother in a personal way, and a musical jingle referencing the idyllic island of Samoa – all appropriated from a range of original BBC online archival recordings. The strategy of voice-over enabled me to explore the processes of how we investigate, view and record ‘others’ and to examine what happens when we apply the same rationale to a humble collection of a family’s home movie sequences. In contrast to *Remembering*, in *Paradise* I develop more radically the ‘gap’ between the image and narration. For example, in *Paradise* there is an associative rather than a logical relationship between what we hear and what we see. Recalling my discussion of Matthew Buckingham’s ability to create spaces for the viewer/listener’s own imagination in his installation *Situation Leading to a Story*, my intention was to allow greater agency and opportunity for the viewer to make her own ‘imaginative’ associations through the dual device of narration and song.

Water again features as a metaphor in the film, with the initial scenes showing a slowed down panning shot of a very large indoor swimming facility. However, this time ‘water’ is depicted in its most socialised form, that is, a modern, contained, sanitised, leisure experience, housed indoors; excavated from its original and natural associations. In fact, we see how the natural environment is now being simulated and replaced with the

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marriage and women’s role in modern American and Western culture were deemed controversial, which, in turn, informed the 1960s ‘sexual revolution’. In the enquiry, the relationship between high and low culture is explored through the use of popular cultural items such as the home movie genre and ‘the radiogram’ to emphasise the constant cross-over between our everyday lived-experience and its more scholarly study, for example, through Anthropology and Philosophy. Although Mead’s contribution is acknowledged as hugely significant, it was somewhat over-shadowed after her death by a controversy over the objectivity of her studies and field notes for her research project in American Samoa, outlined in her famous book “Coming of age in Samoa: A psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization”, was first published in 1928 as a commercial book for public consumption, especially for middle-class American social groups, and radically departs from other purely academic ethnographies of the time. However her findings were criticised, for example, by fellow academic Derek Freeman – though this was never substantiated and has in turn been highly rebutted and criticised.

display of a number of colourful, plastic exotic parrots and foliage swinging from the ceiling.

As the last in the series, the film presents the viewer with a kind of final ‘statement’ on ideas previously articulated. Furthermore, as the last in a triptych, *Paradise* benefits from the experience of the accumulated artistic experimentation and is therefore perhaps more assured than the other two films in the way it critically engages and articulates its ideas through the home movie footage.

In conclusion, this sub-section examined how by reconfiguring home movie footage I was able to explore key trajectories of the enquiry by shifting the reuse of their original structure and meaning through, for example, by re-editing the sequences with voice overs, sound tracks and inter-titles. Conceived as a triptych, each short film builds on the previous one to draw on and explore the core question of how a family archive can be reinterpreted to speak back to wider issues of social memory and its relationship to identity formation, as seen through an everyday, ‘ground up’ filmic encounter with a family in and over time.

A lot of the imagery in the home movie footage, particularly in *Paradise*, may appear nostalgic and often ‘politically incorrect’ to a contemporary audience; for example, in *Paradise*, being allowed to film inside the public swimming pool area or the bathing beauty contest appears to represent a different era that constitutes a social memory where attitudes to women, children, film-making, individual privacy and ‘the male gaze’ are performed, both self-consciously and innocently, in front of the camera. And in many ways, for this researcher, this is one of the strengths of these records; that is, that the material is primarily emotionally-driven, in the personal pursuit of creating a record of the family’s own personal lives that is simultaneously creating a social and collective record. My intention was to conceptually rethink these images and bring them to a new audience - reformed and reframed with sound, these projections explore specific aspects

of memory, time and identity as a meditation and reflection not on the past, but on the relationship we have to these structures, beliefs and ideas in current times.

#### **4:1:2 Re-imagining personal records**

Throughout the enquiry, I have been arguing that how we categorise and commit our memories to the record (for the future) is crucial as it affects how we ascribe meaning to things, people and events, ultimately bestowing or removing the value invested in individual and broader social memories. In chapter two, I introduced the term ‘appropriation’ and its role in contemporary installation art practice and associations with ‘scavenging, replicating and remixing’ (Evans, D., 2009)<sup>115</sup>.

The act of ‘appropriation’ is a recurring strategy throughout the research process and here I introduce two works where I redeploy a piece of ‘found’ 1950s bedroom furniture, my father’s letters and a small album photograph to engage with, and comment on, a range of archival processes and their relationship to the processes of how we form our individual and collective memories and identity.

Firstly, in a work titled *Dresser*, I deploy a selection of the letters to create my own hybrid archive, that could be termed a ‘counter-archive’<sup>116</sup> as it both refers to and critiques traditional museological, archival processes while exploring fiction as a way to re-engage with these concerns. Secondly, I discuss the reasoning behind transforming a

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<sup>115</sup> ‘The term ‘Appropriation’ in contemporary art is associated with scavenging, replicating, or remixing. Many influential artists today continue the legacy of "stealing" images and forms from other makers. Among the diverse, often contestatory strategies included under the heading "appropriation" are the readymade, détournement, pastiche, rephotography, recombination, simulation and parody’. Extract taken from introduction to: *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, (2009), editor, David Evans (Paperback]), London: Co-published with Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.

<sup>116</sup>Charles Merewether uses the term ‘counter-archive’ in *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, published by MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Referring to the practice of an artists’ collective, he makes the observation that, “The Atlas Group seeks to form a counter-archival approach that challenges the very logic of an archival practice that gathers and stores evidence, not in order to provide the basis of judicial proceedings of crimes committed, but rather to contain the truth, reducing events and experiences to statistical data” (Merewether, C., 2006, p.17).



small, family-album photograph into a large photographic work to examine thresholds between private and social memory.

### ***Counter-archiving***

In *Dresser* I explore ideas, such as ‘the unconscious and subliminal’, ‘truth and fiction’ and ‘archivization’ and their influences and roles in how we archive the past. By interweaving factual accounts with fictional narratives I ask the viewer/reader to reconsider the meaning and function of how we produce, receive and categorise the past. By highlighting fragmentation and randomness and deploying Kuhn’s ‘memory work’ method, I set out to suggest different kinds of underlying connections and realities, such as the role of serendipity and the unconscious forces at play how we memory.

I observed the unfolding in memory texts of connections between memory and the past, memory and time, memory and place, memory and experience, memory and images, memory and the unconscious.

(Kuhn, A., 2002, p.5)



Fig. 12. Artist’s field research for *Dresser*  
Wooden and glass display cases, labelling system and light-protective leatherette coverings  
Natural History Museum of Ireland

Foucault's ideas on the 'constructedness of knowledge' – outlined in *Archaeology of Knowledge* - and his claim, that issues of ideology are constantly at stake in archival processes inform this work (Foucault, M., 2002a). Jacques Derrida's concept of 'archivization' also influences *Dresser's* conceptualisation. Derrida argues that the process of how we archive, that is, 'achivization', defines the type of knowledge and meanings we find in the archive. Derrida uses Sigmund Freud's archive as an example, stating that if Freud and his colleagues had access to modern technologies like fax, typewriter, computer and internet we would encounter Freud's writings and his hypotheses in a completely different way which would essentially change their meaning (Derrida, J., 1998, p.15-17).

By undermining a linear approach to time and embracing the fragmentary, the irrational and the fictitious, my intention was to demonstrate how art processes can challenge the way we perceive the authority of the archive, its procedures and origins and to question the document as truth-record. In *The Order of Things* Foucault outlines how different taxonomic systems alter how we view the past, and affect our value judgments of it (Foucault, M., 2000b, p.xii).



*Dresser*

Fig. 13. Appropriated 1950s walnut veneered bedroom dresser with six drawers. Modified with leatherette, glass, mirror, brass, labels and original archival letters. Dims: h.74 x w.149 x d.40 cms

Though I had the option of constructing an archival cabinet to display the letters, appropriation offered me far more opportunities to allude to social and cultural references outside of the artwork, that is, the upward mobility implied by the lacquered veneered 1950s piece of bedroom furniture. The physical appearance of *Dresser* suggests the merging of two oppositional sites of experience, that is, the privacy of the bedroom with the public space of the museum. By appropriating the visual signs associated with traditional display cabinets that house the sensitive and fragile museum acquisitions, (historical documents, delicate textiles and biological artefacts), I sought to imply the vulnerability of the letters – literally and emotionally. Deploying the familiar, visual language of the museum - the pull-up, light-sensitive, leatherette covering; the interior linen display cloth, glass panel, mirror, the card labelling system and brass signage - helped me create an archival system that, though referencing the official archival cabinet, still retains its previous history, tactile qualities and former incarnation as a personal piece of 1950s bedroom furniture.

There are three conceptual ideas explored in *Dresser*. The first of these is the issue of agency and the subjective voice. I present a small set of seven letters directly under glass on the top of the cabinet with labelling methods that critique the way traditional taxonomic systems elevate the rational and objective, omitting any reference to subjective and emotive origins. Derrida claims that the archive is a mediation between two conflicting unconscious forces, the Death drive (archive destroying) and Eros (conservation) and in *Dresser* I suggest another way of creating or at least classifying life's experiences that incorporates uncertainty and feelings of loss, desire and love and the fragmentary nature of memory.

By reclassifying the letters with a set of labels I wanted to suggest a new way of reframing or recontextualising their content. They present a more lyrical alternative that suggests unconscious or at least, contingent forces while appropriating key taxonomical terms, for example: 'Genus', 'Location' and 'Date'. The information I supply is contextualised by a heightened subjective, emotive, narrative approach: hinting at the limitations of such processes in archiving as well as in memory itself, questioning how

we approached the past through facts and data. I selected seven letters (referencing the seven days of the week) that, when put in a series, loosely tell the story of my father's solo arrival to England, circa 1950-1951. They were chosen to loosely represent different stages of an immigrant's arrival into a new place which spans the course of many months. For example and in order: (1) arrival (my father's), (2) initial settling in period, (3) exploring his physical surroundings, (4) adapting to a new environment, (5) job seeking, (6) loneliness, (7) waiting, (8) arrival again (this time my mother's).

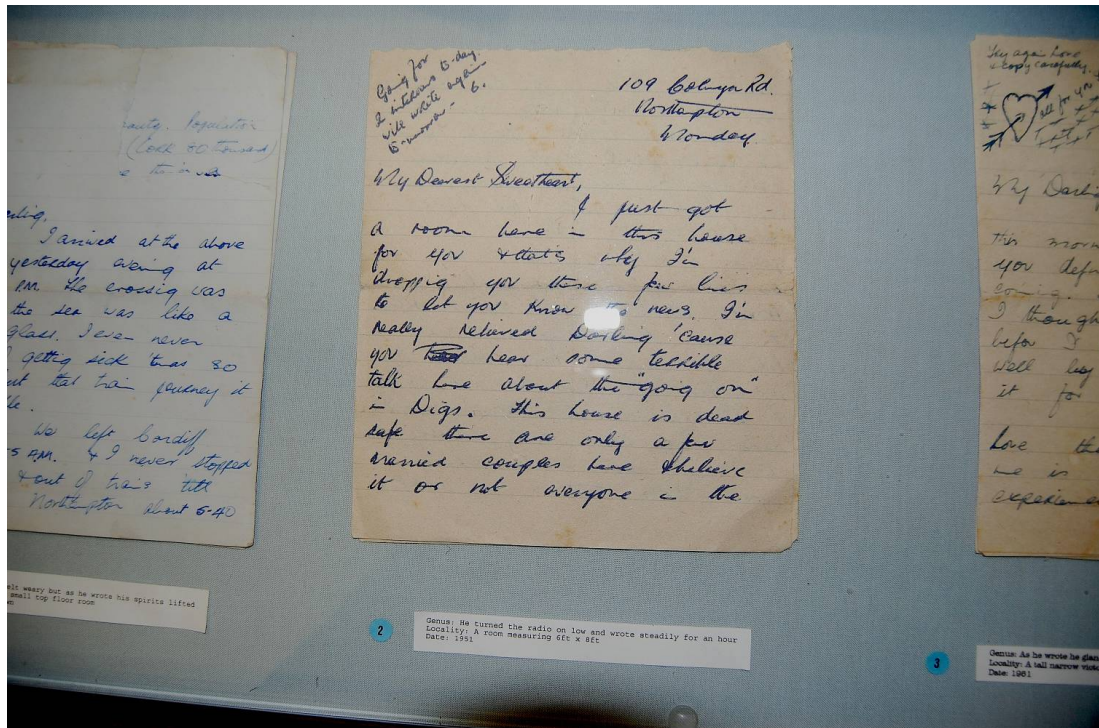
Label no 5.

*Genus:* The wind blew the papers, he got up and closed the window and continued writing

*Locality:* A room with a window facing out the back

*Date:* 1952

The new taxonomy suggests the ongoing pull and influence of the unconscious - reminiscent of dreams and owes more to the illusive structure of dreams or memory than to traditional processes of Science or History. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz's concept of 'Interpretative Anthropology' and what he describes as 'the fluid and fragmentary nature of interpreting any culture...' (Geertz, C., 1997, p.29) informed how I approached the labels. In trying to capture fleeting emotions and images, minor personal observations and descriptions of everyday, familiar locations, I wanted to suggest the underlying transience of the human condition and the malleability of memory, informing the minor happenings that constitute our social and cultural experience of the everyday.



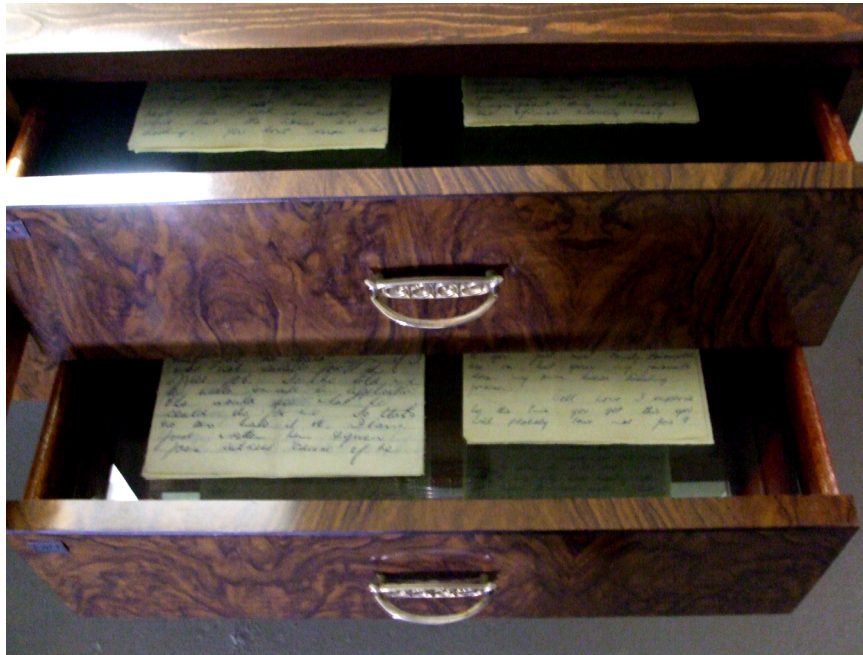
Detail: *Dresser*  
 Fig. 14. Detail: Handwritten archival letter from top case showing labelling  
 Dims: h.74 x w.149 x d.40 cms

The new taxonomy suggests the ongoing pull and influence of the unconscious - reminiscent of dreams. Fleeting emotions and images, minor personal observations and descriptions of everyday, familiar locations, seek to suggest the underlying transience of the human condition and the malleability of memory, informing the minor happenings that constitute lived experience and in turn asking the reader to meditate not only on factual data but also on the inconclusive, fragmentary nature of attempts to organise rational explanations for how and why we do things. This resonates with Geertz's 'interpretative ethnographic' approach discussed earlier that emphasises the need to stay open to the fragmentary nature of how culture operates, what Geertz refers to as 'the fluid and fragmentary nature of interpreting any culture...' (Geertz, C., 1997, p.29)

The second key conceptual concern of *Dresser* is 'truth' in the archive. I remodelled the six original pull-out drawers of the cabinet and displayed within each a set of letters (without labels), carefully organised under multiple layers of glass and mirrors, which



the viewer is encouraged to pull out and examine. Each drawer now carries a small brass plaque reading ‘pull’.



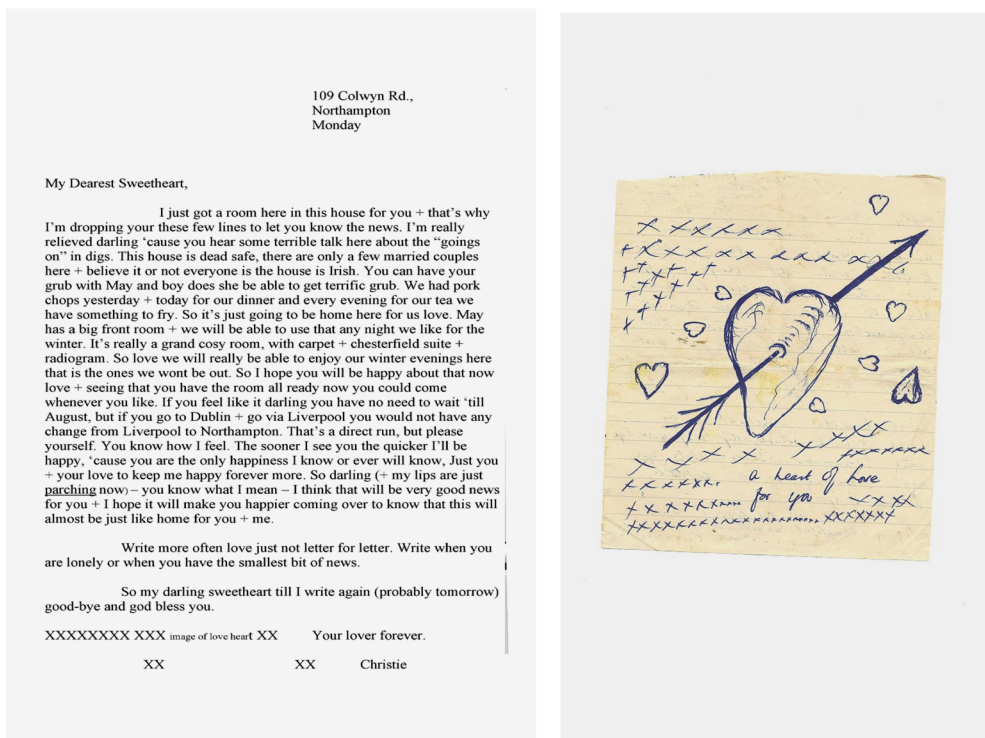
Detail: *Dresser*

Fig. 15. Appropriated 1950s walnut veneered bedroom dresser with six drawers. Modified with leatherette, glass, mirror, brass, labels and original archival letters. Dims: h.74 x w.149 x d.40 cms

This element of *Dresser* explores the notion of ‘the truth document’, primarily through an act of forgery. This involved several digital, photographic processes, including: copying, reversing and reprinting on archival paper the last page from the selection of letters. Earlier, discussing the artist Matthew Buckingham’s work *Situation Leading to a Story*, I spoke about how, through acts of fiction, Buckingham derails the viewer’s sense of certainty in what he/she experiences as the ‘truth’ of the story. Similarly, in *Dresser* I explore what happens when through a gesture of textual forgery it ‘appears’ the viewer is now given the opportunity to read the initial and concluding pages of selected letters, which would appear to bestow greater agency on the reader. But, in actuality, this ‘more complete account’ has only been made possible through a series of digital manipulations, that is, in order for the page’s reflection to be legible – to the viewer – the writing would have to remain in reverse (the reversal of the mirror reversed).

This ‘reversal of a reversal’ intends to set up a context for questioning the ‘truth of the archive’, unsettling any notion that the archive can be viewed as something innocent or the last repository of veracity, or that a singular ‘truth’ is in fact ever possible.

The third and final issue under review in *Dresser* examines the manner or mode of archiving, or what Derrida refers to as ‘archivization’ (Derrida, J., 1998, pp.16-17). Here I transfer the human presence visible in the hand-written letters to a formal typed script to explore the concept that ‘archivization produces as much as it records the event’ (Derrida, J., 1998, p.17).



Details: Archival letter

Fig 16. Left: Typed transcript. Right: Reverse page of original hand written letter.  
Each original letters approx dims: h.74 x w.149 x d.40 cms

This strategy allowed me to examine the transformational effects incorporated into the archival process or, to quote Derrida, ‘the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of ‘the *archivable* content’ even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future’ (Derrida, J., 1998, p.17), examined here in

the context of a family archive. By transferring the letters into a formal, flat, official presentation format I wanted to highlight the affect of a process disturbs the original physical and emotional presence. Arguably, this gesture demonstrates the impact of the medium (of archiving) on our perception of the past while raising questions about the archive's official claims to authenticity and 'truth' (Foucault, M., 2000a).

I typed out the seven original hand-written letters (displayed under glass above) and laminated them in a style regularly used by museums. These are left out nearby for visitors to peruse as forms of 'official' handouts. With this gesture I hoped to draw attention to and suggest the tension between two types of presentation (a) the original physical and emotional style of hand-letter writing, and (b) the mono-typed, flat and shiny surface indicative of administration. This strategy of presenting the viewer with two contrasting formats was intended to provoke a meditation on what can be lost in the exchange and how, over time and imperceptibly, modes of communication become redundant, which will effect how the archive is constituted (Derrida, J., 1998, p.17). The viewer experiences two types of documentation, both contain the same information but something has been radically altered or omitted from the original, that is the trace of the writer's hand, i.e. his unique, embodied presence, which cannot be reproduced.

### ***Photography - thresholds***

Photographs can more easily show us what we wish our family to be, and therefore, what, most frequently, it is not.

(Hirsh, M., 1999, p.8)

Next, I discuss how I transformed a small, black and white, family album photograph. Though there were many photographs used for the purposes of 'photo-elicitation', for example, during the interviews with my mother and the aunts, this image is the only one that I made into an artwork. There are four factors that influenced my decision in selecting this photo: (a) my mother's relationship to the photograph, (b) the location - it was taken on a bridge, (c) the hand-written inscriptions and other codes on the back of



the photograph, and (d) its generational quality and sense of movement – it depicts three women from one family walking.

My mother told me that this was one of her favourite photos, chiefly because of what she maintains it conceals. On this day, as she explained, she is ‘escaping’ – her own term – to England and her sister and mother are accompanying her to the port to catch the boat. “I was very happy, nervous and delighted to be getting away and couldn’t wait, in fact, I found it hard to find a tear”, she mischievously told me.

As has been well documented, there is belatedness of photographic looking and a temporal disjunction between the moment an image is taken and the moment it is developed and viewed; a concept I previously examined in my discussion of Roland Barthes’ essay, ‘Winter Garden’ in *Camera Lucida* (1980). The concept of a photograph as ‘a crossing over’, a gateway or ‘bridge’ to other realities aligns the photograph to alternative discourses, it creates an opening in the present to something in the past that goes beyond the information that it records. This disjunction allows other kinds of creative interpretations to emerge and it is here, in this gap, that *Street Portrait* is positioned.

Walter Benjamin was one of the first to theorise the critical role that photography was to play in our lives, which he addressed in two key essays: ‘The History Of Photography (1931)’<sup>117</sup> and ‘The work of art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (Benjamin, W., 1999a, pp.211-244). In the former, Benjamin discusses how he searches for ‘the here and now’ in photographs in order to find ‘the tiny spark of contingency’ (Benjamin, W., 2005, p.234). For Benjamin, photographs can mediate between ‘then and now’ and act not only to tell a story but also as a mediator between worlds, between individuals and the social and cultural networks we are bound up in. At once a material object and a multitude of paths, the photograph allows us to think about thresholds. In her

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<sup>117</sup> This essay is available as a downloadable PDF at URL: <http://imagineallthepeople.info/Benjamin.pdf>. (Accessed 30/08/2013).

groundbreaking book, *On Photography* (1977) Susan Sontag also alludes to this idea of mediation when she observes, “all photographs are *momento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability” (Sontag, S., 2002, p.15).

Returning to Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* he famously analyses the relationship between photography, recording and memory to suggest that photography is asymbolic, irreducible to the codes of language or culture, acting on the body as much as on the mind (Barthes, R., 2000a). In the oft-cited essay known as ‘Winter Garden’ the author gives a personal example of what this means (Barthes, R., 2000a, pp.65-71). He writes movingly about how, in his grief, he attempts to find a photograph that would reconnect him to his deceased mother and help him to negotiate ‘the threshold’ between the living and the dead, and thus reunite him through memory with his beloved mother.

However, Barthes’ quest is futile as he finds the inertness of the photographic images (of his mother) distances him even further, by fixing her image in time but not capturing ‘the essence’ of the subject. Barthes’ approach helps me to conceptualise *Street Portrait*. His meditation on death, photography and memory is a powerful evocation of the power of photography to give us access to other worlds and it is through a similar analytical framework that I approach *Street Portrait* to navigate the potential to create from a personal family photograph a powerful social document and cultural memory.

The image is appropriated and transformed in four distinct ways to order to place it into a new context: (a) I digitally scan, ‘clean up’ and then magnify the original photo to life-size before printing it on heavy, photographic paper, (b) I mount the original and a copy of the back of the photo and present them side by side, (c) I install both pieces in the gallery space in relationship to each other, (d) the new configuration is accompanied with typed hand-outs that tell a story about the production of the ‘street portrait’ - gleaned from the codes and data on the back of the original photograph.

Firstly, the combined gestures of ‘cleaning up’ and magnification - using digital technology - have the effect of removing the photograph from its origins, that is, the private domain of the family album. However, the relationship between empowerment (largeness) and its opposite, disempowerment (littleness), is complex and I was aware that in employing such a gesture I could easily lose the ‘aura’ or presence of the original. Certainly, the new larger print asserts a new and different authority, the scale substantially alters the viewer’s encounter with the image as this print now addresses the spectator’s own physical proportions and the gesture of ‘the walking women’ also takes on a new visibility, moving it away from the small-scale, objective and temporal into a domain where movement, gesture and the body all play significant roles.

Furthermore, the gesture of changing the medium, scale and original ‘presence’ of the archival material could be conceptualised in terms of what Derrida describes as a process of ‘archivization’ (Derrida, J., 1998, pp.16-18); this concept already discussed earlier through the artwork *Dresser*, where I transferred a selection of the archival letters into laminated handouts.

Secondly, by displaying the original photo alongside the new facsimile, the viewer encounters the ‘original’ document, as material object and memory that (unlike its ‘copy’) bears all the traces of time and organically enduring in the material world, for example, by being constantly handled, looked at and passed around by many hands. I wanted to explore a family image as a ‘transitional moment’, a ‘threshold’ or ‘cross over’ and how this can be articulated in the context of social or shared collective memory through employing artistic strategies as a way to mediate between the past and the present. The location of the photo on the bridge to my mind complements the underlying themes, adding another layer to the multiple narratives in the work.



*Street Portrait (i)*

Fig. 17. Dimensions of enlarged, enhanced print: h.107 x w.66 cms  
Original photograph attributed to Dublin's iconic Street Photographer, Arthur Field.

The next component of the artwork, relates to the inscription on the back of the small photo that supplies an alternative narrative or literal (in this case) 'back story' and allows me to contextualise a personal, family portrait in the mode of its production that speaks back to much wider social, cultural and even historical networks. Responding to the Hirsh quotation given at the outset, where she suggests that family photos are never

what they seem to be, I was curious about the origins of the photograph as it was clearly not the usual sort of posed, family snapshot. The photograph becomes more complex when I decide to focus on the codes and numbers on the back of the photograph.

Through internet research and interviewing professional photographers - I discovered that the photo was in fact taken by a well-known street photographer working in Dublin at that time, known as Arthur Field. Street photography is now an outmoded practice in Ireland but was popular from the mid 1940s - mid 1970s.

With their 'no pose', natural composition, such processes are marked by their anonymity and spontaneity, and as there was no obligation to redeem the photo there was always the chance that this photo could have remained uncollected, in a pile of unprinted negatives. The context of the photo and my mother's reason for being in Dublin on O'Connell bridge in August 1951 refers to a much larger social happening that saw Ireland's young people emigrating to England in their droves <sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>118</sup> It is estimated that half a million people emigrated out of Ireland in the 1950s, mostly to Britain, approximately 45,000 per annum. The scale of the experience demands attention and analysis and my interest is in finding ways to reflect this, through what was for so many such a comprehensive family experience, that is with many from the same family eventually following each other to Britain and the topic of emigration was one that was perceived and discussed as 'a family event'. In a way this photograph is a prime example of what the historian Liam Ryan notes as the level of family involvement. In many circumstances (including my mother's case) a particularly negative attitude prevailed, where the petty bourgeois of the towns and villages of Ireland saw moving to 'sinful Britain' as 'a threat that the family name might be tainted' (Ryan, L., 1990, p.50).



***Street Portrait (ii)***

Fig. 18. Left: Original photo: Dims h.16 x w.11cms.

Right: Reverse of photograph: Hand-written inscription reads “7/8/58  
in Dublin, (Mary leaving for England)”

Original photograph attributed to Dublin’s iconic street photographer, Arthur Field.

The fourth and final element in the creation of *Street Portrait* takes place at the site of exhibition, where I circulate a supplementary piece of text: a gallery handout sheet with a short biography of the street photographer, Arthur Field<sup>119</sup> (refer to the appendix). Visitors are encouraged to take one and read about the photographer’s relationship to this photograph, thus expanding the site once more away from the intimacy of the family photo album through a reportage narrative pertinent to the photo’s cultural and social context.

<sup>119</sup> Currently there is a project proposal looking for funding to archive Arthur Field’s vast collection of ‘street portraits’, all taken in and around O’Connell Bridge. The project proposes to collect as many of these negatives and photographs from the public as possible, in order to create a kind of Irish social archive – seen through the eyes of one man. It is estimated there could be as many as 500,000 spanning three decades 1940s-1970s. For more details see URL: <http://www.irishcentral.com/ent/Arthur-Fields-famed-photographer-on-OConnell-Bridge-to-be-subject-of-documentary-220492721.html>, (accessed 09/09/201).

Thus, I propose that *Street Portrait* demonstrates a new way to explore the past through an image that inhabits two locations at once. Firstly, as a part of a family's personal narrative found in the pages of a family album and secondly, constituting an image that circulates in a much wider social and public arena. I propose that a 'street photograph' could be considered a type of accidental, social archive because, though commercially driven, such images still serve a valuable, social function perhaps even more relevant due to a lack of over determinedness. This arbitrariness, is born out by the fact that so many of these images were never developed or collected but remained just as negatives and numbers in a limbo – unable to cross over into the light and become developed images. This suggests a relationship between the procedure of analogue photography, memory and the personal image of my mother caught up in the act of escaping that reflects a certain historical moment in time.

Through a series of artistic interventions I took such a 'street snapshot' and installed it in a new combined installation employing affect, scale, movement and viewer interaction by, (a) the installation of the large digital photograph, (b) displaying the original and its inverse side by side and (c) the accompanying text that allows the reader to know the photograph's provenance or at least what I propose it is (I have no way of proving it). I propose that through an encounter with all these multiple narratives, the viewer is encouraged to 'cross over' and participate in a social memory – which according to Halbwachs is never static but continually being changed and added to over time (Halbwachs, 1980).

#### **4:1:3 Redeploying material memories in a social context**

Next, I discuss a single artwork that, like *Dresser*, began with appropriating a piece of home furniture - a radiogram<sup>120</sup>. However, this time there are a number of differences,

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<sup>120</sup> A radiogram is essentially a unit comprising a radio and record player. It became hugely popular after WWII, primarily driven by the growing interest in vinyl records. The radiogram became fashionable as a piece of modern furniture between the early 1950s and the 1960s - the period this enquiry is set in. It was generally perceived as a piece of glamorous furniture that represented upward mobility and the cutting

such as: (a) it is not a ‘found’ object but a ‘real’ family artefact, (b) its provenance is not the bedroom but the collective, family, living room. It represents the aspirations of the family’s life in England. For example, this piece - along with some other special items, came ‘home’ with the family to Ireland in 1966 and henceforth was known as ‘the London furniture’. It therefore embodies the family’s hopes, status and upward mobility. This is also evidenced in how the image of the radiogram is employed in the original home movie footage (refer to the discussion of the short film *Remembering is a From of Forgetting* previously). In *Radiogram* I appropriate the ‘actual’ radiogram and imaginatively reconfigure it into a sculpture with sound to explore its potential as a ‘material memory’ (Kwint, M. et al, 1999) and to articulate the family record through Halbwachs’ concept of ‘collective memory’ (Halbwachs, M., 1992).

In chapter one I discussed how the cultural historian, Marius Kwint, believes that memories are significantly bound and defined by their material presence in many ways, for example, ‘objects furnish recollection’, ‘constitute our picture of the past’, ‘stimulate memory’ (including unconsciously), ‘form records’ and, through these processes, establish a shared sense of belonging (Kwint, M. et al, 1999, p.2). Through bringing together these ideas I hope to develop some understanding of collective notions of the past by approaching objects, structures, and landscapes as nodes of social memory that are rich in overlapping human interpretations.

In chapter one I discussed how first Henri Bergson (1896) and later Maurice Halbwachs (1950) note that individual memory exists within a certain social context and thus overlaps in many ways with the memory of others. Halbwachs shifted the focus from individual memory to social memory by creating the term ‘collective memory’, also known as ‘social memory’ and ‘cultural memory’ depending on the disciplinary

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edge in modern family home entertainment. It combined a three-way band valve radio and record player, with a turntable for playing a range of records from 33 1/3 rpm (long playing) to 45 rpm (singles).



approach. In *On Collective Memory* (1950) - focusing on the family unit - Halbwachs interrogated the social contexts of collective memory and explored the narrative and logic of family life from a sociological perspective (Halbwachs, M., 1992, pp. 54-83).

My concern in *Radiogram* is to give artistic form to how social processes, environments, customs, spaces and objects influence not only people's personal memories in their own lifetimes, but also a community's shared memories of the past. Previously, in the film triptych, I explored the potential of family memory and its relationship to identity formation by intertwining and over-lapping a range of autobiographical, biographical and documentary narratives to explore how different perspectives alter our view of the past and in *Radiogram* I continue this exploration in a three dimensional tactile sculpture.

To create *Radiogram* I employ the transformational processes of sculpture, appropriation and sound collage. The work is an interactive sculpture consisting of two core elements, six new 'records' and a new soundtrack (which is analysed under the next sub-heading 'sounding the archive'). These artistic strategies were the tools I used to re-image an alternative family 'record'. My intention was to expand, from the specific to the general and relocate the family's personal archive into wider cultural belief systems and broader social contexts. I draw on the family's 'ground up' everyday experiences, locations and the 'intimate typology' (Bachelard, G., 1994) of the material world surrounding them

By making this sculpture I am looking for creative ways to articulate some of the key issues of the enquiry such as 'the time of the family archive', 'who speaks, who has agency' and 'what role does fiction play in these multiple, over-lapping narratives'. I explore what Kwint refers to as a material object's ability to 'stimulate memory', by deploying a piece of 1960s furniture as a trigger in the remembering process (sometimes unconscious). In *Radiogram* I also examine how objects 'form records', that is, that a material object creates a palpable trace of its own physical past. Through such processes,

I hope to explore how the material world contributes to our sense of personal and collective identity (Kwint, M., 1999, p.2).

Developing ideas explored in *Dresser*, I once again appropriated the visual language associated with traditional museum and archival record keeping (see illustrations below). I researched storage systems that are designed to hold and preserve fragile works in a transparent manner particularly those designs that are interactive, that is, allow public access, removal, perusal and replacement. An encounter in The Textile Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum influenced me in the design of a set of six new mixed media ‘records’. My new files were specifically designed to ‘return’ and fit into the pre-existing slots on either side of the turntable that once held a selection of the family’s record collection.



Fig. 19. Artist’s field research trip June 2010 into preservation and storage techniques  
for the artwork *Radiogram*  
The Victoria and Albert Museum, London: Textile Department 20.



Fig. 20. Detail: Artist's field research June 2010 into preservation and storage techniques for the artwork *Radiogram*  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London: Textile Department 20.



Two details of *Radiogram*

Fig. 21. Original 1960s radiogram, oak veneer, wood, sound track: Dimensions: h.77 x w.106 x d.42 cms. Details show six pull-out files in perspex, vinyl, and wood files. Individual dims: h.30 x w.30 x d.4 cms.

These new 'records' reinterpret the familial emigration experience 'from below'<sup>121</sup>, drawing on oral histories, the home movie footage and the letters, and by employing a

<sup>121</sup> This is a reference to the term 'History from below'. This strand of history studies emerged with a particular group of English historians, circa 1960s. Notable among them was Edward P. Thompson who was influential in forming the History Workshop movement at Ruskin College. The group's studies drew on labour history and women's history. They were interested in 'oral history', as well as encouraging the

range of sculptural techniques and strategies such as: appropriation, digital processes, blurring fact and fiction, and employing several narrative perspectives (autobiographical, biographical and documentary). By fiction, I don't necessarily refer to information that is not true, rather I mean that these are 'constructed' stories about real events – which is a position associated with oral histories (discussed in chapter two). I devised a coded, classification system for the outside spine of each of the six files that indicates the space, time and content of each vinyl 'record'. These were drawn from childhood memories, stories circulating in the family and the new perspectives that emerged from the family's oral histories. The emphasis here is on a type of remembering in which persons establish a link between themselves, others and past events, rather than simple recording 'what happened'.

The new typology divides the family experience into six time zones and locations that span 1950 -1966 which is the time frame of the enquiry and points to important family locations, such as, Portsmouth, Northampton and London and other more lyrical sites, hard to pin down, such as the space of 'emigration'.

One key strategy was creating my own 1950s and 1960s record labels as a form of 'cultural memory', for example, by erasing the original song list and replacing it with a new typology. This process of 'addition and erasure' was a way to create twelve unique record labels (front and back of each record) that are near-replicas of the originals but now chronicle the family in time and from many different locations. However unlike forgery, this kind of artistic appropriation allows the visitor to have a transformative experience by putting the viewer in the position where they have a dual experience, that is, of both recognising the original provenance of the image while also placing it into a new context. By bringing together the interior, private world of the family with the public site of the archive, I wanted to re-evaluate, re-imagine and re-encounter family

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participation of non-academics. Over time the term grew to denote any history that emerges from the experience and viewpoint of the 'ordinary' man or woman on the street – rather than the actions of 'great men' or other political leaders.

and social memory through reconfiguring these ordinary, consumer artefacts into cultural artefacts and material memories embedded in a specific time-frame.

In chapter three I discussed the role of subjective and unconscious memory in grounding and narrating a family story through Vivienne Dick's film *A Skinny Little Man Attacked Daddy*. In creating the new song listings I employ a range of real and 'reconstructed' special moments and memories in different narrative formats that include: first, second, and third person positions. For example, each album now lists new song titles that allude to a range of narrative approaches such as, autobiographical (my birth in Portsmouth, England), biographical (key moments in my parents early emigration experience) or documentary (contingent moments in history) and lyrical (fictional song titles referring to an Irish emigration experience).

The design of the files (with handles) invites the visitor to interact with them, that is, to pull out, read and return the 'records' from one of the two side compartments, and through this gesture become - momentarily at least - a type of archivist. Art Critic Claire Bishop observes that... 'this activation is, moreover, regarded as emancipatory, since it is analogous with the viewer's engagement in the world. A transitive relationship therefore comes to be implied between 'activated spectatorship' and active engagement in the social-political arena' (Bishop, C., 2005, p.11).



Fig. 22. Detail *Radiogram*: Individual vinyl record, in perspex and wood with brass handle





Two details of record labels: *Radiogram*  
Fig. 23. 2/12 digitally altered album labels

In summary, *Radiogram* is a key work that was made towards the end of the research project and synthesizes several of the core concerns with the methodology and artistic strategies of the enquiry. In *Radiogram* I articulate how personal, family and social memories are constantly intersecting and informing each other by my appropriation of a 1960s popular, home entertainment system and its cultural associations with a Post World War II economic environment of social upward mobility and burgeoning consumerism. Drawing on such processes as: ethnography, oral histories, sculptural techniques, digital photography and appropriation allowed me to investigate and demonstrate how time, agency, identity are an integral part of the archival process where ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’ frequently intertwine and are interchangeable.

In chapter three I looked at how Renée Green reconfigured her personal family history to examine wider social histories through reconfiguring a series of her father’s home movie slides. A new series of vinyl ‘records’ were an integral aspect of the artwork allowing the viewer to be actively engaged with the artwork, while proposing a visual and literal pun on the original collection. By interweaving autobiographical, biographical, documentary and lyrical narratives I wanted to find more subtle,

subliminal and sensory ways to articulate a selection of everyday customs, aspirations, myths and stories of one Irish, emigration family, during the period 1950-1966, and link these to broader social and popular culture. Through various processes like blurring fact and fiction and employing multiple narratives, I attempted to create a ‘counter-archive’ that could offer an alternative chronicle of the family’s time spent in England while exploring how concepts like time and experience are compressed by memory and continue to influence in the present.

#### **4:1:4 Sounding the archive**

This subsection is a reflection upon research into sound, memory and the archive – begun in the film triptych - and developed here by focusing on the role of ‘sound memory’. There are two sound works under review titled respectively, *Radiogram* (soundtrack) and *Singing Letters*.

In chapter two I discussed how the senses were an integral part of the research process through exploring writers like Sara Pink, writing in *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009), who emphasise the role of the senses both in *how* we research and in *what* we research. Here I focus on the medium of sound and the voice, which writer and critical theorist Joan Gibbons, writing in *Contemporary Art and Memory* (2007) believes has such creative potential for contemporary artistic research on memory (Gibbons, J., 2007, pp. 48-51). She argues that... ‘The rhythmic and emotional charge of music and lyrics has a particularly tenacious hold on memory, which, as with photography, is due in a large part to its indexical nature’ (Gibbons, J., 2007, p.48). What is pertinent to the enquiry is how Gibbons implies that sound, voice, singing connect us in different, more direct, and emotional way that is harder to resist or ignore because ‘The emotion generated by music, is a direct trace of a bodily movement on an instrument or the voice, relayed to the ear and body of the listener’ (ibid p.48).

In the following two pieces I explore the emotional terrain of sound and its ability to bring us into an encounter with the past in ways that are not only conscious but also

resonate directly with our physical bodies. Gibbons draws on Walter Benjamin who notes that one of sound's potential and affect is "the ability to reactivate the original experience" (Gibbons, J., 2007, p.48). In the sculptural sound-works under review here, I explore the concept of 'sound memory' in relationship to family, place and identity.

Scholar Leslie C. Morris in her essay titled, 'The Sound of Memory', also explores sound in her 'conceptualization of the circulation of memory', which, she maintains is still 'largely unexplored – eclipsed by the primacy of the visual' (Morris L., 2001, pp. 368- 369). Although Morris's essay is framed within 'the echo of the Shoah' (Holocaust) her ideas are relevant to the enquiry primarily because of her use of the term 'sound memory', which is not the same as 'the memory of sound'. As she explains, 'the sound of memory can be a tangible recording of how an event is remembered acoustically, while the memory of sound presupposes a melancholic relationship to the sound that once was and is now lost.'<sup>122</sup>

Morris continues by arguing that 'the sound of memory' is 'more elusive, fragile and transient than the visual sites of memory' and, unlike the other senses, requires 'a medium for its transmission' (Morris, L., 2001, p. 368). This quality, or what Morris calls the lack of 'a frame for the aural', opens up many imaginative possibilities that allow me to rethink the potential of sound as a conceptual tool to explore the circulation of memory. As Morris emphasises,

Thus my call for a turn to the aural is not a call for a move away from the visual; rather, by exploring the repetition of sound and the echo of memory in texts (poetic, filmic, visual) we can find, in the interstices between sight and sound, additional layers in the production and creation of memory.

(Morris, 2001, p. 377)

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<sup>122</sup> Morris gives an example of how this concept is deployed in Marcel Beyer's novel *Flughunde* (1995). She argues that in it, Beyer takes up the question of 'sound memory' in the particular context of WWII and the sound of war... "The narrator of the novel Herr Karnau, is a sound engineer hired to rig up a complicated public-address system for a large Nazi rally". In addition she notes, and this is particularly relevant for my enquiry, how 'Beyer also provides an imaginative way of constructing subjectivity through the voice, which the narrator likens to a state of originary wholeness that is then disrupted through the use of the vocal cords' (Morris, 2001, p.374).



Increasingly, sound appears as an integral part of contemporary art practice<sup>123</sup>, as I demonstrated previously in my discussion of the artists Matthew Buckingham, Renée Green and Vivienne Dick who explore sound as a strategy in their practices through voice-over, mechanical sounds, ambient family narratives or ‘sotto voce’<sup>124</sup>.

(Please open Disc One: The Artworks *Radiogram*)

The first sound work I discuss is a key component of the sculpture *Radiogram*. My intention was to try to deploy sound, not in a subservient, illustrative way (a role it is sometimes reduced to), but instead as a primary, conceptual tool to address issues concerning agency and memory. Gibbon and Morris, in their conceptualisation of sound both suggest that the concept of ‘sound memory’ cannot be reduced to merely the interpretation of visual data in sound (Morris, L., 2001, p.; Gibbons, J., p. 2007). Instead, they argue, that this form of memory has the potential to restore sound as a separate discourse that runs parallel to the visual image in order to make the viewer aware of the hidden functions that sound normally fulfils in our life in general, and in particular in our recollection of that lived experience, which they refer to as ‘sound memory’. As Gibbons notes, this ‘takes memory from the circumscribed realm of programmed commemoration to the more expansive realm of sensation and association, so that memory-work’ becomes more subliminal. (Gibbons, J., 2007, p.49).

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<sup>123</sup>Increasingly, the potential of the human voice and the medium of sound is a dynamic presence in contemporary art practice. A fact borne out by the 2010 Turner Prize, when Scottish artist, Susan Philipsz became the first ever artist to win this coveted award with a sound work. Artists take many approaches to exploring sound and the human voice, for example; (a) as intimate guide - Janet Cardiff: ‘The Missing Voice (Case Study B)’ commissioned in 1999, (b) as disembodied singer - Susan Philipsz: ‘Lowlands’ (2010), (c) historical absences - Susan Hiller: ‘The Last Silent Movie Show’, (2007), (d) exploring the relationship between sound and architectural space – Bill Fontana: ‘Distant Trains’, (1984). These contemporary art works review sound’s potential and characteristic invisibleness and explore its physical properties and emotive, mnemonic and historical resonances for creative and imaginative purposes.

<sup>124</sup>Sotto Voce is Italian for ‘under – the voice’ or in soft tones, so as not to be overheard; in an undertone. Merriam-Websters’ online dictionary defines it as: ‘under the breath: in an undertone; *also*: in a private manner’ URL: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sotto%20voce> (accessed 27/08/’13).

One of the key strategies employed in *Radiogram*'s soundtrack is collage or montage. Jonathan Miles in his essay 'The Fragment, Aphorism & Collage', observes that collage...

in-itself is not an image but an assembly of found material cut or edited into an assembly of parts, in the becoming a new co-belonging. Rather than being a production, it is closer to being an eruption, offering a rapture of an oscillating tension of parts on the edge of chaos. Put in another way, it is representation passing into the presentation of an 'unworking' of the image<sup>125</sup>.

Employing this key gesture I set out to explore how memories are created and remembered in the mind and *felt* within the body, to create a space which opens the listener up to a range of fragments, that never fully complete a total image but rather suggest a range of fluid sites merging one into another. In this way I explored the subject of memory through the body, voice, movement and sound within the context of understanding how we "hear" the past and evoke our acoustic memories as we move, act and remember in our environment and in relationship to others. The soundtrack is an integral aspect of the artwork and explores the concept of 'the struggle for memory'. The sound appears to emanate from the radiogram and this in turn is activated by the viewer's approach,

The soundtrack was created by collaging approximately forty three individual files, that range in length from 5 seconds to 1:45 minutes drawn from many sources, for example, (a) snippets of oral interviews (b) live and archival digital recordings of outdoor environments pertaining to travel, radio commentators, static radio interference and fragments from a 1960s iconic pop song, titled, *Downtown*, sung by British pop star, Petula Clark<sup>126</sup>, (c) one repetitive abstract sound of a four bar electronic beat (which is used to signal when someone is about to speak). These sound snippets are intended to

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<sup>125</sup> Online article by Jonathan Miles, pp. 1-11, titled "The Fragment, Aphorism & Collage", p.4, URL: <http://jonathanmiles.org/lecturetext.THE%20FRAGMENT.html>, (accessed 30/08/2013).

<sup>126</sup> Petula Clark (1932 -) "Downtown" is a pop song composed by Tony Hatch. Clark recorded it in 1964. It was a huge success. It reached no. 2 in England and Ireland and skyrocketed to no. 1 in the USA - launching Petula's American career and earning her a Grammy in 1964. Source URL: <http://www.petulaclark.net/> (accessed 10/04/2013).

explore a type of unconscious and conscious collective sound memory caught and relayed through the family radiogram.

I chose the pop song *Downtown* as it is indicative of the period under review and points to the modern, alluring and glamorous qualities of big city life through musical evocation. The lyrics of the song<sup>127</sup> refer to an underlying restlessness for a different kind of life – one of individual freedom, upward mobility, entertainment and consumerism, offered by life in any big city while at the same time hinting at a type of loneliness or emptiness that is often associated with the anonymity of cities at night. These fictional lyrics return to the site of the letters in *Dresser* where the writer (my father) is sharing similar real life experiences.



### ***Radiogram***

Fig. 24. Left: Original radiogram as it appears in a sequence of 1960s family home movies.

Right: *Radiogram*: original 1960s radiogram, oak veneer, wood, sound track; incorporating six female voices. Dimensions: h.77 x w.106 x d.42 cms.

Six pull-out perspex, vinyl, and wood files. Dims: h.30 x w.30 x d.4 cm.

Sound track: multiple layered tracks/ looped /duration: 11:09 mins.

Integrated into the body of the sculpture, the sound appears to emanate from the analogue radio – whose light is constantly on and alert – just like memory. However it is the visitor's approach that activates the soundtrack by sensor, putting the viewer in the

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<sup>127</sup> The lyrics of *Downtown*, can be found on URL:  
<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/petulaclark/downtown.html>, (accessed 19/01/2013).

centre of the work and in the role of the one who starts the collective memory process and is actively interacting with it.

In summary, the soundtrack of *Radiogram* is an attempt to engage with the imperceptible struggles that take place for memory on a daily basis. The intention behind retuning and re-imagining a weave of personal, public, natural, man made, popular narratives, noises, sounds and song, was to create a multi-layered, interwoven sonic landscape to represent an affective, social memory that points to the complex ways memory is generated through mind and body. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) Foucault argues that ‘the archive’ symbolises the hidden nature of dominant discourses (Foucault, M., 2002a). *Radiogram* reinterprets this idea as a ‘struggle for memory’ in a soundtrack that consists of unresolved, broken, fragmentary and competing narratives, influences and environments and that appears to be trying to recreate and reconstruct a story of the past but with constant interference.

In fact, ‘retuning’ could be an analogy for the enquiry and *Radiogram* in its totality presents a synthesis of this concept. In this work and its installation two types of tuning are explicit. Firstly, the imaginary line drawn across the airwaves as the various voices compete for the right coordinates that will allow them to be heard. The other, it could be speculated, is the line or threshold that the visitor (to the exhibition) crosses as they play within the space of the installation and triggers the artwork into life.

(Please open up Disc One: The Artworks: *Singing Letters*)

The final artwork created in this body of research is an assemblage sculpture<sup>128</sup> incorporating a soundtrack, titled *Singing Letters*. This piece continues the investigation into the ‘struggle for memory’ in a family narrative by expanding on Morris’ and Gibbons’ theorization of ‘sound memory’. However to push the research into new areas, this work emphasises the unique role of the voice and investigates its relationship to

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<sup>128</sup>Assemblage is an artistic process that brings together found and fabricated elements and objects to create a whole while retaining the intrinsic qualities and values of each element.

agency, that is, one's sense of autonomy and feeling of effectiveness, memory and identity in a public and social context. To do this I set out to recuperate a female narrative, to challenge the singular 'authoritative voice' present in the archive.

The introduction to a reader that accompanies an international exhibition, titled, *Acts of Voicing: On the Poetics and Politics of the Voice*<sup>129</sup> notes that,

The voice always simultaneously exists inside and outside of the body, and its immateriality weights just as strongly as its social and political import. It equally yields screaming and talking, sense and nonsense, noise and chanting. What is more, the voice is not only a tool of articulation but always likewise associated with action: it can name things, give commands, or swear an oath, declare people innocent or man and wife.<sup>130</sup>

This observation helps to frame some of the issues under review in *Singing Letters*. For example, my desire to explore the immaterial, human vulnerability of the voice, its potential to reach an audience in a direct, affective way, especially in the context of retrieving voices lost through the archival process.

There were three main stages in making the work. From the original letters I selected eight letters that reflect a range of key events and experiences relating to the early days of emigration and arranged in a narrative sequence, for example: arrival, locative

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<sup>129</sup>This exhibition is curated by Christ D. Hans., Dressler Iris, Peters Christine, Shin Boseul Nathalie. There is an exhibition reader that accompanies the exhibition 'Acts of Voicing On the Poetics and Politics of the Voice'. The exhibition emerged from a two year project that runs from Oct 13th, 2012–Jan 13th, 2013 in The Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany and from Oct 13th 2012 to Jan 13th 2013 in *Para Site*, Hong Kong, from May 2<sup>nd</sup> – Jun 2nd 30, 2013 at The Total Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul and in Căminul Cultural in Bucharest (no dates available). In the press release for the first stage of the exhibition in Stuttgart, Germany, it states that the aim of the exhibition is ... “to deal with the aesthetic, performative, and political significance of the voice from the vantage point of visual art, dance, performance, and theory... Accompanying the exhibition are a reader and a detailed programme leaflet. In 2013, the exhibition will be on view in modified form at Para Site in Hong Kong and at the Total Museum in Seoul. A book retrospectively documenting the project will be published in the fall of 2013.” All quotations are taken from the online press release which also gives details of some of the artists and their practices that are participating in this project. Available at URL: <http://www.totalmuseum.org/exhibitions/1129>, (accessed 30/08/2013).

<sup>130</sup> Online introduction to the exhibition on the Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany, home website, URL <http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/2012/exhibitions/acts-of-voicing/introduction/> (accessed 30/08/2013).

identity, keeping in touch with home, loneliness, seeking work. Next, I switched the gender; the female voice suggests that what we are now hearing is the invisible voice of my mother or even myself as she/I reads the letters to her/myself. There is another possible interpretation which is that the voice could represent a ‘universal’ female voice, often ignored or subsumed by patriarchal institutions, such as, family, state and church institutions (prevalent in the culture under review, that is, Ireland 1950-1966). The final transformation occurs by moving the letters from the intimate terrain of inner thoughts and a private act of reading out into the public space of the gallery.

The sculptural assemblage brings together several found and fabricated elements, such as, (a) a melamine<sup>131</sup> megaphone, (b) a large-scale, heavy-duty, steel camera tripod, (c) a circular tin for preserving analogue film, and (d) a newly created soundtrack. All elements were selected because of their association with various forms of transmission, which relates directly to the enquiry’s concern to find new ways to transmit and encounter past experience.

In particular, I was keen to explore the concept of the ‘Tannoy’ (PA) system for its links with authority, public-address and assembly in public spaces. Significantly, it is an image that appears in the last couple of sequences of the final film *Paradise*.<sup>132</sup> As an image, it is central and it is through the megaphone that the sound track is amplified and projected into the exhibition space. Here the public context and all its references, like shared belonging, play a special role echoing Halbwachs’ idea that individual memories are constantly in dialogue and changing through contact with wider community and social networks (Halbwachs, M., 1992).

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<sup>131</sup>Melamine is a colourless crystalline compound used in making synthetic resins used in the production of many household and industrial objects. It is lightweight and durable.

<sup>132</sup> The ‘Tannoy’ system became a household name as a result of Tannoy Ltd, the Scottish-based manufacturer that supplied PA systems to the armed forces during World War II and to Butlin’s holiday camps after the war. A public address system (PA system) is basically an electronic sound amplification and distribution system with a microphone, amplifier and loudspeakers, used to allow a person to address a large public, or to get attention in noisy air, rail and ferry boat terminals, school auditoriums, churches.

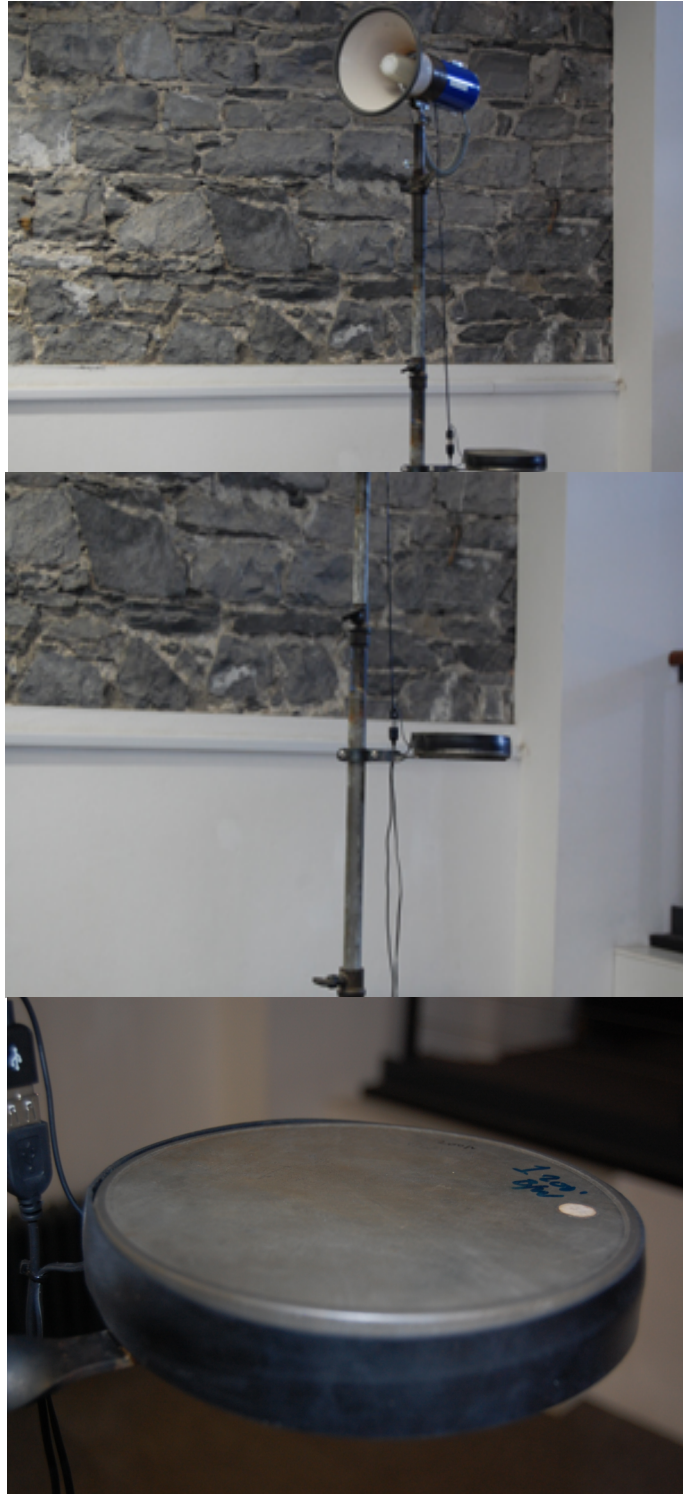


Fig. 25. Three details: *Singing Letters*: Cast steel metal tripod on wheels, metal film canister reel, polyurethane portable megaphone. Dims: h.207 x w.120 x d.120 cms

I invited a female singer to sing the letters in a style that is associated with religious ‘plain chant’,<sup>133</sup> popular in Irish church singing throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The point of this exercise was twofold, (a) the mono tonal effect of this mode of singing is at odds with the often passionate content of the letters, suggesting some kind of conflict between inner and outer worlds, and (b) the association with the Irish catholic church of the 1950s suggests how religious, social and cultural memories can be transferred and maintained – a concept that Halbwachs maintains is, where individual memories are constantly and implicitly attached to the broader community (Halbwachs, M., 1992).

The gender reversal also alludes to my subject position and role in the research project as the interpreter of my father’s voice as it passes from generation to generation through the archival material. By foregrounding the female voice, which is not represented in the artwork *Dresser* because my mother’s return letters are lost, I thought it possible to give her a new and imagined site of recognition and reinstate her metaphorically through the presence of a female voice. My subject position continually informed the enquiry, involving me in a curious journey that brought up many questions. For example, my role as daughter and feminist brought me into conflict when remediating the father’s ‘voice’ - forcing me to engage with and acknowledge broader cultural attitudes, such as the sexism of the 1960s, that my father would have been operating within.

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<sup>133</sup> Plain chant/song church singing was originally developed for use in the liturgies of the Catholic Church and was popular in Ireland throughout the 1950s and 1960s the time-frame of this enquiry. Plain song is monophonic, consisting of a single, unaccompanied melodic line.





*Singing Letters*

Fig. 26. Cast steel metal tripod on wheels, metal film canister reel, polyurethane portable megaphone. Female voice singing six excerpts derived from the archival letters. Dims: h.207 x w.120 x d.120 cms

In summary, for *Singing Letters* I transformed a selection of archival letters (written by my father to my mother) through a series of artistic gestures in relation to medium and gender. One of the main issues explored was the role of the authoritative voice in the archival process, and by employing sculptural appropriation and the voice I set out to disturb the original configuration – primarily by switching gender and remediating the materiality of text into the immateriality of song.

With *Singing Letters* I wanted to use the ephemeral nature of sound and the immediacy and emotional impact of singing as a form of ‘sound memory’ to explore the way sound can be mobilised to contribute to the circulation of memory outside of dominant and often repetitive, clichéd, visual images; not to replace sound but, as Morris observes, ‘to offer sites of indeterminacy where meaning and reference are, as Libeskind famously insists are “voids”’ (Morris, L., 2001, pp. 371) as a form of social memory that can surpass the inscribed and conscious, for example, in the way (folk) songs are passed on orally through memory, from generation to generation forming an integral, ephemeral aspect of our identity. Secondly, by substituting a female voice to sing the letters in a plaintive way (reminiscent of church music) I reinserted the female voice to derail the dominant authoritative voice in both a personal and public sense, and to represent the many female voices that constitute the research project.

In summary, in this section of chapter four I examined a range of unique artworks that constitute the core contribution of the research project to demonstrate how various artistic strategies, such as, appropriation, assemblage, sound and editing techniques allowed me to explore my family archive as a site of contradictory, multiple, collective memory records through image, sound and word. By interweaving and layering many narrative registers, such as, autobiographical factual/fictional narratives and using a range of documentary and fictional genres I wanted to create a multi-sensory environment with artworks that, rather than privileging a homogenous or linear approach to time and the past, instead reflect qualities such as, the fragmentary, omissions, gaps and selection processes present in the remembering process. This allowed me to raise issues and find alternative forms to addresss theoriectical issues of concern to me such as, truth, agency and transparency in the archive.

For example, in the film triptych I focused on three core issues in each of the short films. Starting with *Rehearsal*, I explore the subtle role of unconscious memory and try to give it form and articulation through sound and imagery. Next, in the film *Remembering*, my focus is to interpret the struggle for memory, its fallibility and fragility, both on a personal and social level. Finally in the work tilted *Paradise*, I

investigate how many forms of memory can run parallel, for example, interweaving ethnographic, family and autobiographical memories through the personal imagery of a family's home movie footage.

I also introduced three sculptures, each of which appropriated authentic and 'found' objects to create three, interconnected, distinctive works. In *Dresser* I made an interactive sculpture that combined the 'domestic' and appropriated official, visual language of the archive to create a 'counter-archive' (Merewether, C. 2006) to find a way to express such themes as: the unconscious, minute, everyday forces at play in everyday memory processes (Bergson, H., 2004); Foucault's concept of truth and legitimacy in the archive (Foucault, M., 2002a); and the concept of 'archivization' (Derrida, J., 1998). In the piece, titled *Radiogram*, I develop the idea of a 'counter-archive' by appropriating a piece of family furniture that is associated with the centre of the family home and its socialising activities.

By deploying sound, appropriation and forgery strategies I articulate the way autobiographical, biographical, documentary and fictional narratives overlap and interweave to explore what constitutes social memory. *Singing Letters* continues many of *Radiogram*'s themes through a focus on 'sound memory' (Morris, L., 2001; Gibbons, J., 2007) in a distinctive work that explores how memory circulates, drawing on such Irish traditions as folk singing and plaintive church singing, by deploying the potential of the human voice as a memory trace that has the potential to reach beyond the individual and personal and into the social and cultural arena. In addition, through a work titled *Street Portrait* I examine the role of the humble, family-album photograph through the concept of 'threshold', to examine how a material object that is constituted by both a front and a back surface can become a point of discussion for the intersection of ideas concerning the struggle between individual and family memory in the context of a broader national, social, cultural and public narrative.

Next, I introduce and critique a site-sensitive, public exhibition where I brought finished works and work in progress together in a large, former riverfront, warehouse space to create an experimental, immersive, interactive, multi-media installation experience.

#### **4:2 *Transient Retrieval*: Exhibition**



#### **Transient Retrieval July 11<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 2011**

Fig. 27. (Images from promotional flyer for installation)

Left: The warehouse, 3<sup>rd</sup> building in from left  
ferry taking emigrants from Ireland to England

Archives are the hinge between the past and the future. They are prosthetic memories that are activated in the present. Archives always exist in the present tense, capturing that moment of a past action and fixing it. This instant is thereafter reignited in another present moment when they are translated by an unknown reader of the future.

(Breakell, S., and Worsley, V., 2007, p.176)

In their essay titled, ‘Collecting the Traces: An Archivist’s Perspective in Archive Art’, Breakell and Worsley point to the time of the archive as a mediated space between past and present and in this final section I analyse of the rationale and concepts behind the exhibition *Transient Retrieval* wherein I bring completed artworks and background research into an encounter with a public audience and the potential of an encounter ‘with an unknown reader’ in the present tense. I begin by briefly describing the warehouse site, its former use and geographical location, before moving to a discussion of the way I

installed the individual works in relationship to the space. I proceed by discussing the way I created an overlapping, interactive sonic and visual landscape in which sound, objects, sculpture and film elements all combine to develop the core themes of the enquiry.

Water, which appears as a recurring theme in the research project, influenced my choice in picking a large waterfront warehouse for this the first installation of the artworks. Its alignment to the canal basin meant that when the visitor reached the top level inside the building, the large narrow windows here were (surprisingly) at water level. Also, another reason was the building's location in the heart of The Canal Docklands, a suitable leitmotif for Ireland's current economic crisis and return to the practice of emigration in response to mass unemployment. The warehouse is close by to the 1950s passenger ferry terminal and the specificity of the location hinted at a sort of psychic remapping.

The title, *Transient Retrieval*, alludes to a layering of fleeting operations, for example, the operations of memory, the temporary appropriation of the warehouse and transient nature of installation art and the temporary retrieval of my family's memories through art practice.

#### **4:2:1 Choreographing the installation**

Claire Bishop notes that 'insisting on the viewer's first-hand presence in the work, installation art has come to justify its claims of political and philosophical significance on the basis of two arguments: activated spectatorship and the idea of the dispersed or decentred subject' (Bishop, C., 2005, p.128). Both these viewpoints informed how I finally installed the artworks in the warehouse, and my priority to ensure the agency of the visitor by offering them many different ways of becoming involved. I also hoped that the size of the site and its multiple levels offered the opportunity to journey around the entire the site and experience it over time. This would ensure that they immersed

themselves in and experienced the repeated sounds, sensations, visuals and objects from many different angles and perspectives.

In her essay, 'Here and Now: Art, Trickery, in Installation Art', Niamh Ann Kelly observes that 'the functioning of installation art thus depends upon the presence of the viewer daily transformed, willingly or unsuspectingly, into necessary participants in the life of an artwork at a particular location' (Kelly, N. A., 2011, p.8). In this instance the location was a very large, stone, 19<sup>th</sup> century warehouse by the waterside. The interior had however undergone a recent transformation and been refurbished into office space. This was part of a general redevelopment of the docklands into a new 'financial centre' during the 'Celtic Tiger' period of Irish economic growth. These many incarnations of the building, for example, former industrial and more recent – now defunct - financial traces were a physical and mute reminder of the way histories circulate and overlap in the cityscape contributing to our sense of (Irish) identity.

Through the new refit, the space now had three levels and I wanted to use the typology of the site to reflect the approach I had taken to the research in general, for example, as a series of fluid reflections, journeys and trajectories. The works were positioned accordingly to overlap, echo and relate to each other, visually and sonically, dispersed throughout the total area and the three levels. The public were encouraged to freely enter and exit the installation at several entry points and levels, for example there were two main doors and this contributed to a sense of a fragmentary, multi-perspectival interaction, that was informed by many people moving and circulating around the large exhibition space in different directions.

Entering the large open plan ground floor the visitor encountered, *Dresser*, *Radiogram*, and *Singing Letters*. These were the three key sculptural works and putting them in close proximity created links between their content; for example, the letters in the *Dresser* close by to *Singing Letters* meant that the viewer could connect the content. Likewise, at certain angles *Radiogram*, positioned on the ground level, momentarily existed in the

same temporal space as ‘the image’ of the radiogram flitting by on the screen above in the room where *Remembering is a Form of Forgetting* was screening. Return, replay and redeployment of particular elements and images were constant features in the theorising and construction of the body of artworks and pointed to memory as a constant process of repetition, redefining and rethinking ourselves and our identity whether consciously or unconsciously (Bergson, H., 1896).

Upon entering the warehouse space one was immediately immersed in a sonic landscape. From time to time aural fragments, such as music, sound and conversation, escaped from the film rooms, circulating, overlapping and, in the process, creating new conversations with each other as doors opened and closed. This emphasis on non-hierarchical overlapping sounds mirrored the methodological approach pursued throughout the research, foregrounding the participant’s voices and everyday histories.



#### Transient Retrieval

Fig. 28. Left: *Rehearsal* screening ‘room’ with Radiogram in background  
Right: *Radiogram* and *Singing Letters* in far left background





### Transient Retrieval

Fig. 29. Details of second floor in the Installation

Left: *Street Portrait*, Large photograph and small photograph and its verso  
 And showing open door into *Paradise* screening room  
 Right: Open door into screening room for *Remembering*



### Transient Retrieval

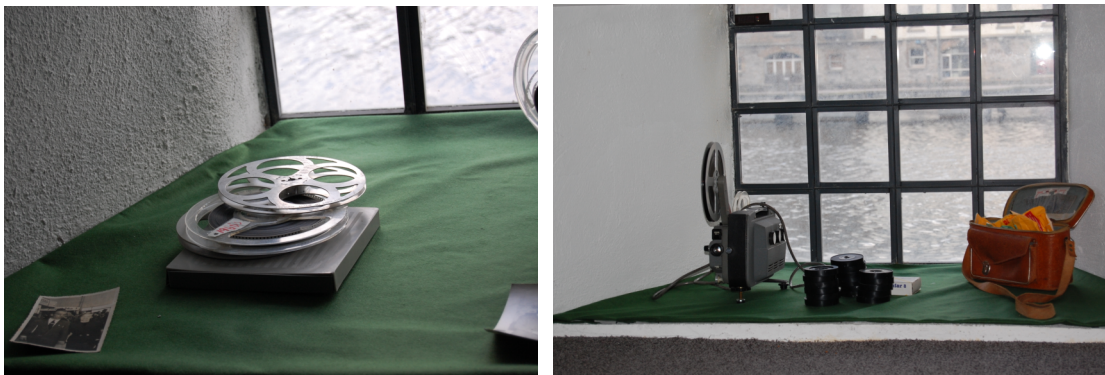
Fig. 30. Details of the Top Floor 'Research Area'

Left: Two *Research Cabinets* and on the right hand wall '*Artist's Wallpaper*'  
 Right: Windows to the canal basin with film paraphernalia, film stock, camera, loose album photographs

The warehouse had a series of windows on the upper most level that backed onto the water level of the canal basin outside giving an odd feeling of displacement but the space was too low and narrow to site artworks properly. Nonetheless, I wanted visitors to have the odd sensation of climbing the stairs up to this level to find they were looking out onto a flat, plane of water outside which, pressing right up against the building, was also uncannily at the level of the viewer. This feature aptly continued the metaphor of water and its association with the fluid nature of memory and one I explore in the film



trptych, either as a visual or aural metaphor. Bergson's idea that 'pure' memory presses in on us unexpectedly seems to resonate in the presence of this large body of water which, though logically out of place, the visitor is confronted with on the top floor. I decided to treat this space more like a studio with works in progress, such as, an ongoing artist's wallpaper project based on a selection of home movie footage; 8mm cinema paraphernalia; loose photographs; two specially designed research cabinets that held a selection of my A5 research notebooks. The notebooks were made accessible in the cabinets and people were able to turn the pages and peruse my research drawings, notes and sketches spanning from 2008-2011.



**Transient Retrieval**

Fig. 31. Detail: Two window alcoves in top floor 'Research Area' showing home movie paraphernalia

#### **4:2:2 Closing reflection and findings**

My main focus has been to examine how a shift in the reuse of one family's archive can help us to understand the links between society and memory and their role in how we both construct and negotiate our identity, enabling us to reconnect with the past. Arising out of this were other trajectories that, for example, demonstrate how the micro/autobiographical can be expanded to have relevance beyond itself, how the reuse of archival material allows new perspectives on the past to emerge that help us to find

new positions pertinent to the present moment and finally, how the particular consequences of my subject position inform the research.

‘The family archive’, though important to the family, is assumed unlikely to have relevance to those outside the family, but, as Marianne Hirsch points out in *Familial Gaze*, there is much to be gained by expanding the family image ‘... beyond the conventional happy representation of family rituals, to expose the darker and more hidden aspects of family life, the disagreements and compromises that are most commonly excluded from the family’s self-representation’ (Hirsch, M., 1999, p.xii).

By studying my family’s images and artefacts with the help of hindsight, I align the material to loss and mourning and introduce a more ironic, less innocent, retrospective gaze into the frame (Hirsch, M., 1999, pp. xii-xiii). My approach to the filmic material resonates with that of filmmaker Desmond Bell, who sees the archival image’s potential as ‘both historical trace and as narrative resource’ (Bell, D., 2004, p.1), rather than as a source of fact and truth. I found that through a range of fictionalisations, I could bring the original material into juxtapositions with other narratives from different world domains and, by doing so, expand the personal nature of the archive and bring it into play with broader, social and cultural discourses. The fictional gesture also questions authenticity and ownership by introducing uncertainty and challenges the authoritative voice of the artist and of the singular, metanarrative of history, and moreover brings the spectator into a more productive, active engagement with the material, for example, asking them to decide what to believe. This approach opens up a plural, multi-perspectival reading of the past that in my case also includes acknowledging the role of the accidental, the illogical, and the unconscious and embodied and sensory memory in the process.

Collective memory profoundly challenges the view of memory as the product and property of individual minds, instead, collective remembering is concerned with remembering and forgetting as socially constructed activities with individuals constantly accounting for and negotiating their memories within the pragmatics of social life

(Halbwachs 1992). In this enquiry, this is demonstrated by an experimental approach to the autobiographical, by this I mean that the term ‘autobiographical’ is expanded so that the spectator encounters numerous individual voices, overlapping, contradicting and complementing each other in turns, creating a more symbolic, collective memory, informed by the subjective and personal experiences of myself and the extended family and speaks back to a more general, global diasporic experience. This approach demonstrates some of the micro social and cultural processes of an emigration experience during a very specific time frame, intertwined in everyday experience; while highlighting the partiality and fictionalised aspects of these accounts.

Halbwachs observes that collective memory is not the same as just the combined individual memories of a random group of people, instead, collective memory is that which can be agreed upon, something that is shared by the group - it is based on shared experience (Halbwachs 1992). In the enquiry, one family’s emigration experience is contextualised in the framework of a much broader, national, collective memory, shared narrative and social and cultural identity spanning 1950 to the mid 1960s. It is estimated that approximately 45,000 people emigrated from Ireland to Britain per annum – men and women – with an average age of 15-26 years. Moreover, these individuals were often perceived as going against ‘... traditional outlooks and identities...bound up with unquestioning allegiances to family, church, and orthodox nationalism’ (Miller, K. A., 1990, p.105).

Historical evidence shows that my parent’s story is just one of thousands of familial emigration experiences that took place between Ireland and England and consequently is representative of a wider constituencies. My study explores where these stories belong in our national, collective memory and demonstrates through creative strategies the range of pushes and pulls that informed these emigration experiences that were often shrouded in personal and public ambivalence, shame and negativity. During this period and right up to the early 1980s Ireland was always promoted as ‘Holy Ireland’ with secular and progressive England, viewed as ‘Sinful’. Furthermore, as Liam Ryan, points out, though it was totally acceptable and often expected to send money back home it was not

appropriate to flaunt your prosperity and success when you came back to visit or returned home permanently (Ryan, L., 1999, p.67).

According to Halbwachs, the family is one of the first places people acquire collective memories (Halbwachs, M., 1992). The material that constitutes ‘the family archive’ represents more than facts and evidence, it maps the sensory and embodied memory of the family and, as such enhances our understanding of the way people preserve the past and create (new) identities through popular culture, such as, collecting pieces of furniture, vinyl records, writing letters and taking photographs and amateur films. But as Hirsch reminds us, though family images (and I include artefacts here) offer ‘an inclusive, affiliative look’, that can transcend national and cultural boundaries, they also function ‘as a screen: the identifications it engenders can be too easy’ (Hirsch, M., p.xiii). I explore the notion of power play and ‘the struggle for memory’ from within one family archive. This idea of control and representation in and of the past resonates with what Foucault and Derrida maintain is one of the fundamental roles of the archive, that is, ‘he who controls the archive controls the past’ (Derrida 1998; Foucault, M., 2002a).

Employing appropriation allowed me to recontextualise the family’s original, radiogram and create a new artwork. This strategy allowed the object to be creatively transformed but still remain tied to its origins, as an iconic, glamorous, futuristic, 1960s home-entertainment system and a central, social, fixture in the family’s life narrative and memory. In the sculpture *Radiogram*, space is interpreted both as an intimate and contained experience and, as an expanded, social and public broadcast event. Employing sculptural processes brought into dialogue the unique role material memory plays in our lives by allowing us to imaginatively and conceptually engage with the world around us, remember the past in a unique way and lend significance to our innermost feelings. As Gaston Bachelard notes, ordinary domestic objects that we live amongst day in day out ... ‘are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy’ (Bachelard, G., 1994, p.78). The sculpture explores the many ways

in which we preserve the past and leave physical traces behind, and how this connects to identity and a sense of place, specifically, in this case, the emergent consumerism and urban industrialisation of Post World War II Britain.

*Radiogram* is an example of a process of memorialising that is counter-monumental or what the art critic Charles Merewether refers to as ‘counter archival’ (Merewether, C., 2006, p.17). It celebrates the many small and fragmentary ways in which we connect to others and are embedded in the past. The work employs the potential of ‘sound memory’ to create new public and private spaces. The work plays with space and time and, at first glance, its modest scale defies the great variety of sounds, narratives and visual data it contains. There is an intimacy implied in the way the interiority of the object is conceived to open out like a Chinese box of incrementally smaller chests that neatly fit one into the other. This motif is continued and echoed in the way the labels of the long playing records are designed to tell the story of the family in song form and the way the ‘live broadcast’ is a micro narrative tuning in and out from across the vast and public airwaves. The set of six reconfigured long playing vinyl records are neatly stored in the pre-existing space on either side of the cabinet. The new labels evoke musical and lyrical iterations of both real and imagined performative spaces of the family’s emigration story, spanning 1950 -1966 using different narrative registers – including the autobiographical record of my own birth in Portsmouth England in 1958 and a series of key political world events of the late 1950s to mid 1960s.

Through the soundtrack of *Radiogram* I demonstrate how one family ‘tunes in’ and is embedded in a range of personal and public, social, cultural and environmental spaces all vying for airtime. Through a new sound montage created from snippets of official and generic archival sources that include: pop songs, foreign news broadcasts, urban sounds and family narratives. True to an oral history tradition, the women’s voices heard on the soundtrack offer more than just accounts of the past but with their range of small hesitations, sighs, spontaneous laughter and silences seem to reveal, often on an unconscious level, the subjects’ underlying or repressed feelings. Through these

personal accounts, immersed in the wider social network of sounds, songs and official announcements, we listen to how, through repetition and story telling, the individual is in a constant process of constructing and moulding the story of the past in the present tense. This demonstrates memory processes ‘in action’ and resonates with Kuhn’s observation that through a process of ‘memory work’ emerges ‘the shift from ‘just’ telling stories about the past to constructing identities for ourselves’ (Kuhn, A., 2002, p.2) and shows the struggle for memory that exists between these often competing narratives. It also references Halbwachs’ observations on ‘collective memory’ and offers an imaginative and alternative way to understand the past not as a fixed entity but rather as a fluid site that both creates and is created by shifting and evolving notions of national, social and personal identity.

Furthermore, linking the sculpture and its soundtrack to body-movement sensors draws attention to the spatial aspect of the past and how we live and remember always in relation to place. The gesture emphasises how our nearness or distance from the event is critical, and furthermore is activated by our participation and willingness to engage with the past not as a static entity but rather as a fluid, embodied site that is directly affected by our own embodied relationship to the story unfolding.

The short films also engage with space and time and explore the notion of film as a form of public address. The reconfigured home movies potentially offer other perspectives on the record of the 1950s ‘second wave’ Irish emigrant experience of Britain from the perspective of a middle class Irish family looking to better themselves economically but also to get out of insular Ireland, exercise their independence and have different experiences. The home movie material reconfigured into an experimental film triptych explores a range of intimate and public spaces of an upwardly mobile, Irish family as they search for a new identity and sense of belonging – in an emigration context<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>134</sup> For more on this topic see Terrance Brown’s book, titled, *Ireland: a social and cultural history 1922-2002*, where he argues there was a change in the pattern of migration in the mid-50s to which my family belongs

Halbwachs speaks about the process of how ‘place and group have each received the imprint of the other’ which underpins the formation of collective or social memory (Halbwachs, M., 1992, p.190). I found that the family archive offered the opportunity to explore this concept ‘in action’. For example, in the experimental short film *Paradise* there is an intimate ‘nearness’ created through the mechanisms of hand-held, amateur, filmmaking that literally brings into focus, from the ground up a ‘state of the art’, modern Butlin’s Holiday Camp. The new film remakes the family footage of the holiday camp so that it resonates with an ethnographic-type, documentary film, for example, in the way it scrutinises and records the customs, rituals and beliefs of a particular group – which in this case happen to be the family itself. Most radical is the addition of a voice over that does not immediately make any connection with the images on screen, Instead the voice over is used to create a counter-point that opens up the home movies to a different reading that shifts their use from an unproblematic, personal narrative to a context that suggests that such public ‘recreational spaces’ are always part of wider, social, cultural and even political discourses. and can, in fact be scutunised as what Svetlana Boym terms ‘ethnographic memory texts’ (Boym, S., 2006, p.310)

I found that the cache of love letters also contained a range of intimate, personal, local and cultural memories embedded in social spaces, for example, ‘a trip to the cinema’, ‘buying a new coat’, ‘going for an interview’, ‘sitting by a riverbank’. The documents are also a trace, at a micro, embodied level, of the writer’s struggle to both record and conceal ‘the truth’ through the range of marks, hesitations, errors and even symbols that crowd the pages. When these are transformed into song – appropriating the religious ‘plain chant’ sonic structure – they take on different resonances. Now animated in space and sound, they can cross over into a fluid, unconstraint space; released from their original script and interpreted through the human voice they have the possibility to infiltrate space as a public event. The emotional charge of the singing is now aligned to the letters in a new relationship that does not efface the individual and personal nature of

the content but rather expands its reach to a collective context that others are able to build on and add their own memories and responses too.

Barthes' famous contemplation on archival and photographic processes following the death of his mother and a search for 'a definitive image' in *Camera Lucida* (known as the Winter Garden Photograph) remains a seminal text (Barthes 1980). Barthes reminds us of the photograph's belatedness and the way in which it (falsely) offers an indexical return to the past as a static and known entity. However, in the same essay, Barthes also acknowledges the strong, emotional desire to connect with our loved ones through some form of material and visual encounter, for example, through a photograph. *Street Portrait* explores the photograph as a site where the personal and the public literally overlap.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1952, a street photographer takes a generic photograph of three women crossing over O'Connell Bridge in Dublin. Unbeknownst to the photographer, he has frozen a special moment: captured in simple inscription on the back "Mary Leaving for England". Digital processes cancel out the indexical links to the past or what art critic Joan Gibbons describes as the photograph's claim to 'an existential relationship, no matter how tenuous, with what has actually existed' (Gibbons, J., 2007, p.29). However, by digitally changing the scale and deliberately 'cleaning up' the image I emphasise the passage of time – this is now a digital copy – it is not purporting to be a 'truth' document, rather, through a reconfiguration it becomes a life-size, symbolic, autobiographical motif where the collective rather than the individual is the focus – resonating with modern day commercial bill-boards and outdoor public advertising.

Kuhn reminds us that a family is always selecting, ordering and displaying photographs in the process and that consequently there is unlikely to ever be a last word, 'The struggle is now, the past is made in the present' (Kuhn, A., 2002, p.19). Likewise Derrida describes the archive as spectral and haunted when he likens the archive to the unconscious psyche – what Derrida refers to as the 'personal presence' of the archive



(Derrida, J., 1998, p.91). The enquiry started with my seeking to address my family's archival material in order to question my relationship and understanding of it in the context of expanding my creative practice and interest in finding new ways to represent the past and memory. The artworks represent and demonstrate the progression of my thinking through research while emphasising an experimental approach. For example, in the artwork *Radiogram* by exploring the potential of sound as a form of 'memory work' I was able to reconfigure the sensual encounter of the oral histories as embodied, localised sources and forms of popular, social or collective memory which I believe offer a rich, subjective and emotional perspective into the events and that period of the past. Contrary to history - with its attempt to say what 'really happened' – instead these verbalized accounts often reveal the reason for 'why things happen', offering a glimpse into personal and contextual influences. Approaching these aural records as a collective memory that is flexible and continually influenced by more recent events and by self-image I was able to demonstrate how much these memories are part of a group's identity rather than necessarily an accurate record of events.

Emigration plays an integral part in Irish history, is embedded in our collective memory and, crucially is still an ongoing aspect of Irish life and culture. My study brings together an insider view of emigration through experimental installation art practice using a collage of images, objects, songs, texts and voices that enabled my family to make sense of their lives and bring a feeling of significance to it and, crucially, reconnect them back to wider social memories and in that process contribute to our collective view of the past.

I found that by being formally approached to share their stories, my mother and her five sisters were visibly empowered by the opportunity to speak about the past from their own perspectives, speaking now with the wisdom of hindsight as self-reflective, mature, adult women. I found this allowed them in most cases to reclaim the past with me as their witness – a past, that seemed to be controlled by a predominantly patriarchal, repressive, traditional, system. Their oral histories brought this period of time into close

relief. The aunts' and my mother's stories allowed me into their personal and insular lives where it seemed a range of minor actual, anecdotal and fictional narratives informed their decisions. For example, Auntie Eily mentioned how after seeing the drama film 'The Song of Bernadette' (1943), coupled with a familiar visit to the secondary school from a (lovely) missionary nun, she considered that life for herself – "what was I thinking of..." or my mother who remarked that just listening to pop songs and reading (clandestine) magazines allowed her to 'imagine what it would be like to live in a big city, with access to a glamorous life style'.

In the studio, this prompted me to employ a range of narrative sources simultaneously, such as, autobiographical, biographical, documentary and fictional accounts. This strategy enables multi-perspectival views to emerge that embrace contradictory positions as a counter point to a singular authoritative voice. Through the interviews with my mother and my aunts and reading through my father's letters it became apparent that the effect of living under a single, dominant, religious and patriarchal belief system permeated everyday Irish life on a micro level. My grandfather represented a typical, authoritarian figure (of his time) and had the last word concerning all aspects of family life, ranging from your choice of occupation to deciding who was suitable marriage material and, the young women (and their mother) were too scared to contradict him and had little opportunity to express their own views was also a tool used by the local Catholic priests and another way of controlling women's actions and morals. In addition, my mother was all too aware - in our conversations about her emigration to Britain - that she would have to give up her good job in the post office because of the Irish State's statutory law that forbade a woman to keep her job in the public service or a bank when she got married: "the marriage bar" law was not rescinded until 1977.

As well as the archival material referring to real life events and places, there were sometimes hints of an hallucinatory zone or what Derrida terms 'the personal presence' in the archive (Derrida, J., 1998, p00). For example, watching the home movie footage I became aware of my father's - perhaps latent - desire to capture iconic images for 'some

unknown viewer in the future' (Hirsch, M., 1999). For example, archetypal images of 'the aging mother', poetic images of sea and landscape that suggest a different kind of archaic timelessness in counter point to the day to day activity of the family picnic - a desire to defy or at least ward off the inevitable finitude of the family?

During the interviews I also found that moods shifted abruptly brought on by unpleasant or unforeseen memories that tugged at the narrator's consciousness. This was demonstrated 'first hand' during one of the sessions in the family home where my mother and I were again reviewing the home movie footage. Suddenly – watching the happy gathering of an extended family picnic - my mother quietly began to list off - almost in awe - all of the people now 'gone'. This lent a spectral feeling to the whole archival process and a sadness to the present moment that was palpable and seemed to link (silently) with my mother's contemplation of her own demise. This resonates with Derrida's idea of the psyche being likened to archival processes (Derrida 1998).

*Remembering is a Form of Forgetting* uses archival footage, voice-over and editing strategies to demonstrate how multiple emotional and psychological layers lay folded within the site of the archive that owe as much to forgetting as remembering (Connerton, P., 2009; 2012). The strategy of voice-over allows additional information to be provided outside the frame of the images on screen that reframes the homely sequences. Initially we hear myself and my sister commenting on a range of images that soon move to a small, intimate, family gathering in our childhood home in London. Soon, a zoomed-up image of a woman fills the screen for several extended moments – using an extended freeze frame – she (a family friend) is glamorous, in 1960s make up, hair and clothes, and I ask my sister if 'she knows why the woman known to us as 'Irish Eily' went to England?' There follows an extended discussion on forgetting and remembering that includes my mother telling the personal story of 'Eileen' and her unplanned pregnancy and subsequent rejection by her family back home. However, the initial gap in synchronization at the start of the film, between text and sound, deliberately creates an uncertain gap between the narrative, image and spectator that echoes throughout the

film, suggesting that ultimately it is the viewer/listener who is in the position to decide what they may believe and presenting the archive as a fluid discursive site that is open to interpretation.

The journey I took back into my childhood brought with it challenges and rewards. I found the multiple roles of daughter, niece, sister, artist and researcher enabled me to understand at first hand how we are always 'situated' in relationship to the past and that depending on this perspective there is always something personal at stake. For example, when I interviewed my mother it was as a daughter/researcher and when I reframed my father's films it was as an artist/researcher/feminist. Being involved on many levels with my own memories made me vulnerable too and helped me explore my experiences with the other participants, which I believe put us on a more equal footing. I found that rather than adopting an objective and distant position, I could use my autobiographical position as yet one more narrative to be explored, parallel to but no more important than others.

At times there was confusion. I was continually negotiating which memories (of childhood) that I was not sure were even really my own or which were 'screen memories' mediated through the reels of home movie material, photo albums or just things I had been told by family members or heard family members discussing. For example, the image of my elderly, paternal grandmother walking down her garden path towards the camera is an event that I am told I was a witness to but all I can remember of my grandmother is this sequence as mediated through the lens of the camera. However this only confirmed for me the complex terrain of the project where 'personal memories' are constantly being mediated by a range of known, unknown and even fictional sources.

## Conclusion

In this research project, I explored ways to reframe autobiographical, family, cultural artefacts which when aligned to current reconsiderations of memory and archival process can articulate how individual and collective memories configure our sense of identity and moreover, how these experiences can be represented through installation art. I considered theorists and contemporary artists who approached personal, archival material not as a nostalgic return to a static past but rather as a reflective and dynamic process that opens up and enables access to the past as a multi-layered, fragmentary and discursive terrain of social memory.

However, the project takes a distinctive perspective by focusing on personal, archival material from my own family's emigration experience to England during 1950 -1966 that emerged from real-life experiences. The project is articulated through the processes of installation art. Central to this is the way it privileges the role of the visitor in bringing the work to life and in creating meaning, not least, by engaging the senses and creating dynamic, immersive environments with multi-perspectival approaches (Bishop, C., 2006). Many of the techniques developed or refined in this body of artwork highlight subjectivity by either employing the human voice or using the visitor's body to activate sound, which in turn, sensitises the viewer to his/her own subjectivity – putting him/her in the centre of the story.

In addition, this intimate, family story coincides with two historical and cultural moments, that is, (a) the 'second wave' of mass Irish emigration to Britain and, (b) Britain's Post World War II burgeoning consumerism, which in generally embraced a more modern, liberal lifestyle and popular culture and these social and cultural events contextualise the approach taken to reinterpreting the family's artefacts. 'The family archive' under review consists of a series of ordinary artefacts that includes: domestic furniture, home movies, photographs and love letters. Through a range of strategies, associated with installation art, I reframe these humble objects into an exhibition that

incorporates sounds as much as images to engage with outsiders who have no personal or emotional investment in the material. Marianne Hirsh, Annette Kuhn (Hirsch 1999; Kuhn 2002) and others argue that family memories are constructed, socially contextualised and circulated to become an integral aspect of the present moment. The artworks in this study explore how this operates 'in action'. The visitors are required to engage with artworks that re-position particular, individual memories to ask more general questions, such as, how time and the unconscious, order and legitimacy are transformed and disrupted through the process of archiving and become elements in a narrative that dwells on presence and absence (Derrida 1998; Foucault 1966).

The project is informed by a range of concepts and methodologies from Philosophy, History, Sociology and Anthropology that challenge the concept of a singular, dominant, authoritative viewpoint of the past, acknowledge the unconscious processes in the archival process and, argue for a social constructed view of memory. My contribution is to employ art strategies that allowed me to interrogate both the material and the conceptual terrain of my 'family archive'. By deploying methods, such as, experimental film techniques, appropriation, assemblage, collage, sound and voice over, I was able to radically shift the meaning and purpose of the original artefacts, which in turn, opened them up for a wider audience to speculate on their social and cultural context.

Over three years, I created a series of individual, experimental artworks ranging from artist's wallpaper, sculptures sound and a photographic work that systematically and cumulatively investigated different aspects of the core issues under review and informed each other in that process. A final selection of works that address the core ideas is presented for viva examination. Rather than insisting on one authoritative perspective, these works represent a multi-voiced, sensory range of interpretations that tell a socially engaged story. By emphasising the senses - tactile, oral, aural, embodied and visual - I wanted to put the visitor in a landscape of the past that was intimate, immersive and affective. By recreating and interweaving existing autobiographical and biographical material with fictional and quasi-documentary style narratives, I could present the

viewer with a range of options regarding what to believe and with that gesture bring them into a more interactive engagement with the material and the past it represented. This polyvocal and multi-layered environment, rather than present the family's past as a series of disconnected, nostalgic, personal events, instead, created an encounter with the social and cultural context of those experiences.

I found that by imaginatively restaging 'the family archive' as an art installation, I was able to bring into the public arena personal artefacts, transformed through a range of experimental techniques. The artworks demonstrate, first-hand, how views change as the social context around changes too (child, youth, adult, parent, elderly etc), and our memories are always re-constructed based on the present social context. The artworks highlight a range of conflicts in how the family's past is recorded, continued and handed down from generation to generation, often omitting or repressing certain perspectives. However, through a range of transformative processes, such as appropriation, collage and assemblage, I was able to reuse the original material and reframe certain images, sounds, textures, objects and sites of the family's experience to address these imbalance and reengage with a contemporary, public audience. Furthermore, employing art processes that privilege the viewer and offers an experience that at once makes the viewer an active and critical participant in the exhibition (Bishop 2005), I was also able to create a public site with the potential for others to share in this collective memory.

By interweaving truth and fiction and overlapping different narrative registers, that is autobiographical, biographical and documentary, I was able to demonstrate some of the complexities and pitfalls in seeking to return to 'the past' as a fixed circumscribed terrain. The family's past is explored primarily through the materiality of its archive and tantamount to this interrogation is employing different memory forms, such as, through the different senses, to open up the meaning we ascribe to social memory. In addition, by encouraging the spectator to become active agents in how they encounter 'the family archive' I indicate the way in which we choose and select what it is we understand from

past eschewing a more conventional approach that suggests the past can be simply unfolded and understood objectively.

The artworks presented in the final installation articulate how knowledge and memories of the past are stored in the senses (apart from the visual), for example, through ‘sound memory’ (Gibbons, J., 2007; Morris, L., 2001) and, because this medium is fluid, unframed, imaginative and associative, it represents a less determined way to return us to the past and connect individual to social memories, for example, through affective, immersive, sensory encounters that ‘wrap space in a sea of sound’ (Gibbons, 2007, p.49). I open up new ways to engage with fragmentary events, moments and people of the past, for example, through ‘embodied memory’ (Connerton, P., 1989), that recognises the role of bodily gestures in passing on memories from generation to generation and this helps us to understand how different forms of memory are an integral aspect of identity formation.

Many of the sculptures are appropriated objects that while retaining the trace of their original function and cultural resonances have been reconfigured to offer new and imaginative readings. These assemblages, transformed into a single unified object with new associative ‘readings’, rely less on logic and more on the power of the imagination to decode their meaning. Some of the artworks, like *Street Portrait*, deploys a personal image – a fragmentary moment of the past - as a way to engage with the past by opening up a micro and intimate event to a macro and wider social and cultural reading. Likewise, oral histories are employed to remind us how the everyday, physical, sensory, environment and popular culture inform our social identities in conscious and unconscious, intimate ways.

I believe these artworks are insights into collective memory ‘in action’. According to this approach, the past is anything but a static dimension as collective memory is constantly changing and creatively at play in relation to the conditions of the present. From this point of view, the visitor to the installation gets to experience/witness first-



hand how the past is continually being constructed – in fact it is merely what ‘one has agreed to call the past’.

Another implication is that through this micro study of family memory we get to experience/witness the often hidden ‘struggle for memory’ both within the individual and within the group. The final implication of this study lies in the way it demonstrates imaginative ways to encounter the past that are inclusive and capture the complex, emotional and psychological problems in trying to grapple with presenting a ‘real’ account of ‘what happened in the past’, which in this study is done by primarily challenging the dominant voice of ‘the father’ and permitting simultaneous and diverse perspectives to exist side by side.

However reflecting on the processes of recall, remembering and forgetting and how these function within one family at both a conscious and unconscious level had its pitfalls, such as, how to navigate ‘nostalgic longing’ or the gaps that occurred in transforming the archival material from one medium to another - what Derrida refers to as ‘archivization’ (Derrida, J., 1998). Also this family is a small group of individuals from a certain class with a gender bias (mostly women as all the male members all the family are now deceased) and does not represent an exhaustive study.

Another challenge was to find a methodology to accommodate the project ‘as it unfolded’ and hold true to a process-based approach experimental in nature. Here the notion of ‘Bricollage’ was crucial as it allowed me to use my artistic and interpretative practices as a contemporary artists and complement these from a range of other disciplinary processes as I felt necessary (Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln, 2005, p.4). In addition, I had to navigate my own subject position in the study. For example, I pondered where my objectivity lay and how could I access or research material properly that constituted my own childhood memories and how would I distinguish between remembered fact and family myth.

However, the family under scrutiny was my own, meaning that my subject position was a core part of the research strategy and positioning myself ‘objectively’ was never going to be possible. Instead, I found that by deliberately and critically using my intimate relationship with the material and the family members involved in the project I was able to extract up close, intimate perspectives that a more professional approach would possibly have found difficult to achieve.

However, for this researcher, the main objective was not to have ‘conclusive findings’ or quantitative data but rather a probing and an opening out of assumptions and definitions. While this is an in depth study into a small aspect of a broad and complex field and though I believe the project does produce specific findings that relate its own context and materials, I appreciate that these are limited in their scale and scope. For example limits set by the practical realities of making a series of artworks within a certain reasonable time frame as an individual artist with limited resources. Moreover, the study is circumscribed by one family’s material traces and naturally this selection of documents and artefacts are not comprehensive or representative of larger national traits but instead relate to the specific, personal and local.

The study demonstrates the benefit of adopting a cross disciplinary approach to the past, permitting different kinds of knowledge sources to converge and intermingle. I believe this brings new understanding to the question of how we remember or encounter the past, recognising the play between the intellectual, emotional and material encounters in order to capture the elusiveness and complexities of memory while embracing its historical, sociological, psychological and imaginative aspects.

Looking to the future, I believe the approach taken on this study could be applied to other subjects such as, the way we memorialise historical events, for example, the upcoming centenary of the 1916 Irish Easter Rising. I believe we need to look to alternative and creative ways to engage with the past and our shared collective memory and to rethink the role ‘the archival’ plays in this process. Furthermore, I think that

researchers using contemporary art practices, bring new dimensions and a range of perspective that help us to understand the plurality of influences and voices that make up the past; constituted by many narratives, such as documentary, autobiographical and the fictional. Through employing the senses and re-imagining archives from many sources - including the traces of ordinary people - I think it is possible to create a flexible, memory record that though embedded in social, cultural and political frameworks is rooted in popular memory.

Such a speculative, open-ended approach, that embraces fiction and fact, prioritises subjectivity and, explores the parameters and overlaps of embodied, oral, material and sound memory, offers a model to return to the past not to find singular, fixed truths and factual evidence but instead, enables us to undertake an examination of who we are and where we come from that can accommodate contradictory accounts. Such a process, acknowledges that the past is a discursive terrain, constantly in flux, replete with competitive memories and perspectives that continue to reframe our present and future.

## Appendix A

Arthur Fields



Street Photographer, Dublin City Centre, Ireland  
Dates: b. 1901 d.1994

It is estimated that between approximately 1925 - 1985 Arthur Fields may have snapped as many as 500,000 street portraits of passersby, making this collection an 'accidental archival' of monumental proportions. Of these only a proportion were ever retrieved. The photograph included in this installation (12) is one such print. It is not known for certain who retrieved it. In one fleeting moment, the camera captures a life changing moment in a much larger story. In this chance confluence between two strangers and a camera lens, a personal, family and national narrative is archived for posterity.

Arthur Fields was an immigrant himself. He was son of a Ukrainian refugee from Kiev in Russia. He was born Abraham Feldman, but he and his brothers all changed their Jewish sounding name after settling in Ireland due to anti Semitism, prevalent at the time.

In his heyday, before the availability of cheap, point and shoot cameras, there were many such snappers in European and American cities. You were given a docket with a number this allowed you to later retrieve the printed image by paying over a few shillings either in person or through the post. Field's particular pitch was O'Connell Bridge, the epicenter of Dublin, once quite a fashionable thoroughfare, claimed to be the widest in Europe.

As well as capturing myriads of strangers everyday Fields was known for his collection of snaps of notable Hollywood, local film and stage stars over the decades.

Further information: <http://www.abovethebest.ie/manonbridge/index.html>

## Appendix B

109 Colwyn Rd,  
Northampton,  
10-7-'52

My Dearest Little Darling,

Your letter this morning darling was nice but I thought it rather a little cool. Maybe it's only me. I hope so at least love, 'cause you know what that would mean to me if anything happened - Just the end of everything that I live for + dream of + work for. It just couldn't be. I suppose me pessimistic as usual. I just thought love that it lacked the little fiery pieces of love that the others contained and no lovely lip impressions. But love maybe you weren't in good humor or something when you sat down to write. So darling I forgive + forget.

I hope love you'll be over for definite. You seem so awfully shaky + doubtful. I even much prefer if nobody went with you to Dublin 'cause I imagine that, that is going to make you extra lonely leaving your Mam + Tess in Dublin + the aunt and her grown up family. They will all have a go at trying to make you stay at home + when you feel real lonely, as you undoubtedly will, you would never know what might happen.

About Deady's offer - the old story. I knew that if you gave her notice when I told you 12 mths ago you would have your £5 a week. Her brains are working overtime now. She's probably surmising that you will come over sometime. Why doesn't she give you the £5 now. 'Cause she says to herself that if you don't come back she will have saved a few pounds between this + holidays 'cause if I give it to her now she may not come back even then + I will have lost about £9.

I see also by your letter that it's putting you thinking. I don't want to be nasty love (not to you, that I love so much) but I wonder love never thought of it that way these 2 years back + ask her for a rise? It sounded to me like reading darling that with her £5 offer you will find it rather hard to refuse. Of course it's good money, but didn't you refuse it before? And surely money without happiness without the one you love is useless. It certainly would be to me anyway darling if I hadn't got you. You know that well.

I'm not finding fault with you love (I just couldn't find one) but you leave things so vague. You just give a hint + so I immediately smell a rat. I hope it's only my imagination sweetheart. Please darling, write me a good long letter (some night when you are real lonely) + pour out your whole thoughts in it. Tell me everything. Convince me that you really want to come here + that here alone you will be happy, if that is how you think. Ask me any questions you like. Clear any doubts + just look forward to like you never did anything in your life before.

I hope "little pet" that you have no doubts + that you really are the happiest you can be. Could you be happier love? I guess you would be if both of us could stay at home. But then thinking back I remember you saying on many occasions that you would go to U.S.A to Paddy. How would you stand up to that? Little hope of return from there. If you were in darkest Africa I'd leave everything I ever had or have + work the flesh off my bones to get to you and that's not fooling. I hope you have no doubts about you loving me. I even shudder at the thought. I know you do but ... I hope you saw or met no Clark Gable on Sunday that might have been changing your mind when you were writing about your trip. I suppose I'm silly. But love has me so, + I don't regret it. Never will when it's someone so sweet + lovely + adorable as you. If only I could find words good + kind enough to describe how beautiful in every way I think you are pet. Write me soon again darling won't you.

God bless the best in the world  
 Your adorable sweetheart  
 XXXXXXXX Forever will I love you

XXXXXX

(Image/love heart)

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## Glossary of Terms

**Agency:** Is a term that refers to an individuals or other entity to be able to take action in the world. Agency may be unconscious or purposeful behaviour – but normally refers to the latter.

**Appropriation:** In Art, this term refers to taking an original image/object/film and changing its context in order to parody or comment on its original meaning.

**Assemblage:** Assemblage shares collage's experimental and improvisational nature but moves out into space by joining two and three dimensional organic or prefabricated materials and found objects in a sculptural process that brings familiar materials into unconventional arrangements.

**Avant-garde:** Refers to individuals who sought to challenge accepted norms by pushing the boundaries of convention.

**Avant-garde Filmmakers:** These were a new cache of avant garde filmmakers like Stan Brakhage in America and his predecessor Maya Deren (America) and successor Hollis Frampton (England) films became synonymous with exploring non-linear narrative. These artists explored such concepts as, the dream world, the unconscious and slippages in memory to establish new kinds of identities for themselves and others and employed a range of filmic strategies to explore a new film language.

**Backstory:** Is the backstory or background related to the primary narrative. Generally, it is the history of characters, events or other elements that underlie the situation existing at the start of the main story.

**Bricollage:** Refers to art made or put together using whatever materials happen to be available. In the enquiry, the term refers to a qualitative way of researching which prioritises the piecing together of data from different scholarly disciplines, in a way that allows different strands of experience and knowledge of the world to inform the project

**Collage:** In art practice collage refers to a certain process of working in two dimensions: paper, fabric, photography and film. It consists of joining together or overlapping diverse fragments that do not necessarily belong or share the same provenance.

**Conceptual art:** Typically associated with a shift from object to idea, where the idea of the art work is prioritised over its execution or materiality, or where the idea reflexively highlights the creative processes involved in the execution of the art work. Used in the context of this research to refer to a historical period c.1960-1975 and concepts associated with this movement.

**Death Drive (Thanatos):** Sigmund Freud's students' invented this term for Freud's study of our compulsion towards chaos and disintegration or a desire to return to the

inorganic from which we all originate. Freud was one of the first to study the processes of this drive – which he believes is innate and contrary to and more powerful than Eros or The Pleasure Principle. In the context of the enquiry it is related to Derrida's view of the archive and its role in self-preservation set against this prevailing 'death drive'.

**Durée:** Literally meaning 'duration' in French. For Henri Bergson it is a key term he applies to explain his theory of time; as a continuous flow between past and present. Here Bergson distinguished between time as we actually experience it, lived time – which he called 'real duration' (*durée réelle*) – and the mechanistic time of science.

**Embodied:** Is a term essentially means to give a bodily form to; incarnate or to represent in bodily or material form. Many recent scholars have adopted it as a prefix.

**Embodied Memory:** The Sociologist, Paul Connerton's uses the term 'Embodied Memory' to refer to a form of memory that is opposite and, in his view, 'purer', than inscribed (written) memory in so far as 'embodied memory' is transferred through bodily actions, gestures and rituals such as hand-shakes and hand gestures or the way we dress.

**Eros:** Is a Freudian psychoanalytical term that is the opposite to Thanatos – the death drive (see above). Freud describes it as the life force or The Pleasure Principle.

**Film and Video Elicitation:** This is a term coined by Critic and film theorist Annette Kuhn, to refer to a methodology of working with photographs and films in order to start or initiate a new narrative in the present tense related to but not necessarily only describing the original images.

**History from Below:** Is associated with a particular group of English historians, circa 1960s. Notable among them was Edward P. Thompson – which led to the forming of the History Workshop Movement at Ruskin College. The group's studies drew on labour history and women's history. They looked to 'oral history', as well as encouraging the participation of non-academics. Over time the term grew to denote any history that percolates from a place that is from the experience and viewpoint of the 'ordinary' man or woman on the street – rather than the actions of 'great men' or other political leaders.

**Historism:** Walter Benjamin uses this term to describe the traditional approaches to history, that saw each event of the past as an isolate event. Historicism's lack of relativity to the past, present or future, the pain and suffering (and barbarism) involved in 'creating' history is left out of this epic story approach.

**Installation Art:** As a form of art, installation emphasises the space as well as the art elements exhibited in it. Installation is often a composite of objects and other elements like projected films or photography. It stresses the relationships between these objects; films, sculptures, materials and the viewer who enters the installation space and the experience of the viewer/s is central to this operation.

**Live art:** Used in the context of this research to reference performance art. Some scholars also align live art with theatrical performance

**Material History:** This is a term used by Cultural Historian, Walter Benjamin. He uses it to differentiate between modes of historiography. The ‘material historian’ rejects the position of only seeing the past always from a set position and believes that the present informs the past and visa versa and through this process historical materialism can revive and redeem.

**Material Memory:** Refers to memories that are carried through three-dimensional objects or materials and is normally associated with Design History and Material Culture – though increasingly other disciplines are becoming interested in this terrain, such as, artists, sociologists, philosophers and historians. These scholars believe that such memories contribute in a unique and potent way to the way we imagine, remember and discuss the past, through visual, tactile and other senses.

**Memory Sculpture:** Cultural Theorist Andreas Huyssen uses the term to denote the work of contemporary artists’ who especially dedicate themselves to exploring the operations of memory within a material or sculptural context such as, Columbian sculptor, Doris Salcedo.

**Memory Studies:** Is an emergent, cross disciplinary academic field that concentrates on all aspects of memory discourses, contestations and current thinking in the area.

**Memory Work:** This is a term originated by Film Theorist and writer Annette Kuhn (Kuhn 2002) to denote a methodological approach – especially to photographs. It uses the photograph as a dialogical tool to speak about present concerns and issues and to engage at psychic and the social levels in an effort to make public untold stories in a way that emphasises the collective nature of remembering.

**Metanarrative:** In literal terms, a metanarrative means a “big story”. It represents, in short, an explanation for everything that happens in society. For example, Post-modernists see Feminism and Marxism as metanarratives because they attempt to account for all aspects of society in terms of the perspectives and the various theories they propose.

**Microhistory:** The term ‘Microhistoria’ emerged in Italy circa 1970s. Key exponents, such as, Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginsburg, saw in the small-scale an opportunity to speak about larger issues. For example, a lesser known character or minor event is described in detail in order to reflect the surrounding social and political landscape that those people inhabited and were influenced by in their day to day lives.

**Mis-en-scène:** Is a term associated with Cinema to explain all the objects, lighting, environment and scenery that go into making a scene work.

**Moving image:** Used in the context of this research to refer to all forms of film-based media, including super 8 mm, 16 mm film, video and betacam film formats.

**Multimedia:** Refers to all forms of digitally mediated imagery that typically involves processed film, photography and audio using computer-based programmes. It also refers to interactive artworks that respond to bodily movement.

**Narrative:** Though associated primarily with literature, broadly speaking a narrative can be anything which describes a story or set of incidents, events, experiences whether true or fictitious in any medium.

**New media:** Used synonymously with the term time-based (see below) in the context of this research.

**New Wave Art Scene:** Is a term associated with underground, experimental, punk musicians and visual artists that emerged in New York circa 1970s and with whom the Irish artist Vivienne Dick became associated.

**Nostalgia:** The term ‘Nostalgia’ emerged as a medical term in the 1800s coined by a Swiss doctor – responding to what he saw as a recurring set of symptoms in soldiers returning from duty. It is now a term used to denote a certain kind of looking back to the past that is suffused with longing and happy memories, such as, childhood.

**Oral History:** Has been around for as long as humans have been telling stories however as a particular strand of Historiography it took hold in the 1950s and 1960s as a response to rising social movements such as: civil rights movements, feminism and anti-Vietnam War protest. Critically, contrary to the interview process, oral history seeks to allow the speaker to speak his/her story in whatever order, sequence or form they choose. In oral history the emphasis is on the unique ‘subjective voice’, experience and interpretation of events and not simply gathering information.

**Pleasure Principle (Eros):** Sigmund Freud used this term to describe the driving force in our personality that seeks immediate gratification of all needs, wants, and urges. It strives to fulfil our most basic and primitive urges (id), including hunger, thirst, anger, and sex. When these needs are not met, the result is a state of anxiety or tension.

**Primary Provenance or PP:** Provenance refers to the chronology of the ownership or location of a historical object. Today it is the universal categorising system used by institutions. However, the principles of archival provenance was only developed in the 19th century by both French and Prussian archivists in response to the growth in records and the emergence of Modern States. It is a fundamentally a way to create or receive items in a collection and relates to the items' subsequent chain of custody. According to PP, records of different provenance should be separated. Conversely, records which originate from a common source (or fonds) should be kept together – preferably

physically, but, where that is not practicable, certainly intellectually in the way in which they are catalogued and arranged in finding aids.

**Performative:** Movement of the body to express an idea, without intentionally constituting performance art. Closely related to the conception of the gesture: “Gesturality means a set of requisite operations introduced by the production of artworks, from their manufacture to the production of peripheral signs (actions, events, anecdotes)” (Bourriaud, N., 2000, p.111).

**Postmodernism:** Is a term that originated within Architecture in the 1960s but has since come to address many forms of cultural production, including art, literature and music. It is aligned to Poststructuralism however it specifically relates to the breakdown of established canons, categories, distinctions, and boundaries and a major questioning of hegemony and metanarrative. In art terms it is often associated with installation art, conceptual art and multimedia. It is often associated with irony, humour, and parody often using appropriation, collage, bricolage and a fragmentary narrative approach to capture plural and diverse perspectives.

**Poststructuralism:** This is a philosophical term originating with certain thinkers in early 1960s notably Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Poststructuralists emphasises the study of power relationships - largely in response to an increasing importance on global power interactions in the 20th century, primarily through post-colonialism and globalization. In this context, they believe that by studying the history of cultures, one will be able to understand cultural concepts in the present day. Key terms such as Foucault’s ‘Discourse’ and Derrida ‘Deconstruction’ are pointed to in the enquiry to acknowledge how their thinking changes our relationship to the archive.

**Prosthetic Memory:** Is a term coined by Alison Landsberg in her book *Prosthetic Memories: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Landsberg, A., 2004). Through it she suggests that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with access to cinema television and online archives we now experience a new form of memory ‘Prosthetic Memory’ that is one in which we only imagine we have experienced this memory while in fact it is from any over exposure to images of that particular event.

**Reflective Nostalgia:** According to Cultural Theorist, Writer, Artist, Svetlana Boym ‘Reflective Nostalgia’ is a way of accessing or returning to the past though nostalgic longing that is not interested in fixed ideas (of the past) instead she suggests a fragmented, individual approach that emphasises detail over generalities.

**Remediation:** In the enquiry, this term is associated with a process of ‘refashioning’ one media into another for creative purposes. For example, letters are sung and vinyl, long-playing records are transformed into a set of readable files.

**Restorative Nostalgia:** This is a term that Svetlana Boym applies to a type of nostalgic longing that is fixed and associated with maintaining ‘national identity’ and a return to the past in its ‘wholeness’.

**Self-Reflexive:** Is a term coming from literature but is often used in contemporary art to describe when artists openly reflects upon their own processes. Such self-referentiality is frequently found in modern works of fiction that repeatedly refer to their own fictional status

**Site-specific:** Is an artistic term that came into popular use in the 1970s. It is generally used to describe the way artwork is designed specifically for a chosen site or location in a gallery or for an outdoor environment.

**Social or Collective Memory:** Is a term first attributed to Sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs (Halbwachs 1950). It specifically refers to conscious and unconscious memories that we share as a nation, community or small group. Different to individual memory - it acquires memories in similar ways. Memory scholars often consider it to be more politically and socially charged as it shapes our national, racial and gender identities. It can be controversial, for example, it is collective memory that decides what memorials we choose to erect.

**Stream of Consciousness:** This term is usually associated with literature. It is characterised by a narrative mode that seeks to portray an individual's point of view by giving the written equivalent of the character's thought processes, either in a loose interior monologue or in connection to his or her actions. For the enquiry it describe a certain lyrical approach to creating, such as, in film editing, that is characterized by associative leaps in thought and lack of punctuation.

**The Male Gaze:** The male gaze is related to its parent theory ‘the gaze’ which acknowledges that types of gaze are primarily categorized by who is doing the looking. The introduction of the term “the male gaze” can be traced back to Laura Mulvey and her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” which was published in 1975. In it, Mulvey states that in film women are typically the objects, rather than the possessors, of gaze because the control of the camera (and thus the gaze) comes from factors such as the as the assumption of heterosexual men as the default target audience for most film genres. For the enquiry it describes the gaze of my father or the other males responsible for creating the family’s home movies.

**Time-based art:** A set of artistic practices that draw on the durational properties of time in their production. In the context of this research, used to refer to instances where performance artists utilise aspects of film or video in the realisation of the performance. Also used in the context of this research to collectively refer to artists’ use of film and video media.



**Video art:** Used in the context of the research the term refers to art works produced using the medium of video (dvd). However, generally there is a tendency to use the term 'video art' to refer to all forms of moving image based art, including Super 8, 16 mm film, and digital recordings.

**Virtual memory:** (Pure Memory) Is a term coined by philosopher Henri Bergson to describe those memories that are deep in the unconscious – not related to mechanical or reproducible memory – they come spontaneously and are directly related to our 'inner selves'.