

Memos: the Imagination of Memory

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Master by Research Declaration (by performance/exhibition)

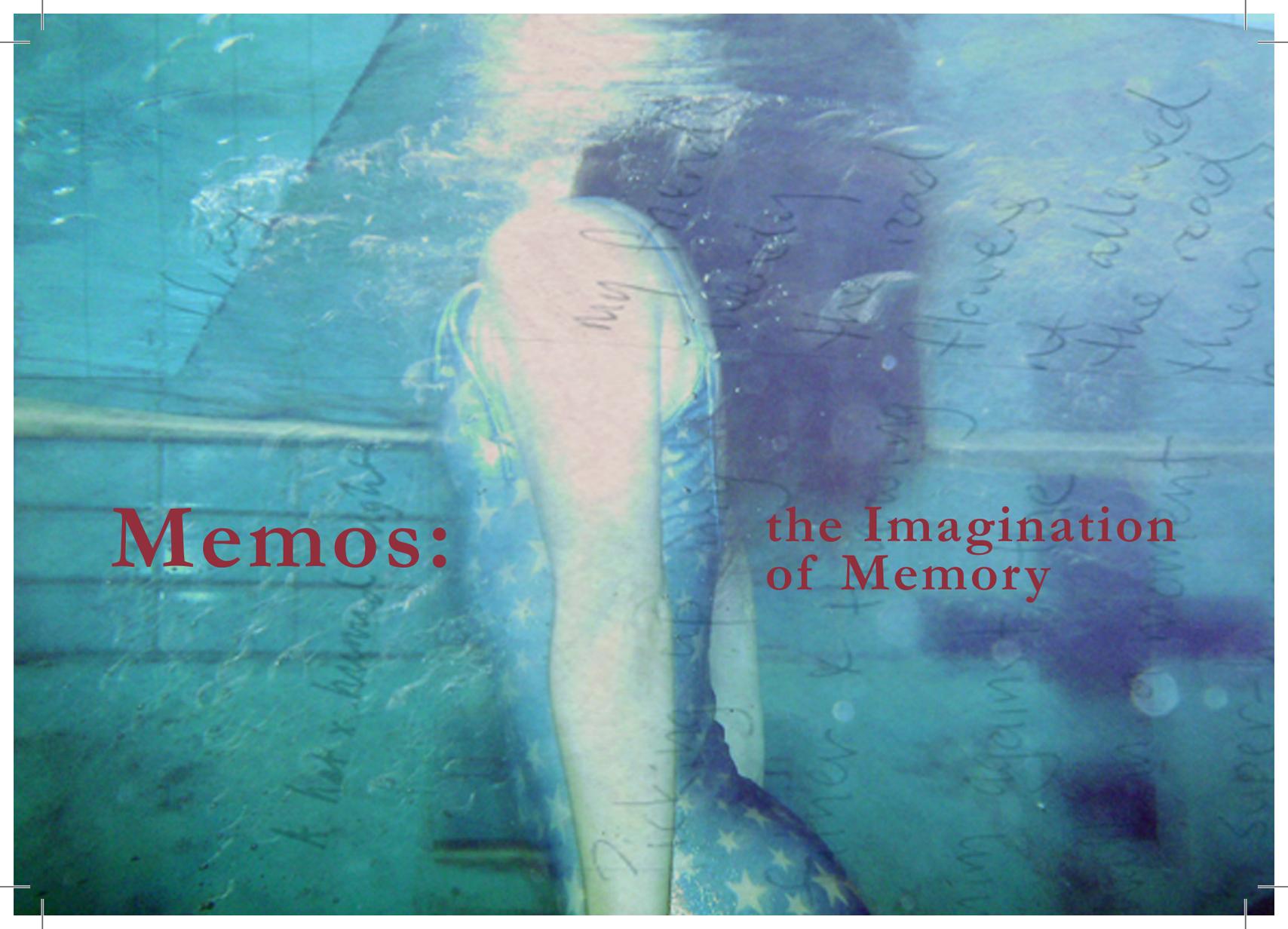
I Georgia Snowball, declare that the Master by Research exegesis entitled *Memos: the Imagination of Memory* is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work.

Signature



Date

6/3/2011

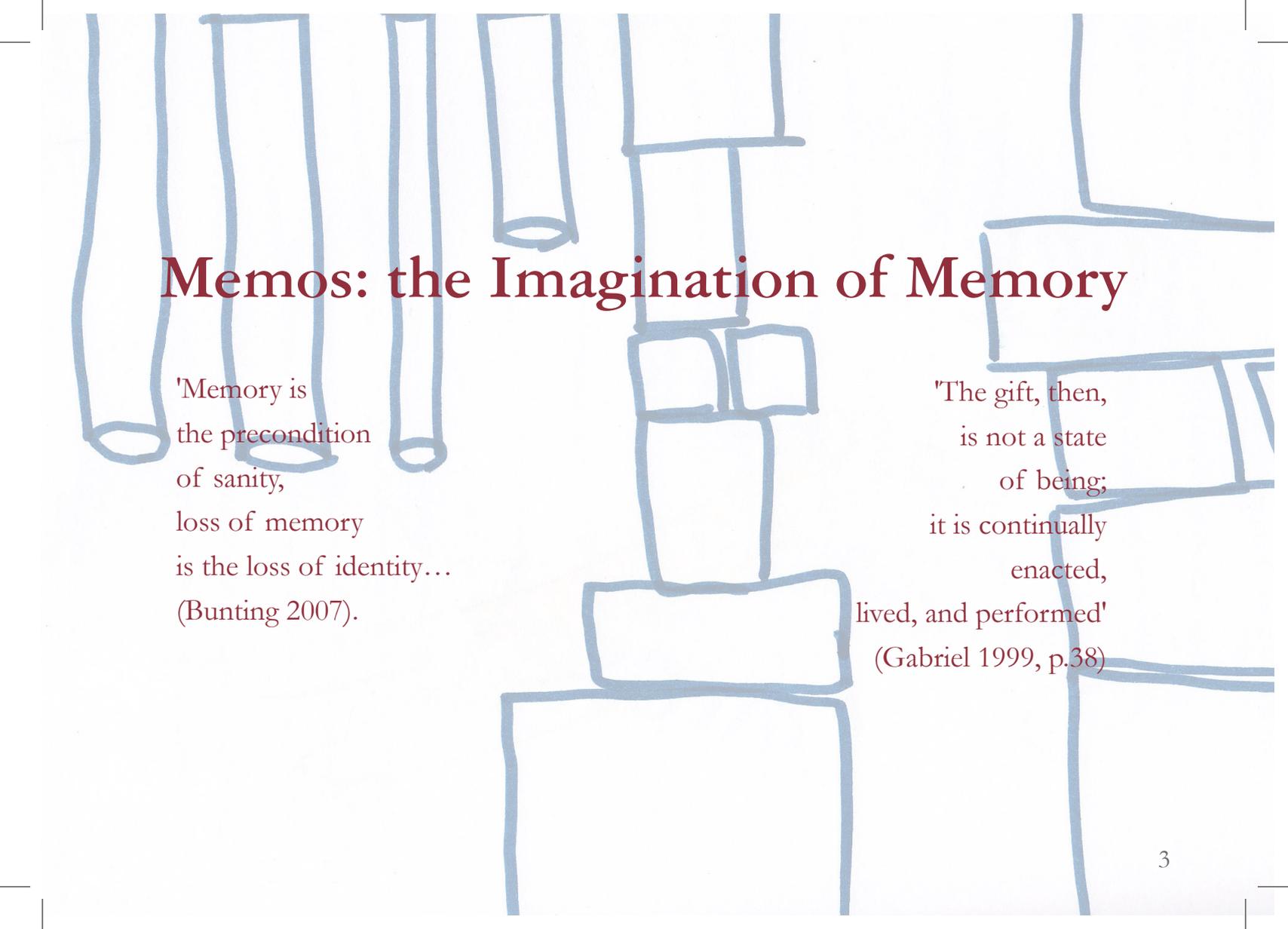
A photograph of a woman's back, featuring a tattoo of the American flag. The tattoo covers her shoulder blades and extends down her spine. The words "my land" are written in cursive across her upper back. The background is a wall with faint, repeating handwritten text: "Picking up bits of the road", "flourish", "the road", "it allowed", "the road", "them", "a moment", "super-", "ing against", "er", "x + wing", "k had x. behind light", and "the wall".

Memos:

**the Imagination
of Memory**

Written, devised and performed by Georgia Snowball in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Performance Studies at Victoria University, Melbourne 2011.

For making this work possible I would like to thank Christine Babinskas, Paul Kavanagh, Peter and Kathy Snowball, John Howard and Helen Sharp, Margaret Cameron, Lizzil Gay, Lisa Mills, Jon Lyons, Margaret Trail, Kerrienne Southway, Lesley Birch, Pippa and Richie, Kate Hunter, Wai-Zea Man, Sophie Dunn, Julia Laidlaw, Shami Kiely, Izzy Brown, Phil and Wendy Kavanagh.



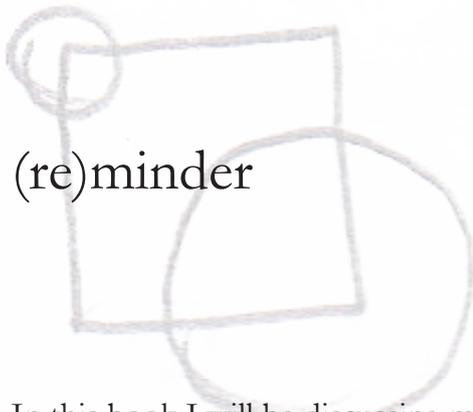
Memos: the Imagination of Memory

'Memory is
the precondition
of sanity,
loss of memory
is the loss of identity...
(Bunting 2007).

'The gift, then,
is not a state
of being;
it is continually
enacted,
lived, and performed'
(Gabriel 1999, p.38)



” Returning to a place from the past I am struck by a strong sensation of memory, like a vapour in the air that brings with it a change in temperature, an adjustment to the light. These blended combinations like concoctions for dreams, transport the body to a place of timelessness, smell engulfs my senses and I can hear distant laughing. I remember an inner feeling, a tingling sensation, turning into a prickling and stretching of the skin, of being somewhere else in another time and place. A feeling that brings with it both a certain familiarity and an inexplicable awareness, a warping of events, shaped by their time and place, remembered by the distance from then to now. Like an image that shows action, friendly faces, though the details of an exchange are blurred. An image stamped into my mind, onto my body that slowly fades with time, now becomes an urgency to reclaim.”



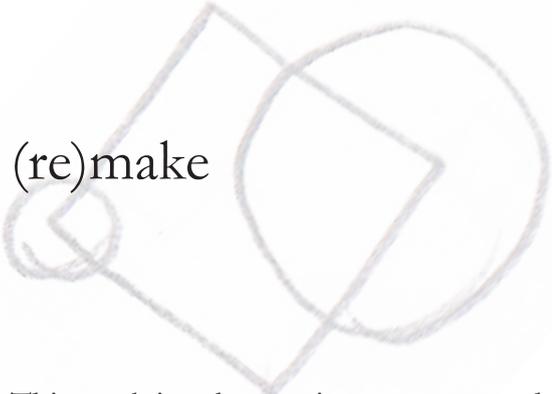
(re)minder

**Try to
Remember
The score.**

In this book I will be discussing my research process, inspirations and how I arrived at the final performance. This writing is an excursion in and around the work and is an insight into the myriad of paths and diversions I have taken to arrive at this performance. It does not reflect what will or has happened in the performance of *Memos: the Imagination of Memory*, though it is a meandering towards and away from it. The images are derived from performance showings, research, rehearsal and play. It is accompanied by quotes and excerpts borrowed from others and my own writing.

Tracing Memories

(re)make



This work involves various systems and methods of trying to remember and looking and searching for memory in many real and imagined places.

Rummaging, fossicking, picking, pruning and sorting through my imagination. Re-arranging pieces of paper, faded diary's, dusty broken metals bits and piles of clothes.

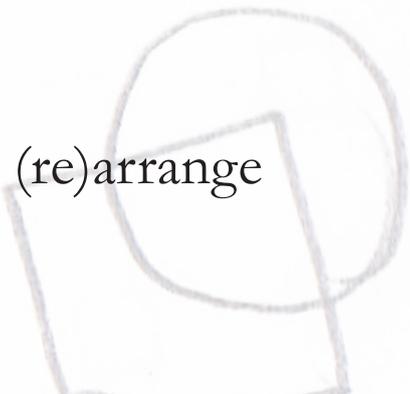
Trawling through discarded objects left on street corners, down alleys and out the front of houses with signs on them saying 'Please Take Me!'

Inside filing cabinets, chests and trunks, loose drawers, shelving, cupboards, and in boxes, tins, cylinders, matchboxes, wooden, plastic and papery boxes, shoeboxes, toy boxes, jewellery boxes... Treasure chests of the past are the containers for memory in the present.

For Russian installation artist Ilya Kabakov, discarded and thrown out objects are symbolic of the Soviet disregard for people over the coming technological age. Amei Wallach describes Kabakov's uses of garbage as,

'profoundly complex, because garbage is also memory. It is history, "sedimented deposits", "continuity", and "connectedness". It is the very human mess of small moments, foolish hopes, intimate disasters' (1996, p.68).





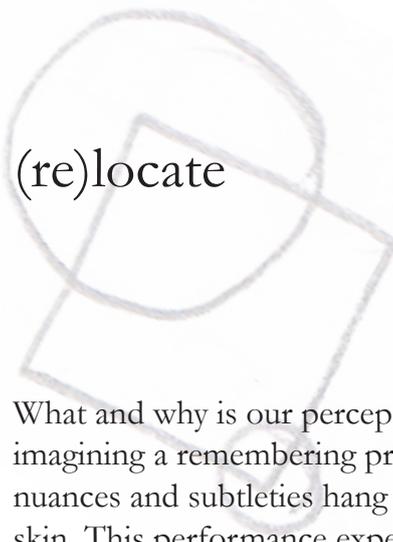
(re)arrange

Sing peculiar Whistle with Eyes

Joseph Cornell's boxes have been described as many things, one of them being as a 'gift for others' by Dickran Tashjian. Cornell used boxes to express and present the information he gathered from the world around him. His meticulous working method was a constant process of note taking, collecting, sorting and re-arranging objects and imagery. Cornell's boxes are inspired by a direct reflection of his obsession with looking for, recording, and describing events, encounters and exchanges in his daily life. Concerned with the fluidity and flooding of information, involved in Cornell's processes of constructing artworks, Lindsay Blair describes how the boxes themselves contained inside their walls stillness as well as movement.

'Some boxes contain parts that move: they spring into action at the pull of a stopper; others sit within the palm of the hand and can gently tilt, making a thimble forest shimmer and shake, or sands shift across the incised ridges at the base' (Blair 1998, p.30).

In *Memos: the Imagination of Memory* boxes 'stripped of their normal function' (Gablitz 1992, p.143) are representative of pillars of the past that have the tendency to come crashing down at any moment. After the crashing down, comes the task of rebuilding memory in the imagination, sparking fragments of the past into action in the present. Transforming and re-configuring moments in time, a constellation of the future is performed instantly.



(re)locate

**Is anyone watching/
Breathe slowly**

What and why is our perception of memory important and how does forgetting play an equal role in imagining a remembering process? Memory does not enter and leave us in a convenient manner. Its nuances and subtleties hang around in the air, in the space between people, in clothing, in objects, on the skin. This performance experiments with where and how we can attempt to locate memory, in the body and in text, in time and space. 'Memory is embedded in our very act of seeing and movement seems to be a particularly potent force in unlocking memories vivid detail' (Steinman 1986, p.71).

The work uses specific remembered events as a catalyst to connect with the present and imagine the possibilities of the future. Memory is all about us; it plays on our information systems of knowing and unknowing on many different levels. The sound of a voice from behind, a fraction of light through parted curtains, the mixed up images viewed from a speeding car, these triggers are embedded in our everyday landscape. Memory and remembering is integral to that which we think and know we are, our identity and our sense of being in the world. We are able to follow a trajectory of who we once were, to whom we are now through sequences of events etched and inscribed onto our memories. It is how we recall these remembered fragments of time and with what kind of clarity that affects the present.

A blurry, low-angle photograph of a room. In the center, a bright yellow storage bin sits on a dark surface. To the left, a row of metal chairs is visible. In the background, two people are standing near a counter or display. The lighting is dim and warm, creating a hazy atmosphere. The image has a grainy, artistic quality.

'Gifts are like imagination – open to the possibility of the "new"' (Meskimmon 2010, p.46).

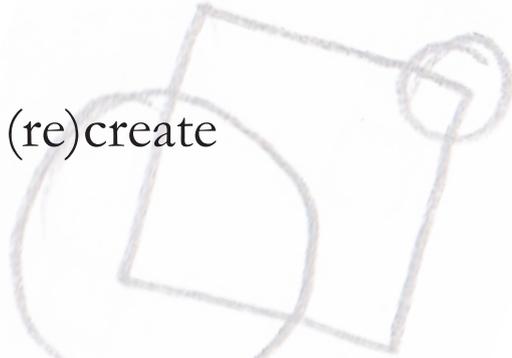


(re)flect

Rock The Lullaby

In a historical and genealogical sense we are products of our family lineage and traditions, which are impressed upon us from birth. I know I learnt how to cook simply from being present in the kitchen with my mother; I was able to repeat combinations of ingredients from memories of the aroma of food being prepared. She didn't teach me 'hands on' as I was bound to make a mess, but expressed that she wanted me to 'keep her company' in the kitchen. Knowledge is passed on without our trying to remember or forget. *Memos: the Imagination of Memory* is reflective of an urgency to remember and forget in equivalent parts, re-locating oneself in time and space and allowing for the 'new' in the present.

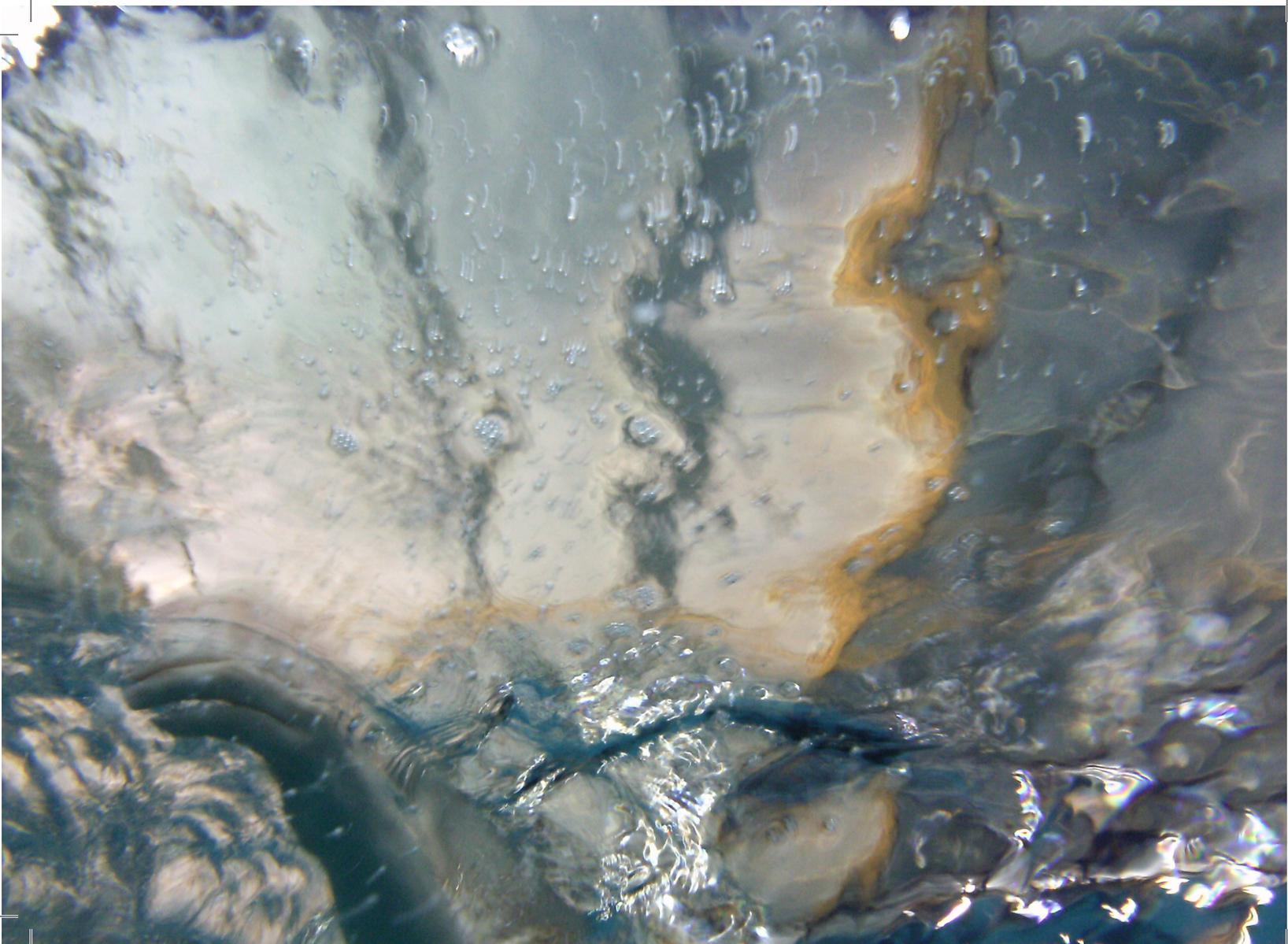


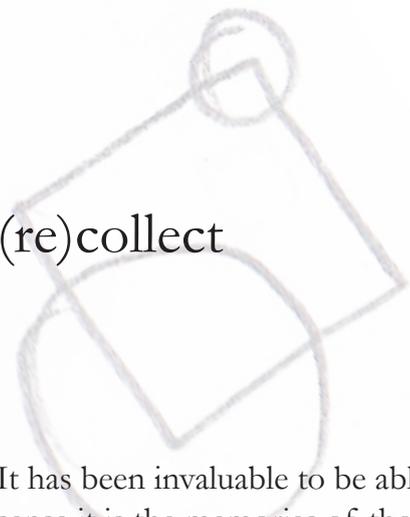


(re)create

Begin Dance

My research has been predominantly informed by Mike Pearson's 2000 performance of *Bubbling Tom*, as I have followed a similar path of researching and gathering information to create and develop the performance of *Memos: the Imagination of Memory*. Discovering Pearson's *Bubbling Tom* performance relatively late in my research, I have found using Pearson's performance processes as a sounding board against my own ideas has reinforced and inspired ways of sorting and filtering accumulated performance materials. Pearson works primarily with biographical content attached to landscape (when working with memory biography is almost impossible to ignore). I may have started out my research in that vein, though moved away from using personal memories to rely more on a relationship with the imagination and the possibilities of an interpretation of others 'collected' memories to inspire a performance score. Having said that, I have now come full circle, as I begin to re-relate to others memories as if they are my own, realising that 'We coincide with ourselves when we integrate, into the present we are living, our memory of the past and our imagination of the future' (Boal 2007, p.37).





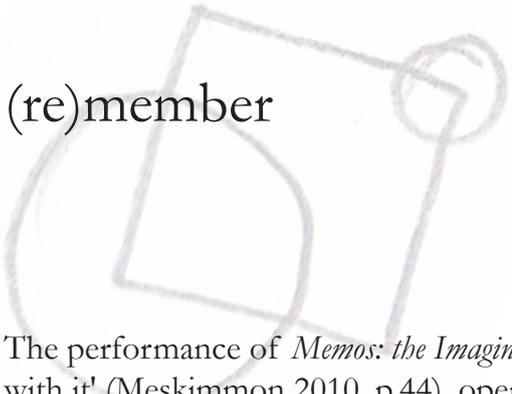
(re)collect

Reaching...with Remembering Forgetting hands

It has been invaluable to be able to collaborate with different audiences in developing the work and in a sense it is the memories of those around me that have sent me delving into an imaginal past. Similarly, Pearson's research into the landscape and visual documentation of the 1950's came from a personal and direct connection that he transformed directly into his body to articulate stories.

'The best thing, storyteller: get others, gently, to tell stories. Make this your goal. And do it in a way that, afterwards, they feel that they had a story told to them, a wonderful one' (Handke, cited in Etchells 2006, p.141).

'Those gaps are the most important thing because it's where you stop "showing" and the audience can use their imaginative powers and they're the ones that fill the gap' (Vawter cited in Goulish 2000, p.148).



(re)member

**Reverse/
Push/
Hold**

The performance of *Memos: the Imagination of Memory* asks the audience to 'enter into a corporeal dialogue with it' (Meskimmon 2010, p.44), opening up further invitations for recognition found in the reiteration and repetition of memories. This exchange or 'meeting place' realised during and after the performance provides/leaves space for a 'gap' in the milieu between audience and performer for the fluidity of memory to speak for itself.

'This shared experience, this notion of "the gift"' (Gabriel 1999, p.76) is *in* the exchange of the 're-telling' of memory. Memory then becomes the gift of imagination. The performance making process locates the absence where the past melds with the present. Through the use of different physical images and vocal layers. Those present as audience are ostensibly transported into both a known and unknown relationship with a past of their invention. Throwing up further questions about the visceral nature of memory, and the effect the reverberation of events has on personal perception of the transformation of moments in time.

(re)view

Walk to Read audience Notes

Mike Pearson's *Bubbling Tom* performance is inspired by recalling the first six years of his life growing up in the village of Hibaldstow in east England. He describes learning to listen to the daily dynamic of his family at a time before being controlled by mobile phones, checking emails and updating social networks. When real time was spent sitting around the kitchen table talking and going over and over the day's events. Pearson (2000) writes of an urgency to re-claim and 're-locate' his identity in this time and place before his history with the countryside of his childhood and its people are forgotten forever. As part of his research Pearson looks for the physical marks he made as a child on the village environment.

'The handprints in white gloss paint I remember making on the shed door; those rooms that were the location of dreams and day-dreams and that provide one's cognitive map for all other places' (2006, p.24).

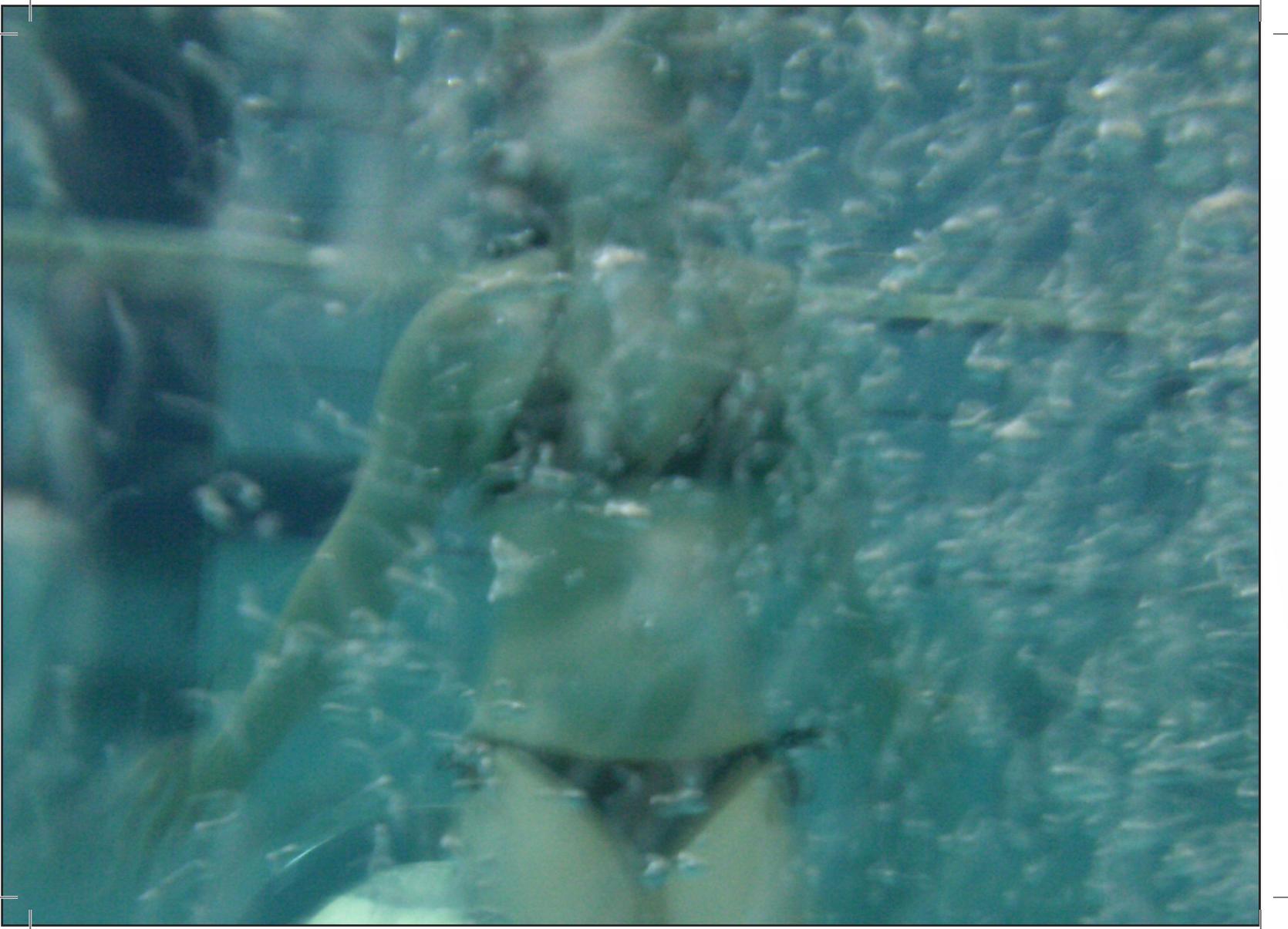


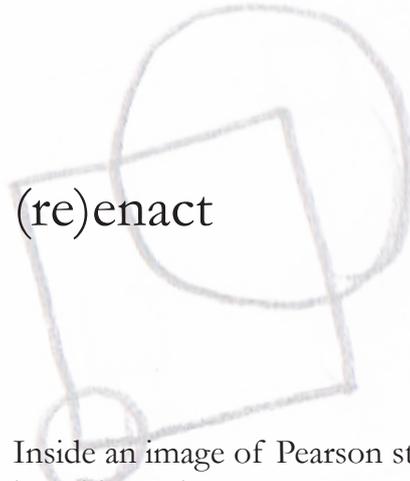
(re)tell

**Announce loudly
"I'm going to put
My face on"**

Enacted as a guided tour Pearson takes his small audience of family and friends to ten sites around the village of Hibaldstow. The memories, events and stories that emerge from the landscape are told by Pearson in the form of 'travellers' tales, poetry, forensic data, quotations, lies, jokes, improvised asides, physical re-enactments, impersonations and intimate reflections' (Pearson 2000, p.176). These anecdotes are also corrected and re-told by interjecting audience members who claim to remember with more clarity than the 'guide'. Fiona Wilkie who was a member of the intimate audience points out that 'Pearson's mother and his primary school teacher were in the audience, and that both of these spectators featured in the stories that he told' (Wilkie 2006, p.36). Similarly In *Memos: the Imagination of Memory* a relationship is forged and a journey undertaken, as the audience become active participants in the narrative, the performer vocalising individual's memories as the performance unfolds.

The book of *Memos: the imagination of Memory* is inspired by the written aspect of *Bubbling Tom*, presented in the form of a 'guide book'. It documents the ten sites on the tour that Pearson stops at with photographs, poems and quotations. Wilkie discusses Mike Pearson's work in relation to site specificity in particular and refers to the 'guidebook' recalling the performance afterwards, which she says highlights the 'discontinuities' of the performance. It is inside these 'discontinuities' where a 'meeting place' can begin to emerge as audience members interact and converse amongst themselves, engaging with their own specific resonance to the performance.





(re)enact

Someone Is Chasing me

Inside an image of Pearson standing in the stream called Bubbling Tom, wearing a suit and up to his knees in cold running water, I can almost hear him re-telling the story of what happened in and around the stream, immersed in the environment. The importance of this work lies in the '[ways of telling](#)' discovered through his processes of researching Hibaldstow and its inhabitants. These are brought into focus through looking at photos and other memorabilia as well as being informed and re-constructed by interviews with family, friends and relatives. Pearson's 'ways of telling' are bound up in the landscape. For example he questions the audience, where is the exact Bubbling Tom? They spend time actively looking in and around the stream (Wilkie 2006).

'Whereas an encyclopaedic filing system is a method by which concepts are written, available one page at a time, a theatre is a place where images are envisioned, available all at once' (Hillman cited in Steinman 1986, p.58).

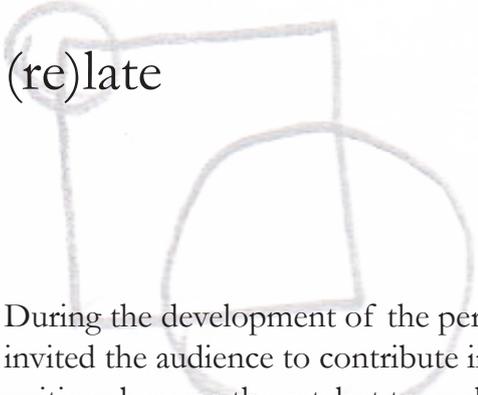


(re)call

'Floating And Being suspended'

In the performance and documentation of *Bubbling Tom*, Pearson's relationship with site-specificity is linked directly to his memory of where he grew up. In contrast Bill Viola's 1985 installation of *The Theatre of Memory*, uses light, sound and image as an interpretation of how the mind works and the brain remembers. In this performance project, I will be asking the audience to 'enter into' the performance as soon as they arrive. In *Memos: the Imagination of Memory* the audience is invited to experience the sensory textures placed in the performance space. This is a way of 'warming up' similar to the preparation for a performance, and invites individuals in the audience to take the time and space for reflection.

(re)late



**Whisper
"All fur coat
And no knickers"**

During the development of the performance in rehearsal, more formal 'showings' and presentations, I invited the audience to contribute in writing a personal memory to the performance. This collection of writings became the catalyst to explore and investigate the internal and external contours structuring the work. Exploring a physical interpretation or verbal translation of these collected memories guided the choreographic and compositional choices of movement and text as the vehicle for the 're-telling' of particular memories. In each performance a 'memory exchange' was made possible with the different audiences that interacted with the work through the 'collected' memory score. Audience members are then witness to their own memories being re-framed and re-told. This 're-telling' added another dimensional layer to a personal memory, that now becomes part of the whole audiences experience of the past in the present.

'When a memory takes on a public form it doesn't necessarily lose its internal psychological intensity, but it may subtly transform it. In fact, sometimes the public use of a memory gives it a definition and substance it didn't have when it lived only in one's mind as a fleeting and infrequent visitor' (Engel cited in Murphy 2008, p.172).

(re)trospect

Balance boxes On Head

In her 2006 article '*Bad memories: the poetics of memory and the difference of culture*' Diane Losche discusses how a tribe in Papua New Guinea locates, exchanges and gives memory away through dance, story and object.



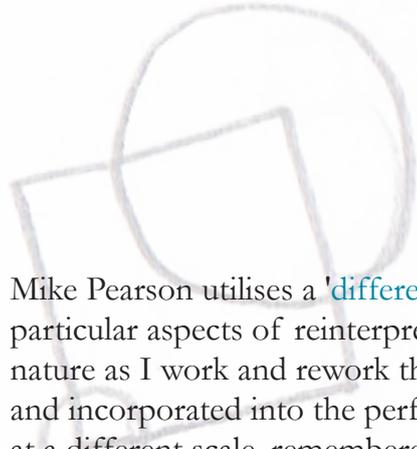


“ Is this memory, or the engagement with looking for and coming to know memory in different places? Today it is taboo to forget or neglect memory, even though the processes of remembering and of forgetting are central to each other. The Abelam tribe of the northern Sepik River in Papua New Guinea, deal with their 'mourning practices' through methods of exchange, by passing on sacred objects and individuals names in a system of genealogical remembering.

In an initiation rite that lasts from sundown until sunrise, two particular narratives are passed from one male group to another in a dance of endurance, pain and suffering. One narrative being about how women came to give birth and the other ultimately depicts the success of the rains and growing yams. The dance of passing these stories on is physically and emotionally intense as the men wear huge inscribed head dresses weighted and precariously balanced at the top of the neck, restricting the movement from bending too far forward or backwards. This long and distressing ceremony embodies the ancestor spirits of these well-known narratives.

The lessons learned from these ancient stories are a part of the 'memory and mourning' that is passed on. The weight and burden of the stories is then handed from one group to another in an 'exchange process' that shares the knowledge, message and melancholy of the past.

This 'exchange process' is part of the Abelam society's intense culture of gift giving during initiation. This society uniquely works to ease the load of memory by giving it away and then passing it back in a never-ending cycle of reciprocity.”



Laugh hysterically With panting Breath

Mike Pearson utilises a 'different scale' in drawing attention to particular aspects of reinterpreting the past. Some of my gathered memories have become second nature as I work and rework them in the studio, whereas others are new, fresh, yet to be negotiated and incorporated into the performance. 'Re-locating myself in a place once intimate; re-embodiment, at a different scale, remembered actions' (Pearson 2006, p.24). Working in the studio I try to unpeel built up sediments of familiarity, I'm dealing with memory... memories, though it is no longer the event or the symbolic meaning that is engaged. One thing becomes another and another until it is completely disconnected from the original written memory. I distil the shapes, sound and movement as the performance takes on a life of its own. Margaret Cameron proposes practicing with 'loyalty and disinterest', which necessitates that I re-enter the work minute by minute 'hearing myself hear, seeing myself see' (Cameron) creating and entering the performance space, softening layers of the self. Keeping my distance lets me make and perform the work rather than be bound to it or a 'real time' past. Therefore the performance lines are constantly shifting, reflecting memory, in that both are a protean experience.

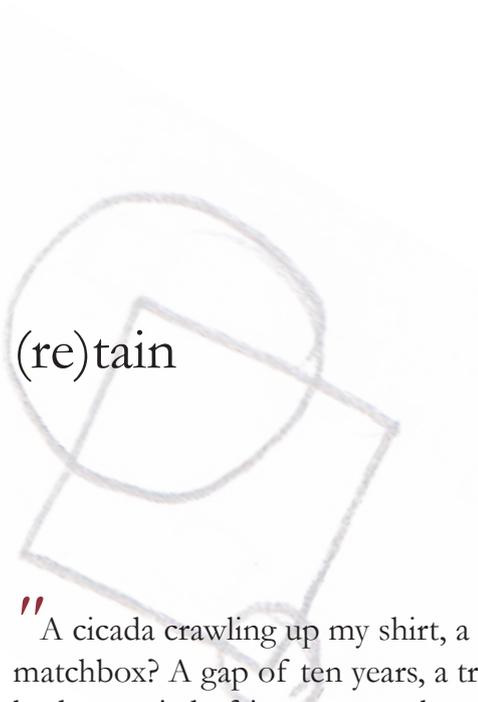


I consciously worked with the memories that produced movement and text that allowed for the most pleasure, the importance of listening to the 360-degree feedback (Hay 2000) keeps me perceiving, adjusting, never quite comfortable in my skin. The evocative and lingering residue of memory has become the final, though not fixed, movement score of *Memos: the Imagination of Memory*.



Siobhan Murphy writes about the creation process of her 2007 performance *Here, Now* as 'experiencing rather than representing the remembered thing', when discussing the desired performance state of embodying memories she had been working with (Murphy 2008, p.176).

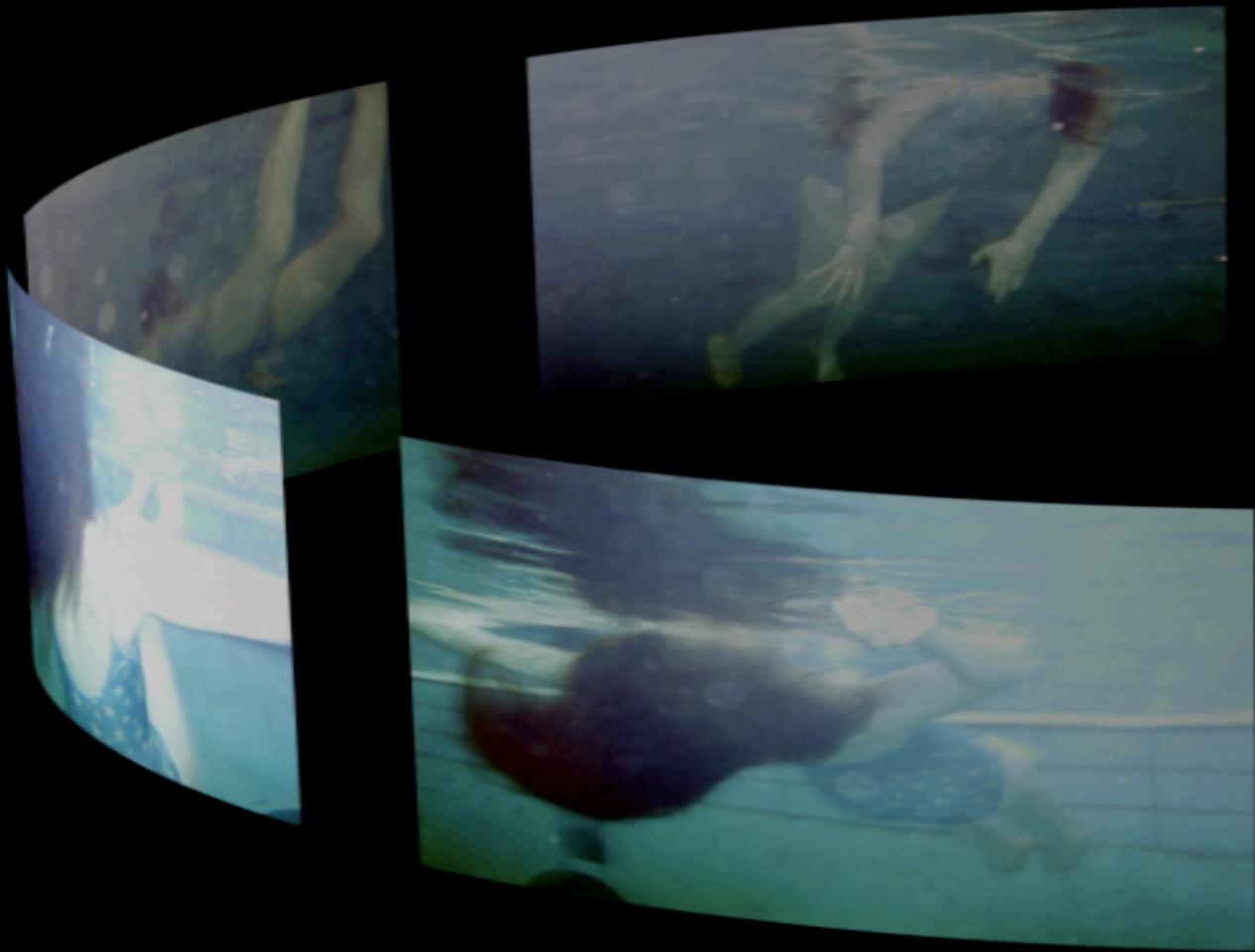
'It is perhaps our bubbling memories that throw into relief our visions of home, out of which emerge all those residual meanings buried in the bigger landscape of "memory-spaces," which we incessantly reconstruct' (Gabriel 1999, p.83).

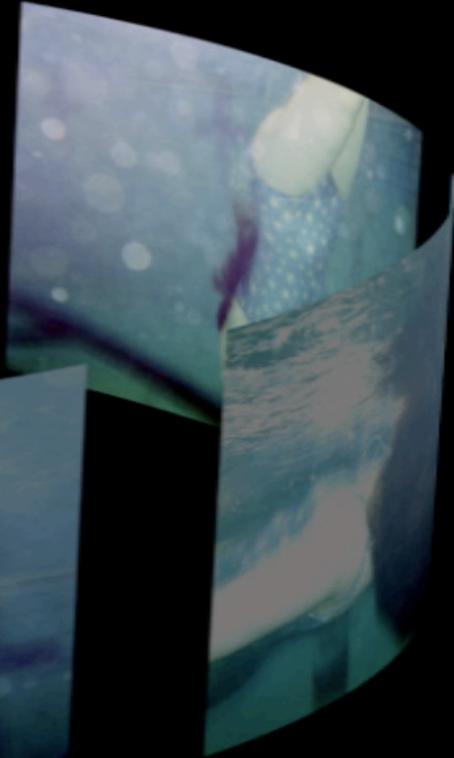


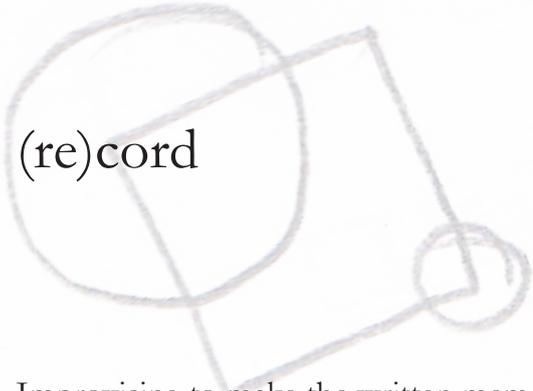
(re)tain

Shake cicada box
With panting
Breath

“ A cicada crawling up my shirt, a cicada found in the dirt or was it attached to a tree and then inside a matchbox? A gap of ten years, a trip around the world, but somehow I remember this translucent shell, a body emptied of its contents, but still keenly clinging to a tree. It seems so familiar and I can't understand why. It must be because it was in the same yard, but I found it in the front, not the back. Is it a trick of the mind? Or rather an image stored deeply inside the body. I did not know this creature, though recognised it immediately. I remember being shocked, what was this insect object that I was sure I had never seen before? Though on the other hand felt a deep connection to. I put that first found cicada in a box and looked at it every day for months afterwards. Was this the strange shape of home? ”







(re)cord

Resume Dance

Improvising to make the written memories physical, I placed the collected papers inside random boxes. The opening and closing of the boxes became the catalyst for movement. I worked in and around the 'everydayness' of movements created, which became purely a reaction inspired by the predictable action of opening and closing. I improvised to pull apart the physical phrases, break them down, mix up fragments of text and movement and try not to get too precious about what I had made. Discarding bits and pieces as quickly, and as unintentionally as forgetting. In rehearsal Helen Sharp observed that, 'I am becoming different through re-entering the shapes of memory.'

'A feeling of floating and being suspended' was a written memory, though also became an important underlying instruction as part of the physical action of the piece, and the actual words become part of the performance text. Similarly post-modern choreographer Trisha Brown's solo '*Accumulation*' combines phrases of text and movement, 'Brown tells two stories simultaneously - one through gesture and abstract movements of the body, the other narrated in words' (Steinman 1986, p.22).

(re)hearse

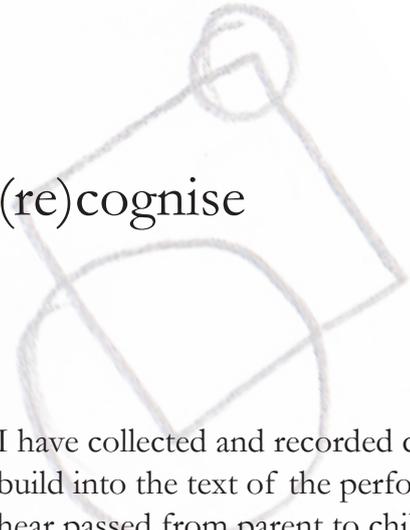


**Arms up,
Unused
Memories**

'And all of this, to work with fragments, with material traces, with evidence, in order to create something – a meaning, a narrative, a story – which stands for the past in the present' (Pearson 2000, p.175).



'What such performance stimulates and elicits is other stories, and stories about stories. It catalyses personal reflection and the desire on the part of the listener not only to reveal and insert her own memories, but also to re-visit communal experiences' (Pearson 2006, p.22).



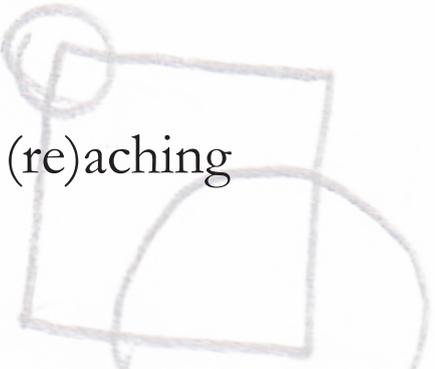
(re)cognise

**In varying tones,
Pitches, lengths
And depths**

I have collected and recorded childhood family sayings and superstitions as part of the research process, to build into the text of the performance soundtrack. The sayings are derived mostly from my youth, others I hear passed from parent to child while walking in the street, some my mother expresses to my daughter on interstate phone calls, others have been overheard from old people muttering to each other at the bus stop. Some laugh light heartedly at these strange expressions of place and time, others remember in some angst a harsh parents fear mongering. They are warnings, comforts, encouragements and part of aural and verbal local lore. Pearson talks of these folklores and superstitions being a part of the landscape of remembering. 'Through a complex set of mutually held beliefs about the natural world and human agency, forms of communality and social practice are engendered, and enacted' (2006, p.71). It is our interaction with others through the course of our life that makes us curious about memory. Event and sensation is always linked, whether it be a gently lingering memory or a harsh and abrupt remembering that catapults our being into another dimension for only an instant.



'Memory is more like a shifting collage, a narrative spun out of scraps and constructed anew whenever recollection takes place' (McGowan 2010, p.70).



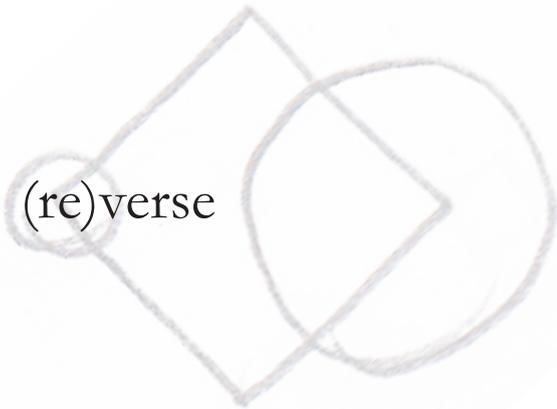
(re)aching

**Lingering say
"Take it with a
Grain of salt"**

It is the '[stitching and unstitching of memory](#)' described by Helen Sharp that gives voice to the changing shape of memory I have been developing, which also informs and builds on, 'generative fragments' (Meskimmon 2010, p.49) to work with...

" At the UNSW in 2008 I continued this investigation with a performance called the *Materiality of Memory* in which I used my own clothing to create a woven matt. Ripping and shredding a dress off my body, I then used the material to knit with, using giant knitting needles to create a re-invention of the material self. Re-organising a collection of memories of smell, shape and texture, which are implanted in everyday fabrics. Shredding and knotting a material piece of the past invites the destruction and manipulation of memory to take on another form, fragments of memories now overlap and are intertwined and en-meshed with each other, creating a material object embodiment of entangled memories. The memory embedded in the material was transformed through the action and I recall stories that are triggered by the methodical movement of knotting the fabric and knitting. The clicking needles, the sensations activated from the smell, touch and feel of the cloth all act on narrative forming pictures."





Satisfied drinking Breathe into Microphone

Working on my own and in conjunction with others has provided the freedom and material to make *Memos: the Imagination of Memory*. Drawing ideas from the memories of those around me left spaces for the imagination of memory to take over in the translation process. The work has developed around the audience's memories, which have become embodied and embedded in the score, the boxes and cylinders being the metaphorical containers for memory. Joseph Cornell notes that the relationship he has developed working with boxes is an 'Intense longing to get into the box - this overflowing, a richness and poetry felt when working with boxes' (Cornell cited in Blair 1998, p.138). In Cornell's artworks and in this performance project, boxes inspire many different meanings and serve a multitude of functions. The boxes are still important, but some now lie open, their insides spilling into the space. Some I have become attached to, others are still a mystery. Some have a life of their own and have become the living and breathing scenery and landscape of the performance space.



(or)maybe

Or maybe it is a place, a rock, a field of flowers that you ran through as a child

Or maybe it is in a gesture that you see in your mother all the time and suddenly realise that you repeat the same action, for the same reasons, in the same place in the same conversations and now you can see yourself doing it

Or maybe it is the rough and calloused hand that pulls you into the darkness

Or maybe it is the sight of your own hands as they grow lines before your very eyes

Or maybe it is someone else's story that you have heard so many times and feel so close to that you truly believe it is yours

Or maybe it is the steamy smell of oil and rain on the road after her car has left

Or maybe it is the charcoal crunch of burnt bread that tells you to move on

Or maybe it is the sensation of your blistering tongue after that final cigarette

Or maybe it is scary and amazing that you can taste that taste in your mouth when she screams

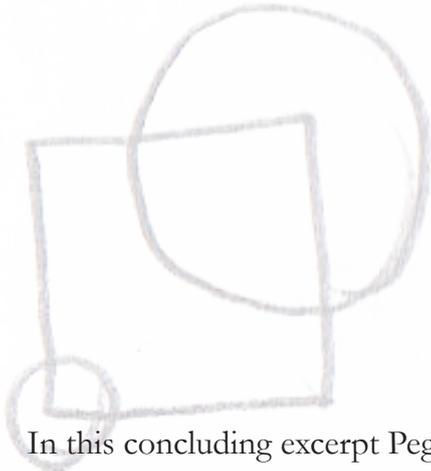
Or maybe it is totally made up

Or maybe it is a second skin

Or maybe someone has passed away, moved out or grown up

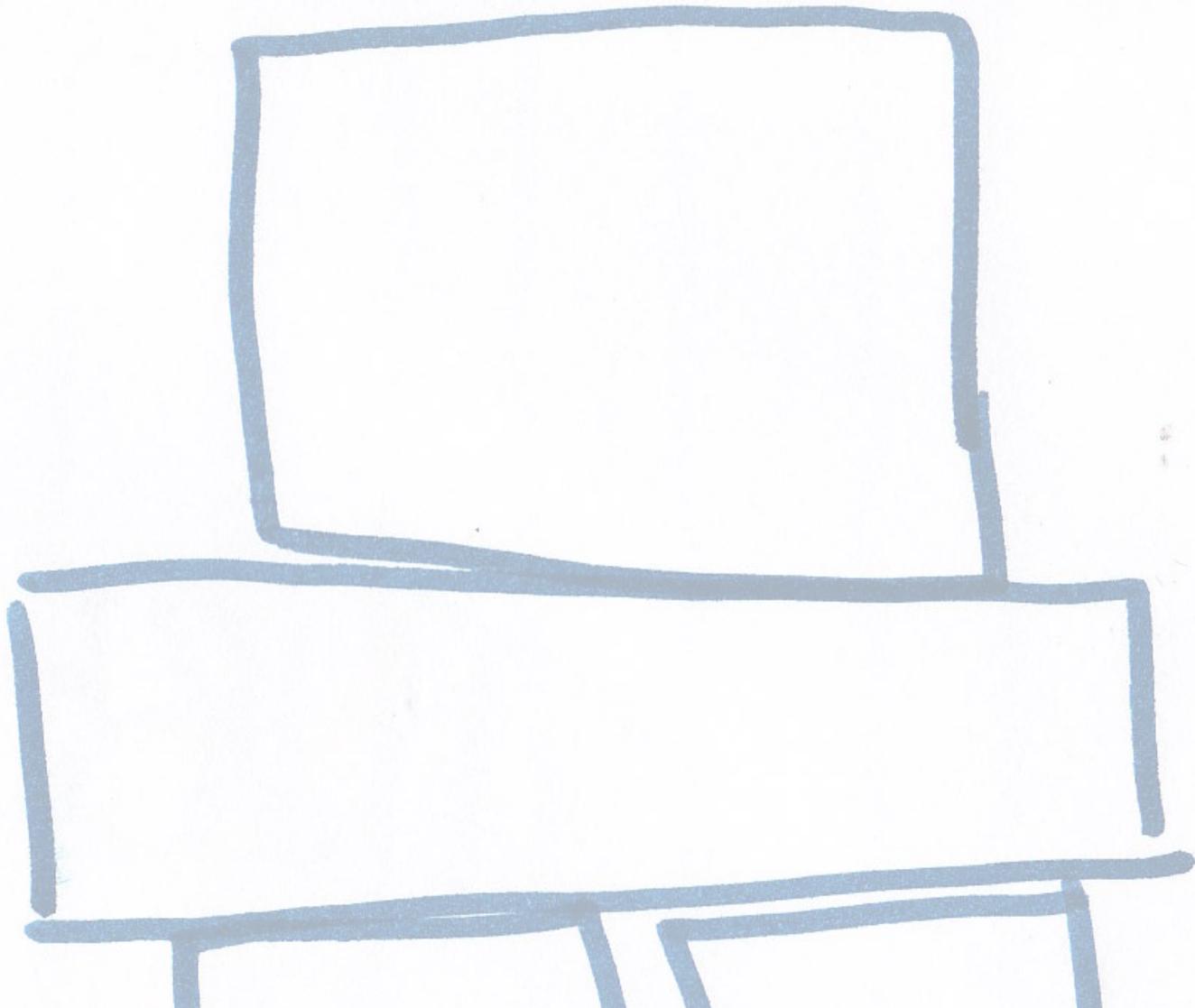
Or maybe it is the sound of your child's bangles on her wrist that mean the day has already begun





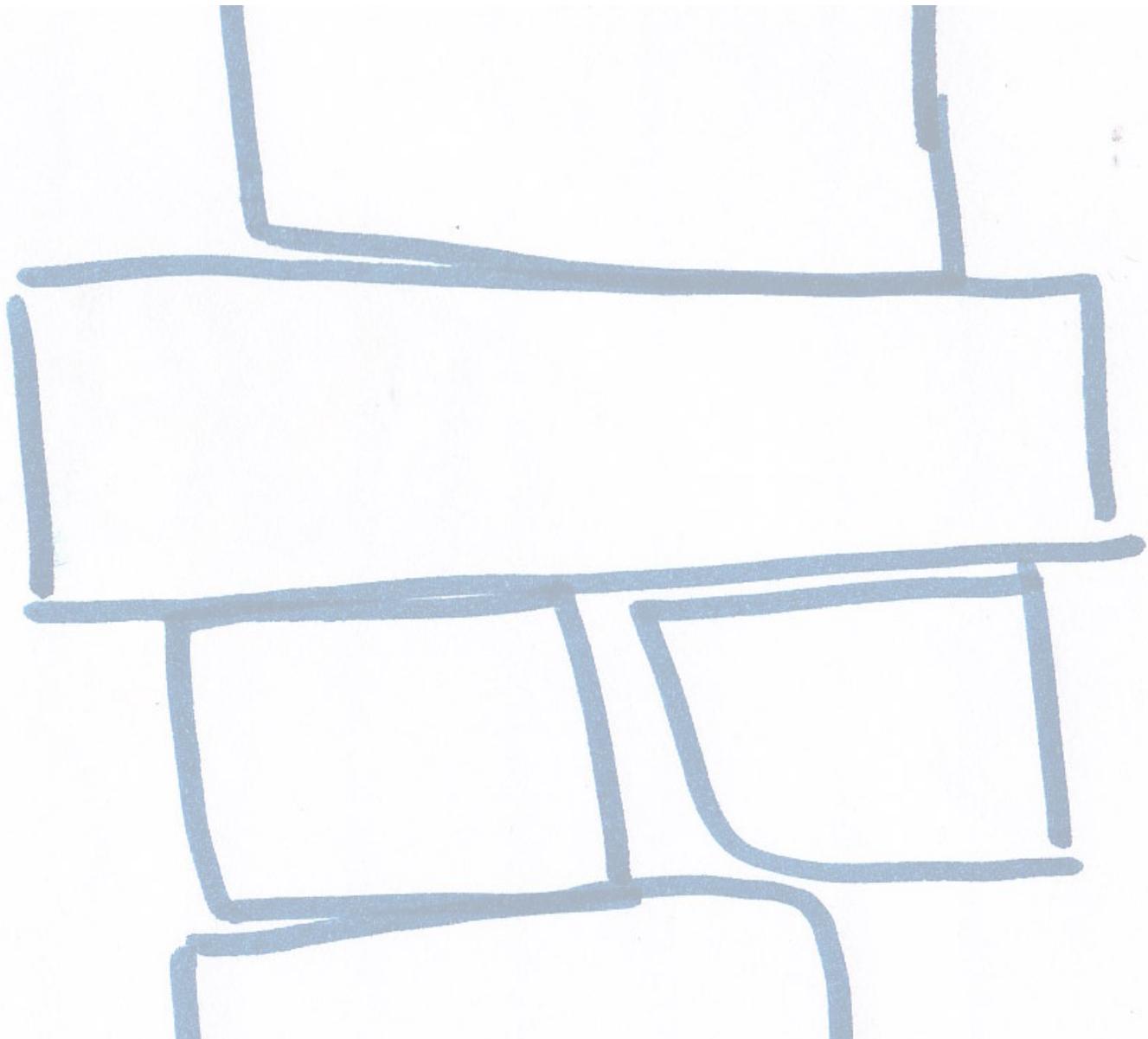
In this concluding excerpt Peggy Phelan describes the emotions of absence and yearning that memory creates, over time and with separation. The future holds all imaginal possibilities of the past as a unique and celebratory 'gift' from one to another.

'I have memories of what was not there, memories of the actions you never took, memories of the words I never wrote, memories of paintings not yet painted I want so much to show you, memories of kisses I swallowed because of crowds, memories of who we could have become but did not. How can I thank you for all the things you never did? All the things you never said? I am in love with the memories of what never happened, who we never became' (2000, p.87).

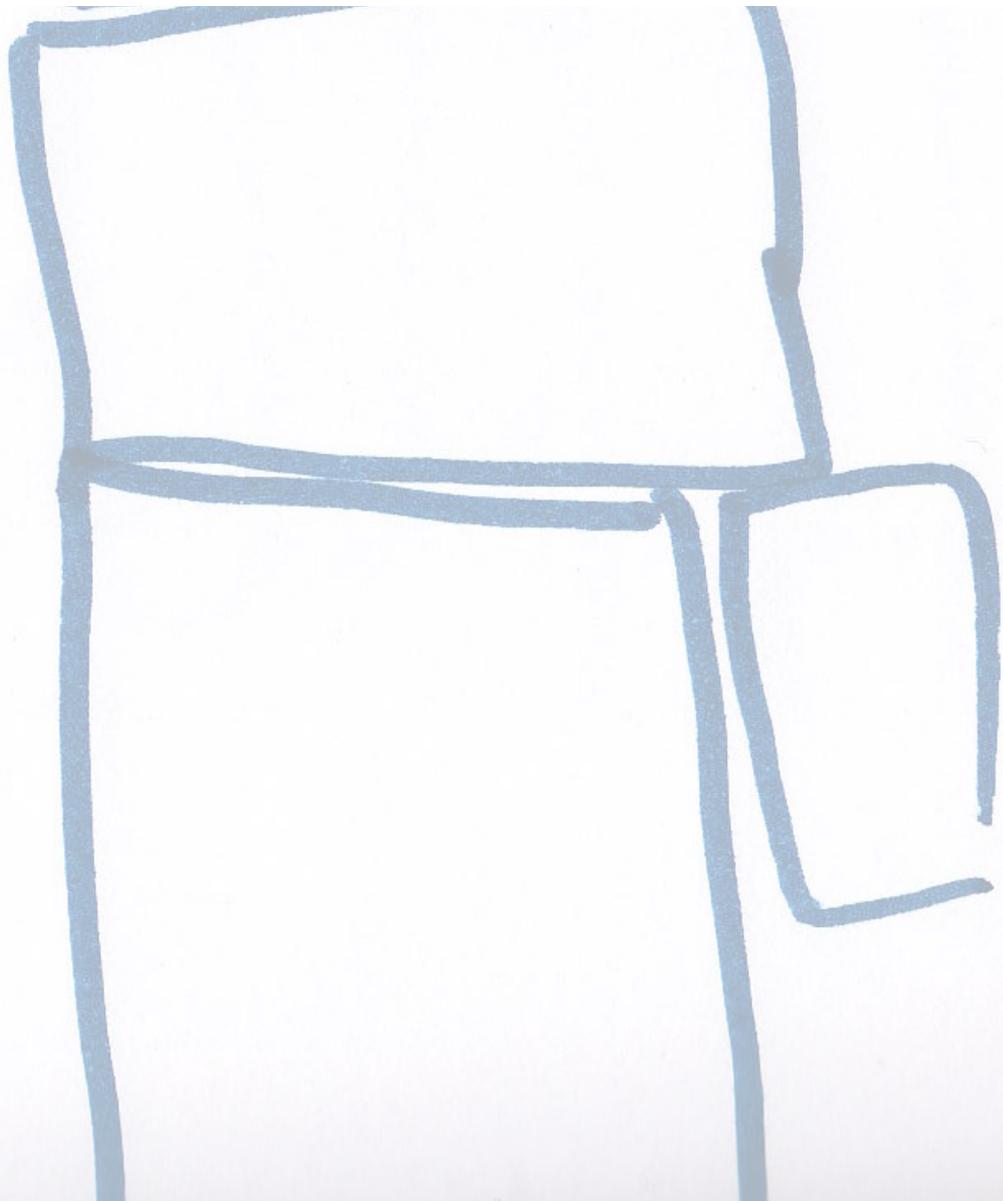


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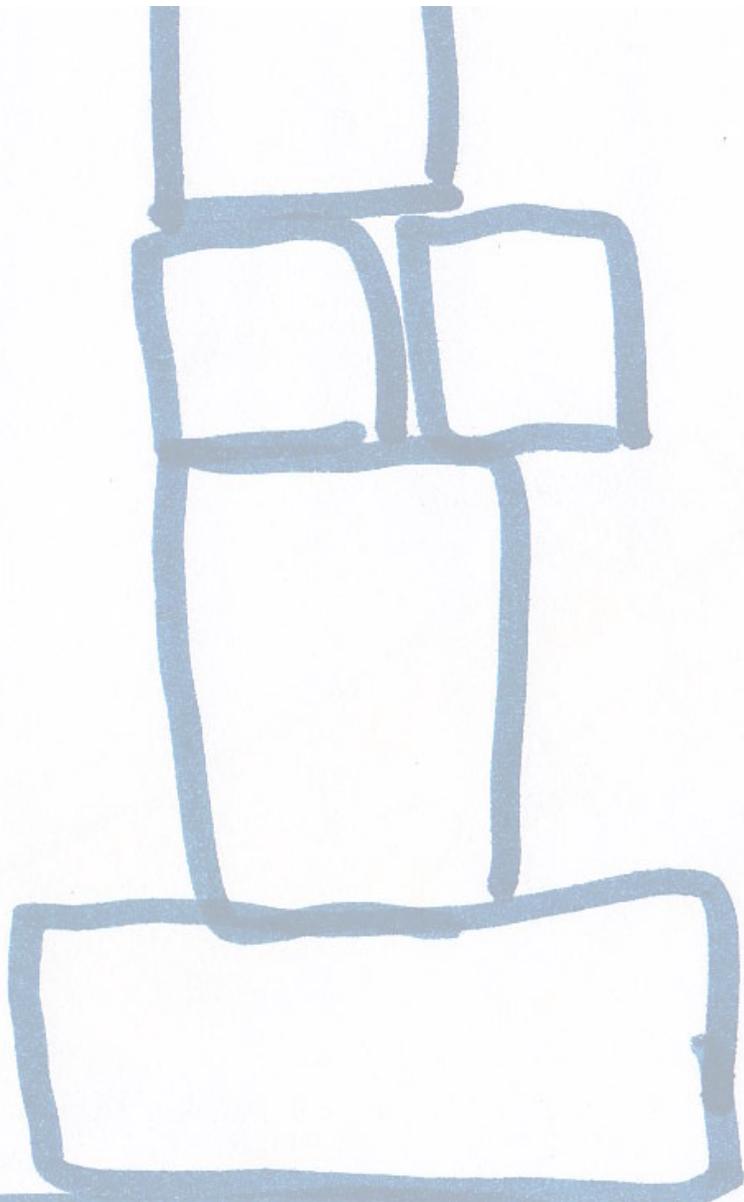
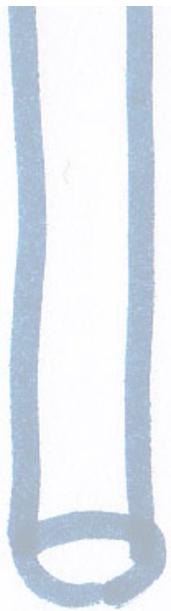
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