

Collecting identity: the PINcard game

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

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Recollection from the artist - age 17, 1972.

I walked into my grandmother's kitchen, the larger of two in the big old house in Marrickville. She had always lived with us - or we with her.

There was an array of utensils, cups and plates on the sink. Some were washed and stacked; others awaited her attention. They sat, suspended by the energy of her life. I was transfixed.

They were no longer just objects, but now loaded with meaning as her belongings, a testament of her life, soon to disappear.

She had suffered a stroke in the early hours of that morning and never returned to her kitchen.

..... such is my life-long obsession with the stories that objects and images from everyday life can tell.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The core epistemic shift from authorial authority to the readerly perception (Barthes, 1977) or from the producer to the consumer (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) characterises the postmodern, or current, trend in cultural theory. This shift provides the theoretical platform for this research in that it situates the viewer of artistic production as the co-creator of meaning (Bourdieu, 1985).

This research expands on such relationships by specifying the fundamental notions involved in the candidates core visual practice and further investigates shifts in meaning by providing the opportunity for a variety of audiences to explore interpretation in different arrangements and variations of public and private contexts.

The artist Louise Bourgeois has created many works in her practice that amplify her claim that if life has any meaning it is through memory...and our senses. In turn, it is generally acknowledged that art appreciation is a subjective experience, often affected by personal memory.

Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1957), in which a chance encounter with a *madeleine** (a small tea cake) brings back a flood of childhood memories for the protagonist, is a well cited example:

The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it [but] as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine... immediately the old grey house upon the street, where [Aunt Léonie's] room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden which had been built out behind it for my parents¹

However, literary theorist Paul John Eakin, points out that Proust sees memory as invariable and argues in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999)², that remembering is a dynamic process. In other words, memories are not narratives simply written into mental books and shelved away; the act of remembering is living and active, and the process of recalling itself reconfigures memory.

¹ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past (A la recherche du temps perdu)*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, (London: Chatto & Windus): 1957.

² Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University: 1999.

In thinking about memory, perhaps a more practical example, which is closer to home for me, comes from Clive James - an ex-patriate Australian author and broadcaster. In the second volume of his memoirs, *Falling Towards England*³, James says; *When I hold my hands as if in prayer and roll a pencil between them, I can smell the plasticine snakes I made in Class 1B at Kogarah Infants' School.* My own recollection is that of the smell on my hands of the little red-brown house shaped rubber slipped onto the end of the pencil.

Given these examples, including the personal instance quoted in the opening recollection, memories largely seem to be fragments from the past, awakened by the senses and reconfigured by our present perception. Such fragments are often brought to the surface when viewing visual art, no matter how banal the subject might seem to be. This research seeks to test and expand on such knowledge by observation, recording and understanding the meanings that can emerge from the artworks over time. Within the practice of the artist, images have been created and arranged to evoke new responses in the participating audience in variance of those intended by the artist.

The purpose of the written component of this candidature is to 'articulate art practice as knowledge' (Barrett, 2004), particularly fundamental notions of the candidates core practice in which uniquely created visual imagery has been produced to expand on arising complications of changing contexts, and the way the work is viewed and interpreted by others. By exhibiting multi paneled works in public contexts as well as surveying works (which were chosen and taken into the private domains of others) the assumptions I have made as an artist in initially formatting and contextualising work for particular spaces was put into question. Response to the works created for the Final Exhibition *Collecting Identity* is a desirable part of this process.

The exegesis also documents the survey undertaken (using the *Flashcards*).

Records of the final exhibition held at the University Gallery, University of Newcastle in March 2014 include invitations, catalogue, DVD, digital photographs and a Power Point Slide Presentation. These represent all the major components of the candidature and in doing so demonstrate the depth of the artist's core practice.

³ Clive James, 'Preface', *Falling Towards England*, (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd): 1985.