

**Memory and Pattern: An Interrogation of the Privacy of  
Consciousness Through Visual Practice**

by

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requirements for the degree of

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## DECLARATION

### Signed statement of originality

This Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.



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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Connor', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Amanda Connor**

## ***Abstract***

In less than three years, I have accumulated over a million words in journal entries. The written outpourings constitute an intensely private realm, and yet I have sought to express the essence of the content and process of my written records, providing it with a visual form. My work features wooden constructions, including objects resembling letters of the alphabet, onto which I have transcribed hand-written fragments of text from the journal.

The central investigation of my project concerns a dichotomy between creative expression and the privacy of consciousness, exploring the capacity of realms of creative expression to deal with this tension.

Through artistic practice and through reference to other work, I have been evaluating the potential of employing a visual language, incorporating written text, to transcend the dilemma of expressing that which lies in a highly personal realm, but is nevertheless indicative of a craving to reach beyond the barrier of loneliness and isolation.

The voice meanders in an incessant dialogue between concealment and revelation that finds its visual metaphor in the palimpsest. The creation of a haphazardly organized alphabet demonstrates the awkwardness of language and its limitations as a tool to penetrate beyond the surface of perception to objective truths, while the volume of written text expresses the relentless nature of a search for personal truth, which is specifically focussed on understanding the

dialogue between ones perception and that which one perceives, in particular, embodiments of consciousness that exist outside of ones own.

I have utilized moving images to enhance and magnify the issue of subjectivity. This component was explored at a later stage of my research, and marks a significant development in my thinking, in which I encountered a more optimistic understanding of the potential fluidity of subjectivity, distinct from earlier inclinations to regard the subjective realm as a fixed enclosure.

The work's function is to glorify the dilemma without solving it, aiming to induce in the viewer a mesmerized awareness of the mystery and complexity of human experience.

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## ***Introduction***

In order to explain the journey that constitutes my research, it is necessary for me to tell a story about a dream, since the outcome of this research is illustrated in that dream. Among manifold poignant dreams that lace this journey, I will refer to a small number of these in the course of the paper.

*In the early autumn of 2001, I woke at 3am from a strange and somewhat disturbing dream. The dream was unusual in that its enigma created an on-going preoccupation in my waking life, transforming my thinking and habits in a way that is not normally considered permissible of dreams.*

*The dream took place in a library; my dreaming awareness accepted it as the Art School's Carington-Smith library, but when I went over the details of the dream I remembered that the window near the carrel at which I was sitting was on a higher level, overlooking a wide, sloped lawn with large trees in rich autumnal colours. To my astonishment, I realized this was the view I recalled from the Morris-Miller library at the Sandy Bay campus where I studied a Bachelor of Arts in the mid-to late-1980s. At the time of the dream I was embarking on my second year of studying a research higher degree at the School of Art.*

*I was browsing over an assortment of memorabilia, including letters, maps, greeting cards and photographs, all of which were connected to my family history. Sifting through the collection, I was drawn to a single photograph, a colour Polaroid snap-shot,*

*square with white edges, reminiscent of most of the photographs from my childhood. It depicted an area of our backyard, towards the end of the 1970s, when our house was of white weatherboard, and there were blue icsias growing at the edge of what was once a grass tennis court but was (at the time that the photograph would have been taken) lumpy with mounds of manure because we had kept and ridden ponies over it. There was a honeysuckle shrub in the corner and a forest of banksia. (In June 2002 when I returned on a rare visit to the property, I was dismayed to discover both these varieties of flora had been mercilessly cleared). The Powton tree, planted in the early 1990s was absent, but the picnic table (acquired in the early 1990s) was there, except that it was positioned parallel to the house rather than to the tennis court. Within the photo's frame, there was a gathering of people connected to my family, along with an atmosphere of festivity, and I suspected it to be a children's party.*

*What confronted me overwhelmingly was that in the very centre of the photograph was the vivid image of an adolescent girl. Though the teenage entity was recognizable, it did not match the time that the photograph was taken. I would have been about eight or nine, and I did not know the person in the photograph for many years to come. The girl's invasion in my past was the main incongruity that haunted my perception of the dream, although I was not yet equipped to wrestle with it.*

*Indeed, what was odd about the dream was a sense that it was not I who had placed her there, as distinct*

*from my normal understanding of the dream as an extension of my imagination, something I have a degree of control over, whether or not I am conscious of this in my dreaming mind.*

*My focus was drawn to this figure and to the bizarre nature of her placement (or misplacement) in the photograph. I'm not sure what happened then, but I may have zoomed in for a split second on the scene so that I was immersed in it, before half-waking, and then I was back in the library, hunting for the photograph to show to someone as evidence of my strange discovery, an anguished frenzy resulting from my inability to retrace it.*

*At 3am, my baffled wide-awake mind knew only that this was a dream like no others I had encountered, but I didn't know why, and I didn't speculate over its significance.*

*At that time it seemed so eerie to me that I fully expected to be terrified and unable to sleep for several nights. Weird phenomena such as 'ghosts' (living or dead); all things associated with the paranormal, had always struck me with varying degrees of fear (mostly terror) when they confronted me during the night. But this way of responding began to dissolve shortly after I had this dream. An inexplicable sense of reassurance then swept over me; a voice that told me the dream wasn't sinister, and I dozed off peacefully.*

*Although I told someone about it the following day, I then forgot all about the dream for an inestimable*

*period, until something triggered my memory of it, and the details flooded back to me, so that I was able to capture it in writing. By this time the preoccupation with things relating to the content of the dream had already crept into my waking life.*

*My exasperation in not having kept any written record of the dream initially, parallels my desire to go back to the dream and ask the apparent 'intruder', the misplaced figure, for an explanation of its presence in a past she did not inhabit. Part of this frustration is that I am unable to determine the time that the dream took place, and to slot it in among the other crucial events that surrounded it. The time of the dream is all the more difficult to pin down because it occurred at a threshold, beyond which the urgency to record things in writing perpetuated to an extreme I had not yet encountered. It was like trying to pinpoint the time at which twilight commences.*

*The dream's mystery continued to haunt me in a compelling, intangible and, so it then seemed, incongruous manner. It demanded my attention and, as if under the spell of hypnosis, I obeyed its voice. It was as if I had no choice. Its influence seeped into all areas of my life, but its main manifestation was in the vast increase of my urgency to write.*

*The writing was at first a therapeutic tool, a device to enable me the mastery to survive in an emotional whirlwind. It also offered a curious form of revenge on the adverse effects that themes conjured up by the dream had inflicted on the life beyond the past*

*depicted in the photograph. It then became a necessary form of expression, and the very core of my current work.*

## ***PART ONE***

### ***A Child's Tapestry***

Weaving memories from experience has always been a vital part of my existence. I was four when I began to cultivate a habit of taking mental photographs encapsulating moments I wanted to retain and celebrate. One of the earliest was the sensation of gazing upwards from a soft, cool lawn, at patches of sky framed by the rugged branches and large yellow green leaves of the magnolia tree in my grandparent's garden. Another was a view from a beach towel on the sand, surrounded by sun umbrellas and a patchwork of shacks and dry grass, accompanied by gentle ocean noises and children's laughter. On gloomy days I would sometimes sit in a quiet place with my eyes closed and sift through the album that my mind had compiled.

In the school playground I constructed mental narratives, as part of a continuous autobiography that was irresistibly laced with the imaginary.

From the time I began to read books, rather than stories with pictures, I wanted to write my own. In the classroom, I was notorious for churning out elaborate fantasy stories on paper, while in my mind, I was constructing my life story as it unfolded.

The status of the imagined experiences was supreme, and I regarded them not only as integral to life, but as

the colour, or even the necessary substance, within the outlines of matter-of-fact existence.

This realm, its vivid presence, was one I fully embraced and possessed. Dreams were an important component, and I marvelled at how real they were, even though they took place inside my head while I was asleep. It seemed that my experience was ruled by the magic of occurrences that were exclusive to an inner world, and I placed immense value on the freedom this world offered. The imaginary was my constant refuge, and the major reason for my idealization of childhood as I remember it.

Being able to visualize, possess, and in a sense capture memories was something I continued to build on as a fundamental strategy that played a powerful dialogue with my imagination.

While imagining is experience that takes place internally, it is generally understood that the experience relies upon that which is encountered objectively, its images appropriated from a realm that is beyond subjectivity. As a child, I refused to acknowledge this as truth (what was inside my head, ultimately, was the only reality) and, in this respect, (I confess), I was greedy with my imaginary life, and intent on keeping it all to myself.

A particularly disturbing dream recurred a number of times in my very early childhood. I was sitting around a camp-fire, in the dark, among a circle consisting of all the people in my life so far, which at that time

comprised of family, friends of the family, and pre-school mates, confronting me with the statement: 'We don't exist. You only imagined us. You're imagining everything'. I didn't take this statement as truth, but it often invaded my thinking. It is a puzzling and sinister revelation (a revelation as it occurred in the dream) for a small child to absorb. I was infected by this fundamental scepticism from a very early age.

While growing up, a well developed sense of individuality, teamed with frequent episodes of feeling misunderstood by those around me, added to the crisis of solipsism.<sup>1</sup> Having a powerful imagination didn't help matters either, since it reinforced an awareness that I could create what I needed inside my own mind in order to sustain myself emotionally.

### *The Writing of Bachelard*

In *Air and Dreams*, Bachelard asserts that imagination, contrary to the mistaken perception that it is a faculty that *forms* images, actually *deforms* the images of our perception; it is, above all, the faculty that frees us from immediate images and *changes* them:

[Without this transformation or] unexpected fusion of images, [he claims]: there is no *imaginative act*. If the image that is *present* does not make us think of one that is *absent*, if an image does not determine an abundance – an explosion – of unusual images, then there is no imagination. There is only perception, the memory of a perception, a familiar memory, an habitual way of viewing form and colour.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Solipsism is the assertion that we have no rational grounds for believing in the existence of other forms of consciousness, because we have no logical access to these.

<sup>2</sup> Bachelard, G., *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, E.R. Farrell and C.F. Farrell [trans.], The Dallas Institute Publications, Paris: 1988, p1.

Bachelard's treatment of imagination in *Water and Dreams* rests on his assertion that:

The imagination is not, as its etymology suggests, the faculty for forming images of reality; it is the faculty for forming images which go beyond reality, which sing reality.<sup>3</sup>

This is further illustrated in a contrast between the imaginable and the perceived world, with a quote from Charles Nodier's *Reveries*, 'The map of the imaginable world is drawn only in dreams. The universe perceived through our senses is an infinitely small one'.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of the 'immensity' of 'daydream' is developed in chapter 8 of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*:

One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream. Daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur. And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity.<sup>5</sup>

In *Air and Dreams*, Bachelard comments on the 'open' and 'elusive' nature of imagination, being 'the human psyche's experience of "openness" and "novelty"'. Bachelard views the Poem as 'an aspiration towards new images', corresponding to the human psyche's need for novelty. He outlines structure and mobility as opposites, and asserts that mobility of images is

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<sup>3</sup> Bachelard, G., *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, E.R. Farrel [trans.], Pegasus Foundation, Dallas: 1983, p16.

<sup>4</sup> Nodier, C., *Reveries, Les Feuilles Vives*, Paris, 1979, in *ibid*, p17.

<sup>5</sup> Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Space*, M. Jolas [trans.], Beacon Press, Boston: 1994, p182.

essential to studying the psychology of the imagination.

In the introduction to the *Poetics of Space*, he suggests that art is:

an increase of life, a sort of competition of surprises that stimulates our consciousness and keeps it from becoming somnolent... The image, in its simplicity ...is the property of a naïve consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Relevant Artists: Alice Aycock and Judy Pfaff***

My attraction to the work of Alice Aycock and Judy Pfaff is connected to the experience of immensity that their work reflects.

The captivating force of Aycock's work is the product of a vast hoard of knowledge from which she derives inspiration. It is expressive of a network that constitutes all the elements of a dizzyingly complex universe.<sup>7</sup>

In his essay *Alice Aycock's Impossibilism*, Jonathan Fineberg writes:

The bewildering multiplicity and obscurity of her sources mirrors her experience of the overwhelming complexities of the world and expresses her drive to master them.<sup>8</sup>

Fineberg points out that it is the thought process of the artist rather than the scientific, historical, and mythical

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pxxix.

<sup>7</sup> Alice Aycock is an American artist who works primarily in a sculptural medium.

<sup>8</sup> Fineberg, J., *Alice Aycock, Retrospektive der Projekte und Ideen 1972 – 1983 Installation und Zeichnungen* [Exhibition Catalogue], Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Herausgeber: 1983, (unpaginated).

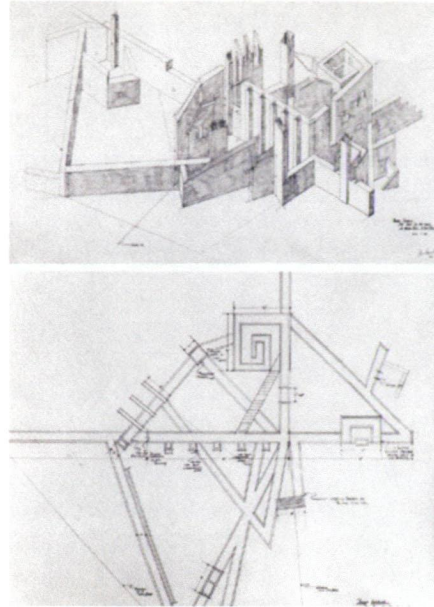
references crammed into various works that one must regard as the central subject matter of her work, and that any single work can only represent a small fragment of this thought process 'at a given moment in its ongoing evolution'.<sup>9</sup>

Among Aycock's most fascinating works are, as specified in their titles, 'Projects...' which consist of intricately drafted drawings; plans for possible sculptural works, many of which have as yet been unrealized in a three dimensional form. Narratives written by the artist to correspond to these projects are childlike elaborations of an imaginary historical construct, a dream-like cosmos of events. That the narrative has the impression of flowing spontaneously, with a quality of childlike gibberish bordering on lunacy, only heightens the awareness of the playful fluidity of the imagination and its potential to liquefy and reform images. This freedom stems from a joy that is innocently precocious.

The stories that juxtapose these drawings often meander incoherently, as in *The City of Walls* (1978), which offers character outlines, describing an entanglement of desire, in which:

They loved one another, that is, as one turned to another one who in turn moved in the direction of the fourth one who was in turn moving toward the fifth...or rather just as #1 began to have a deep neolithic longing for #3, the presence of #5 stifled/sated that longing and this in turn roused #5's passion for #2 who had for the time being sought oblivion by sucking her left thumb. [Aycock concludes the paragraph with this quirky detail]: By the way, it is

Cleopatre who is fond of running a smooth cool cloth between her fingers.<sup>10</sup>



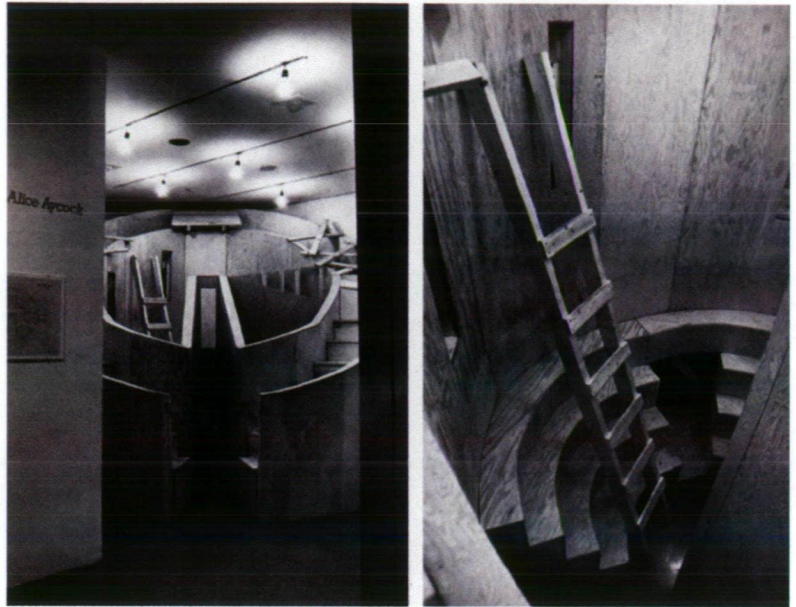
**Figure 1:**  
Alice Aycock  
*The City of Walls* (1978)  
Pencil on Vellum  
105 x 113cm  
Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York

The mutational flow of narratives such as these reflects the sequence of dreams, the spontaneous rearrangement of the elements among a vocabulary of perception.

The unrealized potential of such works is enticing, adding to the mystery and excitement of Aycock's process.

Among her sculptural works, *Studies for a Town* (1977), is a structure resembling a tower, built to appear as if it has been sliced on a cross-section,

offering a tiered view of its interior, a series of walls within walls and architectural elements comprising of



**Figure 2:**  
Alice Aycock  
*Studies for a Town* (1977)  
Wooden construction  
90-300cm (variation)  
330-375cm (diameter variation)

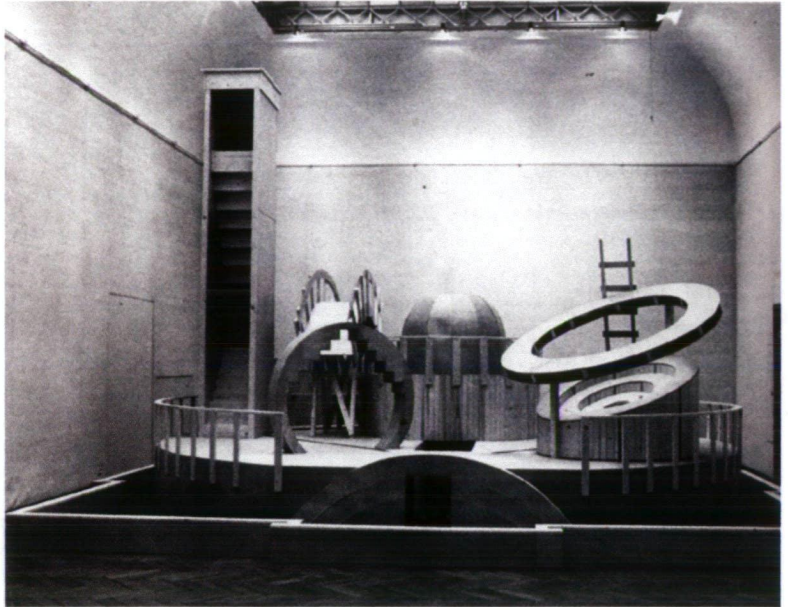
ladders, steps, chasms, arranged in such a way that its elements play on that which is accessible and that which is inaccessible, enticing the viewer like the doorways in Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.<sup>11</sup>

*The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe Part 11* (1978) features an inverted staircase, a bridge, a dome, a ladder rising up from the ground to empty space; objects that are physically static, but offer a presence of movement.

<sup>11</sup>

Carroll, L., *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*, Western Publishing Company, Inc, U.S.A: (no year specified in publication).

The proliferation of Aycock's drawings supplies a boundless potential. Her astonishing repertoire presents an intricate storehouse and displays an



**Figure 3:**  
Alice Aycock,  
*The Angels Continue Turning*  
*the Wheels of the Universe Part II* (1978)  
7000cm square x 5000cm high (tower)  
Executed for the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (destroyed)

interaction between that which is contained within the artist's mind, and which she might create, and the demonstration of the capacity to do so. The interweaving process, whereby elaborate and skilfully drafted plans that map Aycock's incentive to create fantastic worlds, include those which are and those which are not yet realized in a three dimensional form.

The work of Judy Pfaff demonstrates a theatrical and vertiginous quality as well as possessing a distinctively gestural appeal.<sup>12</sup> The boldness and spontaneity is akin

<sup>12</sup>

Judy Pfaff is a British/American artist who works primarily in sculptural installation.

to the carefree abandonment that characterizes childhood creativity. In the catalogue essay to *Pfaff's*



**Figure 4:**  
Judy Pfaff  
*Rock, Paper, Scissors* (1982)  
Mixed media installation  
Dimensions unknown

*Installations: Abstraction on the Rebound*, Susan Krane (assistant curator) writes that:

The quizzical dissociation initiated by Pfaff's works derives also from her nonsequential labyrinthine layerings of information- [sic] for which she has found analogies in the complexities that interrelate natural systems.<sup>13</sup>

According to Nancy Princenthal 'Pfaff's work has always been exuberant, lush and hospitable to the language of poetry and music'.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Krane, S., 'Pfaff's Installations: Abstraction on the Rebound', in *Judy Pfaff*, The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy: 1982, p11.

<sup>14</sup> Princenthal, N., 'Judy Pfaff, Life and Limb,' in *Art in America* vol. 86 October '98, p100.

Princenthal's article includes an overview of Pfaff's massive installation *Cirque, Cirque* (1995), in which 9



**Figure 5:**  
Judy Pfaff  
*Cirque, Cirque* (1995)  
Mixed media  
700 000 square feet

miles of metal tubing roams boldly beneath the roof of the Philadelphia Convention Centre, within a space of 700 000 square feet. Above the gold and blue aluminium tubing, are suspended glass globes tinted yellow and blue; these are connected by fine metal bars in arrangements that suggest constellations. The central focus of Princenthal's description is its evocation of experiencing submergence in the depths of an ocean. Expanding and contracting metal coils are likened to a giant squid's tentacles, 'while smaller arabesques suggest the shimmer of a school of fish'. From the audience viewpoint at the floor of the immense centre, 'light and life play far above near the water's surface, perhaps dimly echoed by deep-sea

bioluminescence'.<sup>15</sup> The work consists of an imaginative rearrangement of solid material elements, transformed by the fluidity of the artist's inner vision into a captivating, otherworldly landscape.

### ***Materials***

From the beginnings of my sculptural practice, I chose to work with whatever I could find that attracted me. Discarded objects had a special appeal, reinforcing the serendipity of my process. The enticement of wooden off-cuts dominated my focus during my final undergraduate year, continuing as a feature in my honours work and as my postgraduate research developed.

Throughout honours and into my postgraduate research I questioned my continual use of these off-cuts. Was I merely clinging to it because it was 'safe?' Because it had become part of a formula? Because it was readily available? My attraction to wood is linked to my interest in pattern, and those found in wood, particularly the readily available radiata pine, (a hearty supply of which I have found in bins and on the floor of the school's wood work-shop), have a special appeal. The patterns are the visual quality of the wood's unique structure, and it is these two aspects of experience, its structure and its uniqueness, in which I am primarily concerned. I regard the patterns as the fabric of life, the seemingly random, meandering nature of experiences unfolding. Furthermore, the origin of wood is the tree, which is, for me, an image

of fundamental preoccupation, inducing endless contemplation, and is also the source of paper, the material on which we commonly write.

Because of the in between-ness of wood, with the idea of tree on one side and, on the other, paper on which I write, I see it, poetically, as an 'in between' that links it to my preoccupation with borderline states.<sup>16</sup>

## **Colour**

The element of colour is the most intrinsic quality of my work, stemming from a love of colour, which has been a dominant focus of my vision from a very early age.

Because of its intrinsic nature, there is a spontaneity and directness about working with colour. The artist Paul Klee said about colour:

I am entranced by colour – I do not need to pursue it. I know that it will possess me till I die. This is the great moment – I and the colour are one.<sup>17</sup>

I am sceptical about colour theory that is based on objective associations because responses to colour are subjective. As a language, colour is problematical, highlighting the conflict between language as a tool for communication, and the subjective nature of

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<sup>16</sup> Hospital, J.T., *Borderline*, Hodder and Stoughton, Australia: 1985. Janette Turner Hospital's novel *Borderline*, my first distinct encounter with the 'border' as an idea, presents the geographic borderline as a place where mysteries occur. In Turner Hospital's book, themes related to the crossover between dream and waking, between illusion and reality, are explored within the framework of a mystery story that evolves from an incident of the smuggling of an illegal immigrant over a border between two American states. The importance that documentation and collation of facts and experiences plays is an important part of the story's fabric as well, and I have dealt with this issue in further chapters of the exegesis.

<sup>17</sup> Fisher, R., *Klee*, Tudor Publishing Company, New York: 1967, p8.

experience; the way differences in perception affect our capacity to communicate.

Colour perception has been known to vary, sometimes dramatically, from subject to subject. Likewise, responses to, and preferences for, certain colours and arrangements of colours are known to be fickle.

I use colour as a projection of the work's emphasis on emotion. During my honours research, I was reluctant to paint the wood at all because of my enjoyment of the patterns within the wood. Eventually I agreed on a compromise, painting only some of the surfaces and, of these painted surfaces, I applied fewer layers of paint on some, so that the patterns remained gently perceptible beneath the paint. I have come to regard the wood grain as relating to the origin of the experiences, while the painted surfaces are a means of creating an emotional impact. At this stage in my honours research the work's presence became larger and more striking.

The colours I have chosen are an expression of the adolescent voice that is central to the work, and of my preoccupation with borders.

Towards the beginning of my research I experimented with colours of varying luminosity, with the juxtaposition of complementary colours, and with gradations of various hues. I then began to investigate the intricacies of what I had viewed as a fundamentally intuitive use of colour. A clarification of the awareness of being drawn to colours that lie on the border between primary and secondary colours,

variations of lilac, magenta, turquoise, orange-yellow and yellow-green, for example, led to the realization that this is connected to a fascination for borders of other kinds, the borders of night with dusk and dawn, between dream and wakefulness, and one which I began to explore more fully in my work, the threshold between childhood and adolescence. I specifically recall that it was during my teens that I became attracted to these colours, and would exhaust those around me with over-worn contemplations about whether a particular 'borderline' colour was closer to the primary or the secondary colour that fenced it.

In some ways, a greater leap of faith is necessary when using colour as an expressive tool. I cannot know that the colours I use will create a similar effect on the viewer that they induce in me. While intuition has been a starting point, feedback on experimentation has been of great assistance. Colour perception will vary, and associations are likely to induce different responses, however, the response to certain contrasts will vary less. It is agreed that bold primary colours form associations with the toys of young children, while earthy, tertiary colours, often described as 'autumn colours' evoke maturity, a different kind of in-between-ness.

My approach to the problem of expressing that which is private and therefore inaccessible has involved confronting and interrogating the issue, illuminating a paradox in which the objects of expression are understood precisely in terms of what cannot be understood. I have utilized my own necessity to capture experiences in the form of a journal, to explore

the link between the remoteness of personal experience, and creative expression, which provides form to such experiences, capable of projecting an essence of privacy to an audience.

The act of recording my experience in words is a threshold, between the privacy of an inner realm, and visual expression. The journal goes at least one step beyond the internal process of absorbing perceptions and transforming them in ones mind, since it articulates experiences that I wish to project beyond myself. I have explored the making of visual objects as a vehicle; a voice, evoking the woven complexity of remembered experiences.

## **PART TWO**

### ***Talking to Myself? The Journal's Voice***

*On August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001, I had a dream I was with a group of students in the ground floor postgraduate lounge looking out at Mount Wellington, which began to erupt, threatening to engulf the town in lava. Everyone started screaming and running in the direction of Evans Street and as I followed I asked someone, 'It won't really reach the school will it?' They said it probably would cover the school and the best hope anyone had was to run like hell and head for the bridge (!?) Nevertheless, I was compelled to turn back, running towards my studio. 'Where are you going?' I was asked. I didn't bother to answer. I was going to retrieve the item of highest value among all of my material possessions—my most recent diary. The volcanic eruption turned out to be a firework display, and the perceived threat entirely a false alarm.*

The realization enhanced by this dream coincides with a growing awareness of the valuable role that the written record of an experienced act has played throughout most of my life.

Unfiled volumes in the form of tattered notebooks and folders crammed with loose pages recording my life's journey in words, some stored in the broken drawer of a filing cabinet, broken because it could no longer bear their weight, others in a box at the bottom of my wardrobe, and in other recesses of the bedroom of my family house that I inhabited during my teenage and early twenties, remain in my possession. Having kept

a diary on a daily basis, almost without fail, since I was fourteen years old, the volumes have mounted considerably, though many, despite my recent searching, remain untraced. Except as part of the cluttered fabric of memorabilia I can't relinquish, these held little relevance for me, or their relevance was dormant, until I was forced to review them in the course of my research.

During an epic tidy up, in Easter 2001, of the bedroom mentioned, despite their pleadings to be acknowledged and utilized in current work, the diaries were initially rejected. I tried to ignore them, but nevertheless found myself flicking through the pages. But they persisted with their hauntings, until the idea to explore the issue of adolescent consciousness by incorporating the writing into my work demanded attention, and wouldn't leave me alone until I had tried it.

### ***The Adolescent Voice***

The recurring adolescent state that I have experienced has a history of manifesting itself in an excessive writing compulsion. Its most recent episode was accompanied by the exasperation of an awareness that I seem to be living in this adolescent state perpetually, a state of heightened intensity, and the degree of anxiety that arises from the dramatic transition between child and adult states of being. The writing has become a frantic attempt to examine and disentangle what lies at the heart of this recurrent adolescence, and its associated dilemmas. It is a quest for self-understanding and it also arises out of a desire to be understood.

My initial plan was to incorporate the letters into a children's narrative that exemplified a fascination, stemming from childhood, for the concept of doorways into worlds of the imagination. When adolescent concerns became heightened, however, there was an urgency to provide them with a voice. It was the voice of the journal that I saw as my most effective and relevant tool for exploring the intensity of adolescence.

As a prelude to the incorporation of handwritten text, I retrieved diaries I'd kept over the previous 20 years (from 1981 to 2001), and re-read sections of these, before transcribing excerpts from the diaries onto the wooden letters, using various fine tipped, gel and iridescent pens.

I built up layers of written text to illuminate the structure of remembering. In reflecting on past experiences, I have been amazed by the way that certain memories move forward while others retreat to the distance, and at the inconsistency of the perceived lengths of patches of time that are identical in terms of their measurement on the calendar.

This awareness became acute in my adolescent years. I distinctly remember telling my mother, with exasperated emphasis, during the summer of 1980, (the summer before I turned fourteen), that everything seemed to be speeding up, like a vehicle travelling at high speed past rows of trees on the side of a road, making everything appear blurred, or as if someone had pressed the fast forward button on a tape-recorder. It was as if during the month of January, I had lived

twelve months when only one had expired on the calendar. The feeling I was describing was one of experiencing too much change in too little time, as if I was covering too much distance, and hence, a feeling of homesickness for the past that I see as the essence of adolescent melancholy.

In the work, I have sought to recreate the emotional impact of this awareness in visual terms. It is an expression of being immersed in a whirlpool of remembering, and a search to find a balance while maintaining the intensity. It is through the formal elements of the work that I have enhanced this intensity; it is in the process of writing that a balance is achieved, by providing a level from which such experience can be viewed more comfortably.

### ***Narrative as 'a structure of desire'.***

In *On Longing*, Susan Stewart writes of language giving 'shape to experience, providing through narrative a sense of closure and providing through abstraction an illusion of transcendence'.<sup>18</sup> The central focus of Stewart's essay is the network of metaphors arising out of the way language relates to experience, or 'more specifically...of narrative to its objects'. In examining the ways in which narrative relates to 'origin and object' Stewart pursues an interest in what she describes as 'the social disease of nostalgia', which resonates with her choosing of 'a kind of ache' as her

<sup>18</sup>

Stewart, S., *On Longing*, The John Hopkins University Press, London: 1984, p13.

title for the essay. In this sense, 'narrative' is regarded by Stewart as 'a structure of desire'.<sup>19</sup>

The impression of converting experience to fiction was emphasized by the ritual of writing the entries on wood. It reinforced the awareness that I had lived the experiences, recorded them as memories, and rewritten them as I would fragments of a novel. I altered the words but not the experiences, in many instances refining the details, providing a more intricate reflection. In this final step of remembering, the record of the memory became something I could fully possess, still contained within as memory, but through the process of recording and embedding it into the object, it became something I could experience from a fresh perspective. It was as if the person I was writing about had become someone else, a character that I could observe, and whose endless flaws and mishaps had become comedic and poetic.

I have known the process of writing by hand to be hypnotic. When I look back over the pages it reminds me of looking at footprints in the sand, providing an awareness of the distance I have covered. The written record contributes to an impression of stretching time. Detailed entries provide an expansion of experience so that more time seems to have elapsed than when the entries are brief. I have experienced this effect as being quite dramatic and something I seek out in the elaborate recording of moments as I endeavour to augment them, desiring to suspend them in time and immortalize them in my memory.

The work is linked to my attraction to books and their presence as physical objects, which provide one with non-physical journeys. As a child I was conscious of the book as being a doorway into another world. If I didn't like what was going on around me I could retreat into my own imagination or read a book, withdrawing into a world created by the imagination of an author, an alternative playground where I was safe.

It is easy to understand my childhood relish for books such as the Narnia series, Lewis Carroll's famous duo, and an array of others, that also inspired the stories I wrote in the classroom; all were manifestations of the enticing possibility of going through some kind of doorway into an imaginative world. Whether or not I finished these books, in most cases only the introductory sections left an indelible impression on me (most of the remainder escaping my memory), because it was the passage through each doorway and the discovery of a world beyond that intrigued me, rather than the plot that developed out of this.

In their stories, many such authors address the issue of temporality and the mutability of time. In the Narnia series, for example, time passes much faster beyond the wardrobe than it does for the children in 'everyday' life, therefore, disappearing via the passage of hanging garments into the awesome land of Narnia enables them to live vast and detailed adventures, and return to their old lives at tea time, so that no unsuspecting adult would have any idea they'd been elsewhere.

As a child, the book form embodied these characteristics for me. I remember my proud awareness of how my mother loved to see me so often quietly absorbed in my reading. The term 'book-worm' became an endearing one, and something that enabled me a luxurious transgression, to escape and find freedom in impossible magical realms while offering to adult eyes, the appearance of a good child.

I regard my work as a set of fragments that may be associated with books, in which the contents have been turned out and displayed onto the cover, so that the cover and its contents have become one. The idea of placing the words on the outside of the cover, but on a tiny scale reflects a struggle between an urgency to express oneself, and a need to conceal, through fear of being misunderstood by the idiosyncratic nature of these details.

I play at seducing the viewer with the visual appeal of layers of text. This intention is distinct from the diary's initial motivation, which is the expression of moments captured in words. The latter becomes lost in the intricacy of the patterns.

My work highlights the issue of the inaccessibility of consciousness, demonstrating the limitations of the object in art that is intended to be fundamentally expressive. The work I have made in the past has often had limitations in its impact on the viewer, and has seemed to speak more immediately to myself. Often I have become so absorbed in my own process, once I have resolved and presented them, I am dissatisfied

with the objects I have made. They echo my loneliness, like the interior of a black hole, or a vacant mirror staring back at me. This is the essence of the problem I have been trying to overcome in recent work.



**Figure 6**  
Amanda Connor  
*not entirely ...* (2001)  
multimedia installation  
3000cm x 3000cm x 3000cm

The piece titled *not entirely ...* (2001) that I made for the group exhibition *Half Way There*, was an attempt both to evoke and transcend this dilemma.<sup>20</sup> The emphasis, in this piece, was specifically the expression of a search for self-understanding through an excessive compulsion to record experiences in words. My intention was to create a dialogue between looking inwards to past and private experiences in a search for origins, and looking beyond to future possibilities and to the ‘otherness’ that surrounds and embraces but is also distinct from the self. The autobiographical bias included images from my family home, combined with those connected to my current studio environment, and

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*Half Way There* was an exhibition, in December 2001, of work by research students from the School of Art who were part of the way through completing their research higher degrees.

an edited rearrangement of excerpts from a recent journal.



**Figure 7**  
Amanda Connor  
*not entirely...* (2000)  
multimedia installation (detail)  
3000cm x 3000cm x 3000cm

A small, round table with a chair, is placed in the middle of a three walled, cubic space. The chair is positioned with its back to the space's entrance, so that the would-be seated entity overlooks the projections on the walls. The projection on the right is that of a window viewed from the exterior of a family home, covered with reflections of a magnolia tree. At right angles, on the wall to its left is a projection of the magnolia tree itself, as if viewed from a window. The table is covered in haphazardly organized reams of thinly ruled foolscap paper, onto which I have transcribed excerpts from my journal. Three calico curtains, which are the curtains from the three windows in my current studio, are included in the scene, as well as a set of wooden steps that lead into a wall. The lengthiest volume of my 2001 journals (containing an estimated 250 000 words), is attached to the leg of the table by a gold chain.

On an immediate level, the title *not entirely*... derived from the curious persistence of 'not entirely' I encountered when I re-read the entries from volume two of 2001. At the time I wasn't consciously aware of their prevalence, but they continued to weave their way into the writing as a kind of on-going joke with pertinent implications. On a broader level, I saw it as a metaphor for the incompleteness of understanding, the pursuit of mystery that is the diary's impossible quest to unravel.

The confusion of interior and exterior is an evocation of the paradox of being affected by an outer realm while being unable to escape beyond one's perception of it. The images were chosen to evoke a melancholy desire to transcend the boundaries of solipsism. The piece expresses an urgency to form a connection to the outer through the projection of inner experience of that which lies beyond the self.



**Figure 8:**  
Janet Sternburg  
*Splendor, San Miguel de Allende* (1999)  
Photograph  
Dimensions unknown

Photographer and writer, Janet Sternburg uses images that confuse interior and exterior as metaphors for our incomplete knowledge of things. The artist has stated her aim: 'to mingle inside and outside, to set them into fertile confusion'. Sternburg claims to be 'looking for a visual equivalent to the aim that Woolf claimed in her diary 'to give the moment whole, whatever it includes'.<sup>21</sup> Sternburg also acknowledges this to be an impossible quest, and in her work she deals with questions relating to this.

Sternburg refers to her experience in the summer of 1998, in which, while writing a memoir, she finds herself trapped in the past. She describes an inability to vividly perceive her immediate surroundings. During the August of this time, she spent a week in a mountain town with striking scenery. She took with her a book of Jane Hirshfield's poetry, having saved this 'for a time when I would feel loose, suspended, receptive', reading daily the essays about a writer's permeability and walking 'without destination along the streets of San Miguel Allend'. Sternburg purchased a disposable camera, which since then became a chosen tool, loving it 'for the freedom it gives me to wait, appearing to be window shopping when instead, I'm looking into windows of time'.<sup>22</sup>

I have come to accept that creative expression has a lot to do with overcoming solipsism. To begin with, the craving to be understood, by which the expression is in many ways motivated, seems to rely upon an

<sup>21</sup>  
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Sternburg, J., 'Windows', *Aperture*, no 166, Spring: 2002, p32.  
*Ibid.*

acceptance of other embodiments of experience beyond ones own. If not, the endeavour to communicate ones experiences to others would be a somewhat pointless effort.

In reflecting on Susan Stewart's statement, my awareness of 'the illusion of transcendence' created a constant stream of echoes, in surges of delight that were a mixture of amusement, (at myself, in seeing myself in various bizarre entanglements of pathos, viewed from a lookout where I was no longer immersed in the mire) and of amazement, (at my ruthlessness in articulating what are painfully private perceptions) when I reviewed the experiences I had put down in words.

I have become increasingly aware that the value of the experience alters with the written memory of it. Essentially, I have discovered, time and time again, that what gives an experience value in retrospect is not how happy or miserable I was when the experience occurred, but how well I was able to capture it in words, and how sharp is the memory retained from it. More important was that which the experiences taught me, and how this learning enabled me to negotiate my way through the labyrinthine pathway of experience extending into the future.

### ***The Memory Game***

At the start of 2002, I decided to conduct an 'experiment', (as I then referred to it) that would take my exploration of the issue of memory, and of the transcendent capacity of recording things in writing, to

the extreme. What triggered the idea was the act of transcribing fragmented excerpts from my 2001 diaries onto thinly ruled foolscap to be incorporated into the installation *not entirely*.

While engaged in this activity of transcribing, I experienced a sense of viewing the recorded memories as if I was looking at a landscape from the air at that distance when the landscape starts to look like a map. In other words, the insight I gained, from reviewing experiences of the months that had gone by, created an exhilarating awareness of being able to examine them on a level beyond being immersed in the experiences; a level on which, even with all their incongruities, the patterns they made took on a poetic value. It was the difference between being lost in a forest and seeing the forest interlaced with hills and surrounded by water and myself among it all, not unlike a fictional character in a story I had invented.

As I pursued the process of transcribing I found myself lying awake at night trying to remember sequences of events that followed on from particular dates. Towards the completion of my second volume of entries I was compelled, in the writing of the final 2001 entries, to refer nostalgically back to past entries, longing to know the dates for which I was hunting, so I could to refer to them fluently without having to search back through the pages. At the end of the year I took my calendar off the wall and started filling in the little squares with fragments of that day's entry. Then I decided I would memorize the events of each day, so that I would have the entire pattern of experiences

clearly embedded in my mind to draw on when needed and to enhance the insight I had already gained from reviewing these experiences.

Although I achieved what I had set out to do, there was a degree of dissatisfaction about what was lacking, and my incentive to take the experiment further propelled me to continue. The exercise had merely whet my appetite to gain expertise in the memory game I had created for myself. This provoked me to continue the process in an effort to retain more and more detail about each day, including any dreams I'd recorded; how I felt when I arrived in my studio, and the sequence of highlights that developed during the day. I also sought to broaden the repertoire of days I could recall to include those unfolding in 2002, and 2003 (in early 2004, the memory catalogue is still expanding).

The experiment became a ritual, perhaps a form of 'therapy', and then, a way of life, something virtually indispensable.

The intense ritual of reflection, of constant reviewing of recorded experience has changed not only the way I regard those experiences, but it has altered the way I react and respond to unfolding experiences. It has allowed me to welcome the unexpected, to flow more freely with disruption to those sequences on which I would otherwise tend to rely. It has helped me to bounce back quicker from misfortune. In phases of disappointment and misery, though I may feel them heavily, they are short lived, because I am constantly reminding myself that it is part of a pattern and that the pattern will redeem the seemingly negative situations

that always pass by. What I learnt from various epochs, and how it shaped my current thinking, allowed me to continue negotiating my way through life's intensity. Time and time again, the process of recording and reviewing experiences has saved me.

Despite the capacity for written language to alter and transcend experience for the writer, it may lack the capacity to bridge a gap between writer and reader. It requires thought to translate someone else's words into an expression that is capable of providing access, as far as it can be gained, to the experience of the writer. In a sense, this is an impossible quest since consciousness, by nature, is private, and we can only get an indication of what someone else is experiencing. Visual language generally creates a more direct impact on its audience, since there is a tendency to respond to visual things more emotionally.

The insatiable intricacy of my work acts to soak the viewer in a dizzying sense of an experience of being bombarded by the richness of life, of vivid recollections of experience that must be recorded in words in order to survive.

By creating a complex network of forms, in which written records of experience have become part of the visual fabric, my aim is to overwhelm, mesmerize, and reassure; to create a sense of a dizzying calm.

The effect relates to a paradox that can be seen in the natural environment, in which the inter-relationship of forms can seem complex and chaotic, and simultaneously, harmonious and united. It relates to

the philosophy of mysticism, in which the mystical experience is, (in so far as it can be described in words), the direct apprehension of separation and unity perceived simultaneously within the universe. The understanding is that of complexity, of division between a multitude of units, but also of wholeness, through the interconnection of these units.<sup>23</sup>

The work is intended to create a kaleidoscope of internal activity, and is a way of externalizing emotional intensity. Ideally, the work's capacity should extend to providing a refuge for emotional intensity. Having discovered the world of the diary as a 'safe place' for this level of intensity to exist, I have sought to create a visual equivalent of this kind of refuge for the viewer.

The main value of the memory game was to create a healthy submission to the mystery of life's experience. At the outset, I was searching for insight concerning realms beyond my direct experience, but which formed a dialogue of interaction with my perception. The outcome was that the clarity of the mysteries, along with their value, increased with each little piece that my memory retained. It was the difference between polishing a precious stone over and over, and cutting it open to see what is inside it. I may not have a sharp enough knife, but perhaps being able to peer into the stone is all I require. What I gained was value in the mysteries themselves, rather than complete understanding.

<sup>23</sup>

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This is a synthesis of my understanding of mysticism, derived from my study of philosophy in the 1980s. I am unable to specify my written sources.

When I became more expert at remembering the sequence of the experiences I recorded, my own personal investigation drove me to replay the experiences in my mind while trying to imagine the occurrences from the perspective of someone else. The exercise intensified a desire to gain insight about what the other was thinking and feeling, and led only to a more focussed speculation. The mystery became all the more enticing, while the goal to expose the reality beneath it lay no closer to my reach.

Helene Cixous<sup>24</sup> has outlined the tendency to avoid the mysterious as such, 'Because ordinary human beings do not like mystery since you cannot put a bridle on it, and therefore, in general they exclude it, they repress it, they eliminate it – and its *settled*'.<sup>25</sup>

I believe that despite a tendency, on one hand, for the human mind to avoid focus on realms that lie beyond its direct understanding, there is, on the other, a value to mystery, including paradoxical concepts, which can be appreciated through a concentrated effort to transcend the barriers imposed by the intellect on imagination and intuitive reasoning.

There is some confusion about the interaction of these two concepts. Blaise Pascal, for example, condemns the imagination as a kind of deceit that works against

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<sup>24</sup> Cixous is a French philosopher and writer of fiction, and on issues relating to poststructuralist feminist theory.

<sup>25</sup> Cixous, H., and Calle-Gruber, M., *Rootprints*, Routledge, London and New York: 1997, pp51–52.

all kinds of reasoning, including intuition.<sup>26</sup> In the investigation that is the central focus of my recent diary, the difficulty of sorting out intuition from imagination is often referred to, as if, through heightened sensibility, the ability to *know* what is real, is confused by the tendency to rearrange things in ones mind to create an idyllic realm that may only exist in *that* mind.

Certainly, the pleasure that the imagination offers can far outweigh the mundanities of normal, workaday existence. The necessity of dreams may constitute the strongest argument for the importance of imagination. Not only does the process of sleep, including dreams, assist one's focus in day to day thinking, by offering a recharge phase for the mind, but problems that can not be solved by rational thinking can be resolved in a less conscious state. Here, imagination and intuition can be seen to work hand in hand.

Furthermore, there are aspects of life in which we naturally and voluntarily operate with contradiction, through a kind of faith that survival and well-being necessitates. The value of contradiction, as I see it, is precisely that it confounds the intellect, and therefore creates a freedom from the confinement of intellect. Its liberating capacity is connected to that which we can understand only by intuition, by a kind of certainty whose boundaries are blurred, whose edges are fluid, a way of knowing that can not be confirmed or encased by reason.

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Pascal, B., *Pensees*, [trans. M. Turnell], Harper: New York, 1962.

It is in writing that I have learned to embrace mystery, to enjoy the liberating power that lies beyond the submission to all that cannot be pinned down. This has much to do with a paradox that is connected to the realm beyond self. In writing, I try to reach out beyond self, to capture what lies outside my own realm, to own it by putting it into words. While haunted by the awareness that I can own only my perception of it, I frame it within the pages, and restore it by going over and over, by re-reading and transcribing and reviewing the life within it. But essentially, the things I describe and try to capture in words can only be known in terms of my response to them. I can describe the tree outside my window, the twilight scene, or someone's actions towards me. But I can't know, beyond speculation, that tree, or twilight, or that person's experience. This awareness is bound to the problem of solipsism.

To go beyond solipsism is an act of faith. It is, in one respect, a refusal to remain bound to the rational demand that the existence of other minds, as enclosures of consciousness, cannot be verified. In another, it is to immerse oneself in the mystery of what lies beyond, to pursue its essence, to attempt to bind oneself with it, while retaining a sense of identity as a unit of individual consciousness.

The importance of imagination as memory's reconstruction of mental images also plays a vital role in the mystery weaving process. The beyond April 2001 diaries were peppered, to begin with, with imaginary conversations. Then it became an urgency to acquire a detailed memory of significant moments,

with attention to sequence, in order to obtain insight about the mysteries that compelled my interest in them. The quest for the solution of the mysteries perpetuated a mirage, something visible and near, yet constantly out of my reach. But while gaining self-understanding, I developed a tendency to luxuriate in the mysteries of things beyond myself, and the endless pursuit for insight.

### ***Other Journal Records***

In my exploration of the importance of giving voice to experience in words, I have been looking at a range of published journals. The written records on which I have focussed in this paper are those of the writer Sylvia Plath and of the artist Joseph Cornell.

The former is the manifestation of a young woman wrestling with life's bittersweet incongruities in her writing. I will concentrate both on the urgency for the writer to come to terms with experience in the journal record, and for the desire to serve a purpose through efforts to achieve publications of finished work.

In my treatment of Cornell, I will be looking at the visual work as the evocation of the melancholy associated with the desire to express a private conscious realm through the poetry of arranging objects. I will examine the success of the artist in giving tangible form to a non-physical realm that includes dreams, desires and imaginings, and what the

knowledge of the artist's diaristic record contributes, in the way of insight, to the creation of the work.

### *The Writings of Sylvia Plath*

Much of the tension that emanates from Plath's writing is indicative of the attempt to 'grasp a contradictory totality'.<sup>27</sup> With specific references to Plath's poetry, Mary Lynn Broe, a professor of English in New York, discusses the struggle of the young writer to find a balance between the polarities of intellect and imagination, and the painful awareness of the conflict between the two.<sup>28</sup> But, as Broe suggests, the temperament of the writer was at great odds with the success of this challenge:

Numerous versions of the fact–imagination polarity were deeply rooted within her sensibility. Each swing in that cosmic "cycle of joy and sorrow" absorbed the poet totally, depleted her emotional and physical energies, yet offered slim prescription for finding the balance between the poetic impulse and mundane existence'.<sup>29</sup>

Broe traces, in Plath's poetry, a process of a 'disenchantment with ideals' that 'becomes more specific, more personal, and more ominous'.<sup>30</sup>

In Plath's world, life seems riddled with contrasts, not merely in the dialogue between things, but within things, and this is an insightful reflection of the writer's state of mind. One experience describes a momentary feeling of peace when a self-reviling state

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<sup>27</sup> Broe, M.L., *Protean Poetic: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London: 1980, p33.  
<sup>28</sup> Sylvia Plath was born in Massachusetts in October, 1932, and died in London in January, 1963.  
<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp1-2.  
<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p 5.

seems to dissolve in the perceived miracle of an August night, and then recurs. The moon, as it shows itself 'from behind the small frequent clouds', is described as being 'poised like a picture puzzle that had been broken, with light in back, outlining each piece'.

She describes a smell of the decay in the air of mouldy, dead leaves, followed by a suggestion of ethereal, other worldliness.

The two lights over the front steps were haloed with a hazy nimbus of mist, and strange insects fluttered up against the screen, fragile...'

In the paragraph's concluding sentence all elements of the night scene seem to twist and contort into images depicting an inner torment in which all polarities, of volume and weightlessness, of beauty and ugliness, of calm and terror, congeal into a landscape of incongruity.

The air flowed about me like thick molasses, and the shadows from the moon and streetlamp split like schizophrenic blue phantoms, grotesque and faintly repetitious.<sup>31</sup>

There are passages that convey the shrill intensity of living within such extremes, and an anxiety that is tightly connected to the temporality of existence. The ambivalence in her attitude towards life, and the issue of temporality, are often juxtaposed, and possibly (in her fears associated with the decaying process of ageing) acutely intertwined.

<sup>31</sup>

Plath, S., *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, The Dial Press, New York: 1982, p13.

I have the choice of being constantly active and happy or introspectively passive and sad. Or I can go mad by ricocheting in between.

Cats have nine lives, the saying goes. You have one; and somewhere along the thin, tenuous thread of your existence there is the black knot, the blood clot, the stopped heartbeat that spells the end of this particular individual which is spelled "I" and "you" and "Sylvia".<sup>32</sup>

There is often a sense of duty to suppress sentiment in favour of intellect, and an inability, perhaps through the pressures faced academically, and in her career, to give adequate status to the imagination. Broe writes 'The imagination is found to be a poor risk, a tool left behind in the idyllic state of childhood and now recovered at only too great a cost. In sum, the youthful Plath is unable to find a balance between "muck and dream." Nor can she poetically resolve the dilemma of a life careening from imaginative to practical concerns'.<sup>33</sup>

This is perhaps most apparent in her use of moon imagery. The duality of vacillating attitudes to existence is simply but evocatively put in a statement she made in this entry:

In this daily game of choice and sacrifice, one needs a sure eye for the superfluous. It changes every day, too. Some days the moon is superfluous, some days, most emphatically not.<sup>34</sup>

Broe refers to a poetic juxtaposition of polarised perspectives of the moon in an early poem, highlighting her inability:

[to] maintain that duet between the illusions of the imagination (the "mica mystery of moonlight") and the

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p24.

<sup>33</sup> *Op.cit.*, p6.

<sup>34</sup> *Op.cit.*, p 108.

cold realities of facts countenanced by the intellect (that "pock-marked face" scrutinized through the telescope). Plath finds that she cannot join the best of both worlds; she is poised on "perilous poles that freeze us in / a cross of contradiction." Still, any reliance upon the imagination alone is doomed, for it fails to notice a burgeoning world of practical facts.<sup>35</sup>

### *Joseph Cornell's Diaries*

The essential connection that I see between the writer Plath, and artist Cornell is the necessity to provide substance to an inner ache, the kind of ache that Susan Stewart outlined and adopted as the title of her essay *On Longing*.<sup>36</sup> In the case of Cornell, the concern is expressed most pertinently as 'that desperation of trying to give shape to obsession'.<sup>37</sup> What I find most interesting about Cornell is that while the diary record is a rather painful evocation of a desire to express intangible feelings and states of being in a more concrete form through words, the sketchiness of the written style demonstrates the inadequacy of the written language to define such states. It is in the visual medium that the artist's flair proves most successful in meeting this impossible challenge.

Cornell's manipulation of the written language is awkward and vague in contrast to Plath's, whose precision and vast vocabulary, and ability to make words malleable through unique and playful use of metaphor, characterize her expertise in giving form to feelings and perceptions in words.

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<sup>35</sup> *Op.cit.*, p 25.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Cornell was born in New York, in December, 1903, and died in New York in December, 1972.

<sup>37</sup> Caws, M.A., 'Joseph Cornell: Diaries and Files', in *Arts Magazine*, v 65, May 1991, p41.

For Cornell, although there is the sense of the diary as fulfilling a separate need, (a record of daily events and responses to experiences, an illustration of perceptions that require immediate capturing, an expression of desires), there is an evident crossover into the visual, a dialogue between the two mediums of expression in which preliminary sketches in words require objects that translate the expression into a visual language.

There are isolated snippets, mere phrases, floating, without punctuation: 'and the quince tree petals making a medieval tapestry of the lawn'. This example is followed by a rambling sentence paragraph, in which perceptions flicker like the shadows and leaves themselves:

resolution of mean mood in cellar, approaching the sublime "early morning" of Monday and Tuesday – birds under the quince tree in early summer shadows sun gradually illuminating the quiet atmosphere of the rustic effects, birds and feeding etc.<sup>38</sup>

The absence of punctuation, in many instances, emphasizes the sketchiness of the written impressions, and an abandonment of closure. It is as if closure is only appropriately sought in the enclosure of his boxes.

The abandonment of precision and structure, emphasizing the remoteness and vague outline of the object of writing, is more apparent when that object is a mood, or a perception that is tightly linked to a state of being.

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Caws, M.A., *Joseph Cornell's Theatre of the Mind, Selected Diaries, Letters, and Files*, Thames and Hudson, New York and London: 1993, p205.

When describing impressions of visual objects that connect the artist to his work, the writing is much more specific and coherent, with descriptive paragraphs that flow, complete with punctuation and free of the dislocation that characterizes much of the diaristic record. This is clearly evident, for example, in an entry describing a visit to the buildings of the Geographic society.

An abstract feeling of geography and voyaging I have thought about before of getting into objects, like the Compass Set with map. A reminder of earliest schoolbook days when the world was divided up into irregular masses of bright colors, with vignettes of the pictorial world scattered, like toy picture-blocks.

The Planetarium was another moving experience, especially on the second floor with its blue dome, silhouetted city sky-line fringing it, and the gradual appearance of all the stars in the night sky to music.<sup>39</sup>

There are also sketches in words, or as a record of process and productivity:

today around 2 thinking back to yesterday & appreciation of cellar working after Saturday completely lifted out of depression of work and nostalgia – the spontaneous making of the little Durer box – carpentry – suddenly in a wonderfully “possessed” response of working versus general toward carpentry, even resistance. First box since Grahn & Alegra miniatures<sup>40</sup>

And combinations of the two:

drop of water too deep for sun so-so day in box work – glistening in sun around 3pm sunny after rain etc.  
yesterday grasshopper on side of house  
bumblebee in the snapdragons<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to Plath, who attempts to ‘play God’ with the written word, to stretch it to its greatest limits, Cornell’s entries tend to demonstrate the limit of

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp95-96.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p211.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

words. Simple phrases to describe visual images, or merely to state that a thing is, show a concern with immediacy, with capturing in note form the little perceptions that lace the day and inspire the artist's work.

## ***THE WORK IN CONTEXT***

### ***Joseph Cornell***

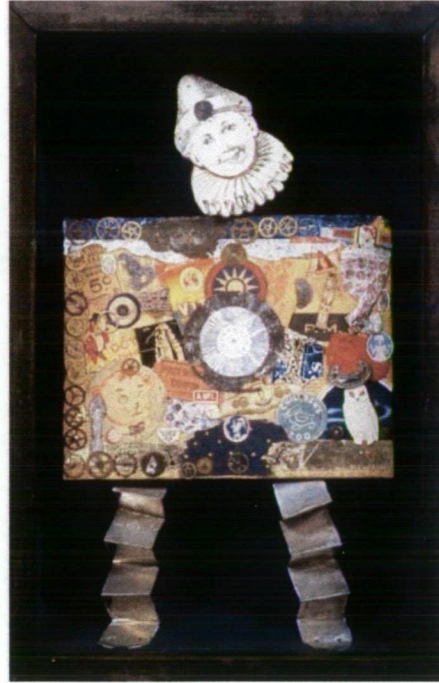
Following the death of the artist Joseph Cornell in 1972, a bewildering accumulation of material was found in his New York house. The vast hoard conveyed a multitude of unrealized potential, constituting an immense challenge for those attempting to gain access to the artist's secret world.

Among his completed works, those which may be regarded as the key to the driving force of the artist's desire, were his portrait-homages to women. Jodi Hauptman, in her book *Stargazing in the Cinema*, provides a detailed investigation of his movie star portraits, and traces the 'logic of desire' that is inherent in the attitude that lay at the heart of these works.

Hauptman's crucial observation is that along with the desire Cornell expressed to retain these 'apparitions', he delighted in the mystery of their unknowableness. Hauptman declares the admiration Cornell devoted to the movie stars as 'dependent on the loss and unreachable remoteness of ones object of desire'. She describes this as a particularly 'urban sensation', one which Cornell experienced wandering the streets of

New York, but also in the enchanting world of the movie theatre.<sup>42</sup>

In Cornell's, *Untitled (Encrusted Clown [Souvenirs for Singleton])* the peculiar balance of contrasts creates a special aura. The interplay of texture and colour



**Figure 9:**  
Joseph Cornell  
*Untitled (Encrusted Clown [Souvenirs for Singleton])*  
c. mid 1950-s Box construction  
44.8 x 29.8 x 11.1cm  
Collection Edward and Julie Minskoff

enhance the spatial depth, with the encrustation of objects upon a background that is predominately of dark blue and yellow-gold contrasts. The contrasts evoke a harmonious, universal quality that borders on being mystical, and yet, there is congestion, inducing confusion. As the depiction of an urban scene at night, it possesses a glorious naivety. There is an invitation,

<sup>42</sup>

Hauptman, J., *Stargazing in the Cinema*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London: 1999, p4.

or more urgently, a plea, to regard the city's presence as a cosmos, which is magnified by a proliferation of opposites.

Surrounding scatterings of red/green contrasts, the aged yellow of documents are interspersed with the blue of a night sky. The dominating gold also conjures impressions of the artificial light, the street-lamps and shop lights that keep the city alive and awake at night. There are areas dappled with stars, and a cardboard sun, and watch movements are dispersed around the edge of the canvas, as if time has been taken apart and incoherently distributed. The watch particles are intermingled with cardboard trinkets, a cluttered array of discarded images whose significance is unstable. They are bits of forgotten trash that look to be picked up from the city pavements, or dug from the pockets of clothing that hasn't been worn for a while. There are objects of measurement that are devoid of their utility. The clock in the centre has no hands, and the discoloured documents are redundant, in terms of their original purpose. The background is composed of old stock market charts, which as Hauptman points out, are the foundations of the city. There is a dichotomy between the mass of clutter, and a sense of what is absent.

Paradoxically, much of Cornell's work gives voice to the image by means of its absence. Ades refers to the 'Constellation boxes, Carrousels [sic], and Soap Bubble Sets' which hold 'enigmatic references to birds, with the perch, ring, and sometimes the attached chain common to several bird boxes, but lacking the

bird itself, absent on its miraculously navigated migration'.<sup>43</sup>

In Ratcliff's essay, *Joseph Cornell: Mechanic of the Ineffable*, Cornell is referred to as 'a virtuoso of fragments, a maestro of absences'.<sup>44</sup>

A shifting perspective between a bird's eye view and the vertical angle creates a vertiginous ambivalence between the congestion of wandering among clutter, and the serenity of floating above the canvas.

The integration of male and female imagery, which is in contrast to a general bias towards the feminine that features in much of Cornell's work, is especially puzzling since the inspiration for the piece is a woman actress. Here, there is strangeness about the sense of what is masculine. It does not seem to know itself, nor where all the objects belong, nor more importantly, their origin.

The clown's face is youthful, but with drooping, uneven eyes that confuse innocence and wisdom. It could be a face of someone very old who has somehow managed to escape the ageing process. The face floats, as if disembodied, with the edge of its frills barely touching the canvas. It is not quite comfortable with its tin legs that seem as if they might fold inwards, as if

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<sup>43</sup> Ades, D., 'The Transcendental Surrealism of Joseph Cornell', in K. McShine, [ed.], *Joseph Cornell*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1980, p34.

<sup>44</sup> Ratcliff, C., 'Joseph Cornell: Mechanic of the Ineffable', in K. McShine, *Joseph Cornell*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1980, p43.

they might not bear the weight of the canvas. Like the clock, it has no hands.

The work was Cornell's own special love letter to the actress Jennifer Jones, whose childlike qualities generated the devotion inspired in him. The character played by Jones in the film *Love Letters* suffered a trauma resulting in amnesia, and in the majority of the film's duration the character 'remains trapped in a disturbing a-temporal limbo'.<sup>45</sup> Having forgotten her own name, her adopted name of 'Singleton' is endowed with a masculine flavour, which adds to her loss of direction.

Under the chapter heading 'Night Wandering', Hauptman describes the features of the 'collage map' that is a recurrent form in which Cornell constructs his compositions. She compares Cornell's approach to Debord's *Discours sur les passions de l'amour*, which, in a similar manner to Cornell's homage to the actress, is 'a map that presents love as a state of geographic aimlessness'. Both 'experienced the city as both site (spatiality) and sensation (memory); the two wanderers were especially attuned to the pull of desire'.<sup>46</sup>

Also demonstrating an abandonment of efficiency, Cornell's map-making is devoid of the logic of the traditional cartographer. Certeau claims that the visual qualities of map-making, the varied thickness of lines, and patches of colour are unable to supply a suitable representation of the urban experience. He argues that

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<sup>45</sup> Hauptman, J., *op.cit.*, p14.  
<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp150-151.

such printed strokes are capable only of providing reference to an absence of that which has passed by. He explains that worse still, transforming 'action into legibility "constitutes procedures for forgetting": "a way of being in the world is forgotten"' .<sup>47</sup> Hauptman explains that:

Cornell's commitment to the logic of the archive is founded on the necessity of defending against such amnesia, and his cartography must be seen in the same light.

The result is an arrangement of objects which "'draft" a map based on emotion and memory"' .<sup>48</sup>

Hauptman compares the layering of Cornell's visual elements to the structure of archeology, highlighting the palimpsestic nature of the city and its history.

Cornell imagines the toy clown as an 'urban loiterer', wandering through the night city, where it becomes 'encrusted'. He associates the clown with the 'little sandwich man', a walking billboard displaying an array of advertisements, meandering directions to the city's commercial outlets.<sup>49</sup>

That the clown is an uncanny hybrid of toy and human is reflected in the unsettling nature of the 'toy' images that recur in Cornell's works. As inanimate objects that imitate living beings, toys emphasize the melancholy of wanting to keep the ephemeral alive, echoing the futility of the artist's longing. Hauptman links the futility of Cornell's wish for Jones, to that for

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting Certeau, *Practicals of Everyday Life*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p151.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p150.

life within a toy. Despite all the artist's accumulation, the 'untouchable woman' that is mirrored by the actress, and the history and location she represents, can only be experienced as a 'dream text', a frenzy of devoted expression without reciprocation.<sup>50</sup>

It is my own experience of the connection between desire and object making that links my interest to Cornell's motivation for expression. The objects I make also bear resemblance to cartography, with letters as islands, and structures as continents, tracing an inner world of desire that aches to be externalized and seeks a visual form.

#### Cornell's *Project GC 44* (c. 1944 –70)

In the summer of 1944 Cornell acquired work at a local garden nursery. The experience embraced a host of Arcadian impressions, which the artist sought to possess. An accumulation of pictures and text articles that evoked experiences connected to this particular summer formed a compilation to which the artist referred as 'a method' for crystallizing experiences that may otherwise have been overlooked or forgotten.

Cornell endeavoured to control his accumulations through a process of categorization and organization. The ordering, by means of systems he established, demonstrates the tension in his process, 'the attraction to fleeting ephemera with the compulsion to control,

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<sup>50</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp160-161.

classify, and frame, the allure of the fragment mixing with the desire for the whole...' <sup>51</sup>

Cornell's quest to construct a method that employs the visual object as a storehouse for memories has fed my incentive to continue my own strategy of remembering through the object. But it is more than merely remembering. In creating objects that give form to the memory, it is also an expression of remembering, a visual essence of the memories that is offered to the viewer.

Cornell was unable to find closure in the project. Hartigan explains that his 'explorations were a constellation of works in various stages of readiness, always to be continued. Only his death finally determined their state, as unfinished'. The project was marked 'semi-complete,' although Hartigan claims that 'the project is Cornell's fullest expression of the possibilities inherent in not finishing'.<sup>52</sup>

Drawing attention to a single box marked 'miscellaneous', Hauptman claims that Cornell's process 'radicalizes "miscellaneous" by transforming collection, combination, acquisition into a technique', and that the process implied by miscellaneous 'is the logic of the archive'. Long before his emergence in the surrealist movement, Cornell was already refining his talents as a collector. Surrealism allowed him the

<sup>51</sup>

*Ibid.*, p24.

<sup>52</sup>

Hartigan, L., 'Joseph Cornell's Explorations: On File' in P. Koch, [ed.] *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp... in Resonance*, The Menil Collection, Houston, Philadelphia Museum of Art: 1999, p232.

opportunity to confidently utilize this talent, 'to put "miscellaneous" into practice'.<sup>53</sup>

Although Cornell forged ongoing connections with members of the surrealist movement, he asserts a firm distinction between the nature of his own work and the concerns of the rest of the group. Walter Hopps refers to the contrast in sensibilities between Cornell and his comrade Duchamp, and quotes part of a conversation Hopps had with Cornell. Hopps describes Cornell's 'cosmology', as 'one of everyday parts, a reality that was both quotidian and somehow mysteriously other'. It was, Hopps believes, his 'unselfconscious alchemy', to which Duchamp responded most. Hopps refers to the difference between the sensibilities of each artist. While Duchamp worked conceptually, Cornell worked poetically, and accordingly his works were 'small, imaginary theatres', rather than 'conceptual machines'. Hopps describes Duchamp as the 'wise man', Cornell as the 'wise child'. Their titles reflect this distinction (as an example, Hopps contrasts the title of Duchamp's *9Malic Molds*, to Cornell's *A Pantry Ballet [for Jacques Offenbach]*).<sup>54</sup>

Acknowledging that he liked Duchamp's work, Cornell admitted, however, that he saw an element of darkness that he found disturbing. Hopps quotes Cornell as having speculated on Ernst's involvement with 'black magic', asserting a diametric opposition, in

<sup>53</sup>

*Op.cit.*, p25.

<sup>54</sup>

Hopps, W., 'Gimme Strength: Joseph Cornell and Marcel Duchamp Remembered' in P. Koch, [ed.], *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp... in Resonance*, The Menil Collection, Houston, Philadelphia Museum of Art: 1999, p71.

his devotion to 'white magic'.<sup>55</sup> To highlight the distinction, Cornell invented the term *metaphysiques d'ephemera*.

In philosophy, the term 'metaphysics' refers to 'inquiries beyond sensory experience, that which transcends the limits of knowledge, a search for a reality beyond the natural world'.<sup>56</sup>

Cornell studied the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, relevant to the understanding of what is known as Christian Science. Eddy describes 'this scientific sense of being, forsaking matter for spirit', as one that, unlike many religions, involves an expansion of individuality rather than a loss of identity through dissolution into Deity, conferring on the individual a 'wider sphere of thought and action, a more expansive love, a higher and more permanent peace'.<sup>57</sup>

The innocent magic of Cornell's work draws upon his love of the idyllic qualities he observed in children.

Cornell's *The Crystal Cage* (1942) is a suitcase full of paper treasures that are connected to the child-spirit *Berenice*, the pursuit of whom is a search for a lost

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<sup>55</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>

*Ibid.* *The Macquarie Dictionary* defines 'metaphysical' as 'concerned with abstract thought or subjects, as existence, causality, truth'.

*The Funk and Wagnall's New Standard Dictionary* defines 'metaphysics' as 'the branch of philosophy which treats of phenomena beyond the realm of psychology'.

<sup>57</sup>

Hartigan, L., 'Joseph Cornell: A Biography', (quoting from *A Complete Concordance to the Writings of Mary Baker Eddy Other Than Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures*), in K. McShine, [ed.], *Joseph Cornell, The Museum of Modern Art*, New York: 1980, p97.

childhood. *Berenice* is, specifically, a spirit of a child; a figure he associates mainly with the Victorian period, although she has the ability to time travel and metamorphose. According to Hauptman, she is ‘less



**Figure 10:**  
Joseph Cornell  
Collage of Berenices, in  
*The Crystal Cage* (1942)  
Courtesy Richard L. Feigen, New York

an individual than an *idea*, less a person than a *pursuit*'.<sup>58</sup> Her ‘spirit’ is encountered in the form of child movie stars, and children spied by Cornell in momentary glimpses.

### ***Susan Hiller***

My exploration into the work of Hiller provided me with a different perspective on the exploration of ideas relating to self.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup>

Hauptman, J., *op.cit.*, p163.

<sup>59</sup>

Susan Hiller is an American born artist who has lived in London since 1973, and works in a wide variety of mediums.

While Cornell's work springs from experiences that suggest an expansion of individual consciousness, Hiller is concerned with ideas relating to a dissolution of self.

Hiller's work is a powerful interrogation of the boundaries that define our existence. Working with a broad range of materials, which she employs both to explore and generate meaning, she sees herself as a 'mediator', and thereby relinquishes a degree of control over her work, acknowledging that the work is a dialogue between herself, the materials, and the viewer.<sup>60</sup>

Hiller uses words as images, and images as words, thereby dissolving the distinction between the two. A considerable body of the work employs automatic writing as a method, although it was initially a drawing exercise. It first found a home in the piece titled *Sisters of Menon*. Transposing the marks onto a variety of surfaces, Hiller breaks down the distinction between word and image.

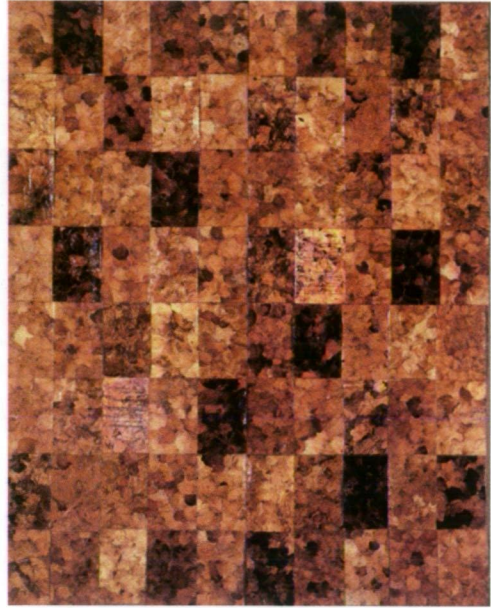
*Sentimental Representations in Memory of My Grandmothers* (1980 – 1981) is an unusual work, and stands apart, in my mind, from the rest of Hiller's work. The surface is built up from the placement of single rose petals into panels, each of them in memory of her grandmothers, who shared the first name of Rose. By using ephemeral fragments to stand for the

<sup>60</sup>

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Bradley, F., *Susan Hiller*, Tate Gallery, Liverpool, Tate Gallery Publishing, London: 1996, p10.

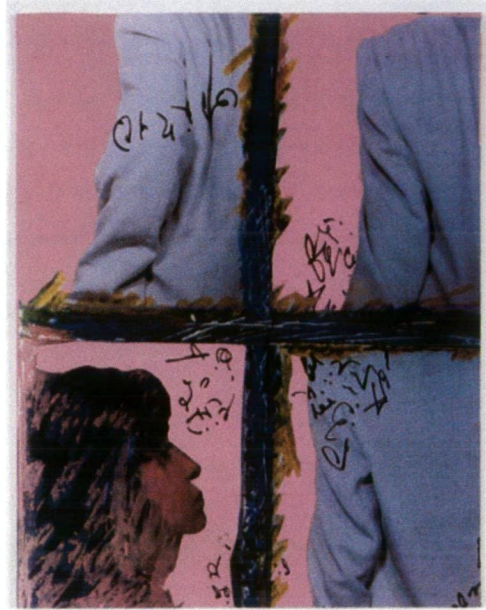
memory of loved ones, this piece dissolves the boundary between the ephemeral and the eternal.



**Figure 11:**  
Susan Hiller  
*Sentimental Representations  
in Memory of My Grandmothers  
(Part Two for Rose Hiller)* (1980-81)  
section 1: rose petals in acrylic medium,  
ink on paper, photocopies  
section 11: photographs  
1380 x 1080; 330 x 200cm  
The John Creasy Museum, Salisbury

What distinguishes this work from others is both formal and thematic. The use of rose petals expresses a heightened emotional attachment to the work. The multi-layered surface emphasizes the focus on time and memory. Since Hiller is dealing with family origins, the work is connected to her self, in contrast to her other work, in which she employs her image only as a detached instrument.

In *Lucid Dreams*, Hiller enlarges and collages photomat portraits and then works over the surface. John Roberts describes the work in the catalogue *The Muse My Sister*, claiming that her self-portraits are ‘not interpretations or transcriptions of dreams’, nor are they fantasies. They are, precisely, the projections ‘of



**Figure 12:**  
Susan Hiller,  
*Lucid Dreams I* (1983)  
Drawing ink on colour  
photographs on board 4 panels (detail)  
555 x 455cm

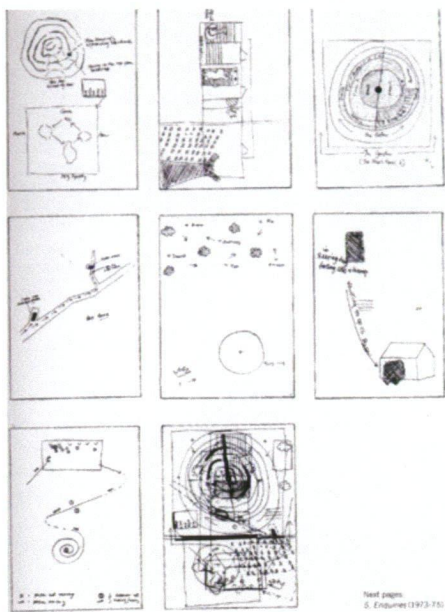
herself as image on a dream-screen’. The fragmented images embody the dreaming process, emphasizing the notion of dreams as ‘a collection of psychic debris that needs “working over”’. This implies the representation of ‘an analogue of the self and language in waking life’. As Roberts insists, the portraits are ‘metaphors of production, metaphors of new selves’. <sup>61</sup>

The multiplicity of the self, implied by Hiller’s work, is a considerable twist away from Cornell’s *Berenice*.

<sup>61</sup>

Brett, G., quoted from *ibid.*, p71.

In Hiller’s work, we have a forceful speculation that multiple minds can exist within one human, or that separate embodiments of consciousness are capable of merging. In *Berenice*, however, we have an imaginative speculation about an identity that travels through time and place.<sup>62</sup>



**Figure 13:**  
 Susan Hiller, *Dream Mapping* (1974)  
 Vitrines containing notebooks  
 with dream maps and documentation,  
 wall drawing, 7 vitrines, each  
 412 x 465 x 219cm

62 I recall a favourite game (in the form of a dialogue) that my mother and I used to play. ‘Where is the sugar?’ I would ask. ‘In the sugar bowl,’ she would reply. ‘Where’s the sugar bowl?’ ‘On the table.’ ‘Where’s the table?’ ‘In the kitchen.’ ‘Where’s the kitchen?’ ‘In the house.’ ‘Where’s the house?’ ‘In Cygnet.’ ‘Where’s Cygnet?’ ‘In Tasmania.’ ‘Where’s Tasmania?’ ‘In Australia.’ ‘Where’s Australia?’ ‘In the Southern Hemisphere.’ ‘Where’s the Southern Hemisphere?’ ‘On Earth.’ ‘Where’s Earth?’ ‘In the universe.’ ‘Where’s the universe?’ ‘IN YOUR HEAD.’ ... Pause... ‘Where’s my head?’ ‘In the kitchen.’ (Squeals of delighted amusement.) ‘Where’s the kitchen?’ ‘In the house.’...And so on. I daresay my mother was quite unaware of the significance of this game and its power to inculcate an awareness of the limitless boundary that I continued to understand my mind to be.

In *Dream Mapping* (1974), Hiller invited ten people to develop a system of recording and then 'mapping' their dreams as a group. They chose the country area of Hampshire as the site for conducting this experiment, which featured unusual circle demarcations on the ground, formed by the marasmirs mushroom. Referred to as 'fairy rings', they are associated with a myth that sleeping within one of such circles will permit the sleeper to enter a fairy-land. The participants were provided with a notebook with a map of the dream site on the cover, into which they recorded dreams each morning, in the form of diagrams. Then noting the comparisons and contrasts between the dreams, they over-layed the individual diagrams to create a multi-layered picture.

### ***The Palimpsest***

I place astonishing emphasis each day on the pleasure of watching the sky. It is a luxury I refuse to relinquish, and I heartily accommodate it into my daily routine. During my research, I have been fortunate to have a studio with a view. The scene from the window of G29 (at the School of Art) is one of my favourite palimpsests, with its shadowy movement of branches and leaves, standing majestically before a backdrop of colour, and birds weaving intermittently over a landscape of pattern. In the slow motion dance of clouds drifting and mutating among the weightless serenity, there is a dialogue between revealing and concealing. It is the visual appeal of this dialogue's rhythm that draws my interest to the work of both Rauschenberg and Schwitters.



**Figure 14:**  
Robert Rauschenberg,  
*Random Order*  
*Document published in Location,*  
Spring, (1963)  
4 of 5 x A4 pages

Underlying Rauschenberg's bewildering arrangement of images, the work, which presents a kaleidoscopic dance of the patterns of life, with particular emphasis on human activity, celebrates the freedom of a wandering attention.<sup>63</sup>

Negating a well known conviction of 'uninterrupted concentration' as the best application towards utilizing intelligence, the artist's counter claim is that; 'If we are to get the most out of any given time, it is because we have applied ourselves as broadly as possible, I think, not because we have applied ourselves as single-mindedly as possible'. The work is inspired by the

<sup>63</sup>

Robert Rauschenberg is an American artist, born in 1925.

artist's interest in man's capacity 'to function on many different levels simultaneously'.<sup>64</sup>

The energy that exudes from Rauschenberg's work is bustling, often loud, and violently aggressive in its excitement. Despite the materiality of the work, in its subject matter, and in the physicality of paint and objects on the surface of the collages and combines, it invites an engagement with the layers, allowing the viewer the freedom to negotiate the work. In creating a drive to look not only beneath but also at the illusions that play upon the surface, the work elevates the status of the illusory.

Rauschenberg is somewhat confusing in his outlook on things. Like Schwitters before him, his assertions are wrought with curious contradictions. In her essay *Perpetual Inventory*, Rosalind Krauss describes Rauschenberg's shunning of 'the promiscuous spread of the metaphor within the older (surrealist-influenced) generation', and makes reference to his reaction to a line in a movie about 'the sad cup of coffee'. But another example she provides, in which he explains that he titled his work '*Crocus...*', "Because the white X emerges from a grey area in a rather dark painting, like a new season". Krauss comments: "Like a new season" comes strangely from the lips of someone who cannot imagine a "sad cup of coffee". However, Krauss adds to her compilation of observations about Rauschenberg's career that it involved a lengthy,

<sup>64</sup>

Stuckey, C.F., 'Rauschenberg's Everything, Everywhere Era', in W.Hopps, and S. Davidson (curators), *Rauschenberg, a Retrospective* [exhibition catalogue], Guggenheim Museum, New York: 1998, p31.

devoted exploration 'of Dante's *Inferno*, a work whose very fabric is woven from the rich strands of multiple associations, one famous branch of which invokes just this figure of renewal'.<sup>65</sup>

Krauss' article goes on to compare the diary resemblance of *Random Order* to Breton's *Nadja*. She explains that the reason Breton compares the book to 'a door left ajar' is that 'when he began to write it he knew no more than did his reader, who by book's end would walk through the door'.<sup>66</sup> Krauss states that the *Nadja*-like quality of Rauschenberg's work emphasizes knowledge as being shared, between artist and viewer, as with writer and reader. She reflects on the comparison in terms of the manner in which Breton leads the reader through an unknown into which he himself is venturing.

Placing himself on the same side of the page as his reader, the writer not only casts his own shadow onto the field of the book, but allows the events unfolding in a future he cannot foresee to cast themselves onto the same space.<sup>67</sup>

Since Rauschenberg's work deals more with the complex world of perception than it does with either the ethereal or the purely material, it forms a middle ground between the two. It could be concerned with either, since Rauschenberg allows the viewer to make the choices. His work is refreshing in the sense of freedom it offers the viewer.

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<sup>65</sup> Krauss, R., 'Perpetual Inventory', in *Ibid.*, p209.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p214.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

## *Schwitters*



**Figure 15:**  
Kurt Schwitters,  
*Picture with Spatial Growths*  
*Picture with 2 small dogs (1920-1939)*  
Collage, montage, mixed media on board  
96.5 x 68cm

‘Avoidance and concealment’, Nicholas Wadley stresses, in his treatment of the autobiographical nature of Kurt Schwitters’s collages, are notorious tendencies in the latter’s work.<sup>68</sup> Wadley argues that concealment ‘as an idea is also an important characteristic of the major works and a vehicle for autobiographical references’. The Hanover *Merzbau* (1923-1937), the first of three *Merzbau*’s, included grottoes that he devoted to friends, which became enclosed in the making of walls; ‘swallowed by the relentless advance of his geometric white architecture’.<sup>69</sup> Schwitters, however, continually acknowledged their importance,

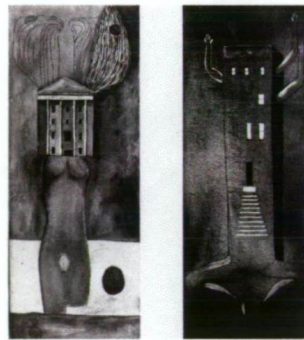
<sup>68</sup> Kurt Schwitters: 1887-1948.

<sup>69</sup> The *Merzbaus* were elaborate monumental structures, which were built by Schwitters over a number of years.

and he later wrote (in reference to the Merzbau): 'It is a true violet that blooms in hidden places'.<sup>70</sup>

Wadley also discusses the artist's playful exploration of language, comparing the link that the artist himself perceived between the 'playing off' of one material against others, and the potential of words. Schwitter's son, Ernst, refers to his father's preoccupation with poetry and nonsense, and with the paradox between nonsense and meaning. The implication is that there is meaning in nonsense, and that glorifying the nonsense of the imagination, by rearranging and transforming images into a whimsical self-created universe, provides relief from an imposed order of the oppressively mundane. Schwitter's playful concerns embraced the importance of sound and rhythm in the expression of words.

### ***Bourgeois / Hesse***



**Figure 16:**  
Louise Bourgeois  
(left image) *Femme Maison 103* (1945-1947)  
(right image) *Femme Maison 105* (1946-1947)  
Oil and ink on linen  
36 x 14 inches (each)  
John D. Kahlbetzer collection, Santa Barbara

<sup>70</sup>

Wadley, N., 'The years in exile: A biographical outline, in Schwitters, E. [ed.], *Kurt Schwitters in Exile: The Late Work 1937 – 1948*, Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd., London: 1981, p69.

My investigation into the work of Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse is connected to the autobiographical content of the work of both artists, the latter having been heartily influenced by the work of Bourgeois.<sup>71</sup>

Critics have referred to the inextricable connection between the art and life in the work of both artists. The accent, however, is ultimately different. While Bourgeois subordinated life to art, Hesse, in the face of a terminal illness and the prospect of an early death, was driven to accept that she would choose to live and not have to justify her life by being an artist, even though life for her had always been life as an artist.<sup>72</sup>

For me, much of Bourgeois' work is unsettling in its materiality, to an extent that it is difficult to view it with emotional safety. Confused by the psychological depth of the work, I always believed the work should create more interest than I was willing to invest, and yet, until recently, I had not understood my resistance to engage in the work.

An essay written by Rosalind Krauss, titled *Portrait of artist as Fillette* exposed to me the essence of this problem with overwhelming clarity, enabling me to

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<sup>71</sup> Louise Bourgeois is a French/American artist, born in Paris in 1911.

<sup>72</sup> Wagner, A.M., *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe*, Berkeley: University of California Press: 1996, p214. Hesse kept a diary throughout her adult life, as a means of finding a form, through words, to express and come to terms with the uniqueness of her identity. The diary expresses similar concerns to Plath's, and critics have drawn abundant parallels between the lives of the two women. Wagner, however, cautions against placing too much emphasis on these apparent similarities, and draws out the implications of the differences.

address the significance of this emphasis on materiality, and why I am so uneasy about it.

The essay first of all addresses the tendency of critics to refer to the work's abstraction, and the common observation of 'the aura of the human body' that 'clings to the work'.<sup>73</sup> Krauss draws a distinction between attention to the 'partial figure' and the 'part-object', the former referring to 'the various modernist truncations of the body', which, they claim is 'a formal matter, a declaration against the narrative of gesture, for example, or the inescapable realism of the body whole... It is about the purification and reduction of form'. However, another reading of modernist sculpture's history, states Krauss, is that it locates itself not so much in the domain of the 'partial figure' as of the 'part-object', which is 'given its psychological instinct as the goal of an instinct or drive'.<sup>74</sup>

Krauss argues that in observations made of Bourgeois' work there is a lack of mention of the 'part-object', and implies that 'the logic of fusion between part-objects', is crucial to understanding the work. She refers to the Woman-House drawings, which bear a resemblance to the surrealist 'exquisite corpse' conglomerate figures. She also draws attention to the art of schizophrenic patients, 'The concatenated images and rigid outlines of ...Aloyse, Klotz, Wolffli, and Neter, all had their effect on surrealist production', and that Bourgeois' participation in the exploration of resemblances to

<sup>73</sup>

Weiermair, P., [ed.], *Louise Bourgeois*, (exhibition catalogue), Edition Stemmler, Germany: 1989/1995, p 24.

<sup>74</sup>

*Ibid.*

the art of schizophrenic patients in her pre-sculptural work is solely related to the 'experience of the part-object'.<sup>75</sup>

Krauss makes important reference to an essay by Deleuze/Guattari that illustrates this preoccupation in terms of 'desiring machines', part objects seeking other part objects onto which to attach, producing the flow of the next machine's desire. This outlook moves fantasy into the material domain, displacing it from its traditionally understood 'realm of ideality' and creates the 'insertion of desire into the space of the real'.<sup>76</sup> The logic of the desiring machine fights the idealization of sculpture that Bourgeois strives to avoid.

Bourgeois gave up painting and concentrated on working in sculpture in the late 1940s because she sought a medium that bore a more satisfying connection to reality. 'Needing something to exist materially, something that would act in the physical world, she turned to sculpture. And, seeking what she called 'fantastic reality' she sought the condition of the desiring machine'.<sup>77</sup>

This outlook polarizes the essential concerns of her work from those of Cornell, whose ephemera is an

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p25.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p27.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* At the outset, my reasons for choosing to work in a sculptural medium, having balked at it for the reason of its materiality, and struggled with this ever since, was my perception of it having the potential to open up choices (the freedom to utilize recyclable material and found objects was a major attraction). As an undergraduate student, I also saw that it would allow me the freedom to be quirky, to express my eccentricity, my individuality, with joyful abandonment.

expression of a world beyond materiality. The logic of the 'Desiring Machines' is entirely at odds with the 'Logic of Desire', which Hauptman connects to the preoccupation that lies in Cornell's work. The image of the movie star is aptly referred to by Hauptman as a 'dematerialized light filled expanse' offering 'spaces of voyage and fantasy'.<sup>78</sup> The driving force of Cornell's work constantly distances itself from its object in order to sustain the desire, an emotional state of being, which is not a physical thing at all (that it responds to the effect of physical causes does not negate the distinction).

My aversion to the materiality of sculpture, exemplified by the work of Bourgeois, both explains and accentuates my attraction to Cornell's ephemera, and I have drawn upon my understanding of Cornell's concerns to utilize processes that liberate sculpture from the clutch of materiality.

In emphasizing the potential of colour and pattern, and employing shapes that correspond to an interior language, I have endeavoured to create an otherworldly experience through the language of objects.

I hold a similar conviction to Hesse's, concerning the value of life over art, despite my experience of life immersed in art related practices. Correspondingly, I regard the ephemeral experiences as being more important than the objects that the artist adopts or creates to retain the experiences in a material form.

<sup>78</sup>

Hauptman, J., *Stargazing in the Cinema*, Yale, University Press, New Haven and London: 1999, p5.

This doesn't decrease the worth of these objects. It implies only that they are expressions and enhancements of something greater in value.

## ***PART THREE***

### ***Breton's Autobiographical Works***

This chapter provides a discussion of three works by André Breton, and how they have brought me to the conclusive phase of my research.

*Nadja*, 1929

*Communicating Vessels*, 1932

*Mad Love*, 1937

To accord with the author's journey, which will assist the articulation of my own, I shall deal with the texts in the chronological order in which they were written, observing the links and the resonating ideas.

In my re-reading of the texts I experienced an urge to sift among the pages, not just of one text at a time, but between the three, as various issues provoked reminders of those I had encountered in one or more of the other texts. In this, the sequential experiences of the author, and the wide reaching, objective speculations or assertions were of integral interest.

### ***Nadja***

Breton's *Nadja* is no ordinary autobiographical work. Generally, autobiography is the exploration of a single life in writing, the detailed journey a writer endeavours to present to the reader. It is the account of what his eyes have seen, how the personal journey has evolved, and how it has shaped the writer's thinking. Its emphasis is on origins, and traditionally, an autobiography tends to begin by answering questions that revolve around the writer's earliest circumstances:

place of birth, family history, and the crucial influence of those people surrounding the writer at this and progressive stages of his life. Tracing the roots of the writer's history, he elaborates on how the branches have unfolded. His essential tool is memory. The autobiography's chief function is to recount what has passed by.

*Nadja* opens with Breton asking, 'Who am I?'.<sup>79</sup>

Bringing the emphasis of the writer's exploration into the present tense, and altering the voice from reflective to interrogatory, Breton proceeds to wrestle with the question, presenting a conviction that the answer lies in 'knowing whom I "haunt"'.<sup>79</sup>

The central narrative is woven around the author's romantic affair with a young woman (who bears the name of the book's title), during the autumn of 1926. The haunting that occurs, within the location of Paris, through the influence of Nadja, forms the substance of this autobiographical narrative.

Breton suggests that the term 'haunt' is misleading, as it would seem to imply the presence of something foreign, 'tending to establish between certain beings and myself relations that are stranger, more inescapable, more disturbing than I intended'. He points out that the word 'means much more than it says, makes me, still alive, play a ghostly part, evidently referring to what I must have ceased to be in order to be *who* I am'.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup>

Breton, A., *Nadja*, R. Howard, [trans.], Evergreen Books Ltd., London: 1960, p11.

<sup>80</sup>

*Ibid.*, p11.

The opening scene of the narrative is marked by a 'signpost', a day on the calendar, and depicts an atmosphere of complacency, of habitual activity, which is nevertheless laced with potential. The insistent presence of 'Last October Fourth' applies emphasis on the sequential ordering of the events, indicating that where the experience is located temporally is a key contributor to the understanding that the author himself is pursuing.

He observes the people in the scene, carrying out their daily activities, and makes his diagnosis. These were not yet the ones prepared to precipitate the Revolution he so desired. And then, a woman, whose dynamic presence draws her out from among the rest of the crowd, captures his attention.

The heightened tension of the author's endeavour for insight, and the peculiar enigma that unfolds, sweeps the reader along with the quest. The text is infused with an atmosphere of irresistible danger, which drives the reader's investigation.

Breton is painstakingly precise in his uncertainty. He speculates as to what may or may not be the case, aiming to draw the reader's attention to that which he is unable to verify. He constantly measures the parameters that his perception and thinking will allow him to touch on, that which he can reach without grasping, tracing, with vigilant accuracy, the blurred boundary between known and unknown.

When the heroine of *Nadja* makes her first appearance in the narrative, the author interprets her as being ‘so delicate she scarcely seemed to touch the ground as she walked’. He makes a painfully tentative observation about her expression, ‘a faint smile may have been wandering across her face’. He describes her make-up as curious, ‘as though beginning with her eyes, she had not the time to finish...’<sup>81</sup> An abundance of uncertainty and incompleteness continues to permeate the text. He refers to the ‘riddle set by the beginning of a confession which, without asking me anything further, with a confidence which could (or which could not?) be misplaced, she made me’.<sup>82</sup>

This precision of uncertainty struck a loud and resonant chord with the way I document my own experiences. The details I strive to attain in the diaristic record, the meticulous documentation of what I have observed and what it might entail, that which the facts tell me and that which they merely indicate, the elaborate network of alternatives; all are endless pathways to that understanding to which I aspire. The glimmers of recognition this aspect of Breton’s writing brought connected me to the proliferation of ‘maybes’ that created the idea for the title of my installation *not entirely*. In both *Nadja* and *Communicating Vessels*, my interest was driven by the articulation of uncertainties that unfold and undergo examination by Breton as he spins the text that maps his experiences. In *Nadja*, these kinds of uncertainties dominate, while *Communicating Vessels* demonstrates an intensification of the self-examination process.

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<sup>81</sup>

*Ibid.*, p64.

<sup>82</sup>

*Ibid.*, p65.

In Cardinal's discussion concerning the importance of objective chance in *Nadja*, he describes the way Breton responds to the enigma of his experiences as 'cautious and undogmatic'. Once he has gathered pieces of information, he collates them as fragments of a puzzle. The fragments or clues may seem incongruous. 'They come and go in brusque glimmerings, though their brevity does not detract from their insistence on *being noticed*'.<sup>83</sup> Cardinal points out the tenuous nature of the single sign, and the way it gathers significance in the accumulation of related signs. Then there is the necessity for Breton to consolidate his perceptions, by recording them in a book form, and organizing them into groups or 'constellations'. Cardinal refers to Breton's 'schooling' himself to 'recognize the patterns of signs', and points out the link between this and the surrealist theory of literary automatism.<sup>84</sup>

In the exposition of automatic writing in the Manifeste of 1924, the emphasis is on the ability to respond to the verbal flow emerging from the unconscious. Cardinal points out: 'This flow is really nothing other than an associative series - a succession of words whose emergence is largely determined by the words that have emerged previously'. He highlights a vital comparison between 'the poet listening in to the serial flow of language to that of the poet looking out at a succession of signs in the outer world...' the parallel to this being that the 'setting of the street is scarcely

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<sup>83</sup> Cardinal, R., 'Critical Guides to French Texts', *Nadja*, R. Little, W. Van Emden, and D. Williams, [eds.], Grant and Cutler Ltd., London: 1986, p19.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p20.

different from that of the page. Signs float into consciousness in progressively more emphatic series'.<sup>85</sup>

Cardinal draws our attention to the little picture gallery (a collection of picture fragments) interspersed with the text, towards the end of the account of Breton's relationship with Nadja. He describes it as a 'curious list of images which are given without explanation, like some glittering riddle'. He asks, what it is that the reader is to decipher from 'these lyrical references to the lustre of rare metals when sawn open', concluding:

All these things, we are darkly informed, are relevant to Breton's project of self-definition; "Rien de tout cela, rien de ce qui constitue pour moi ma lumiere proper, n'a ete oublie" (p128).<sup>86</sup> [The sentence is translated as], 'nothing of all this, nothing of what constitutes my own light for me has been forgotten'.

Here, the subtlety of the unusual aspect of Breton's autobiography is brought to the foreground. In stressing the conviction that his self-understanding is *constituted* by the experiences, he is bringing the significance of memory into the present. The immediacy of his account attributes this memory with a sur-reality; it is more than memory, in being past and present intertwined.

That the French word for light is 'lumiere' shifts the connotations of its definition in associating it with 'illumination', which presents an image of light that is not fixed and sharp, but that spreads over a vista with an indistinct boundary.

<sup>85</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp19-20.

<sup>86</sup>

*Ibid.*, p27 [sentence translation in op.cit., p108].

Cardinal elaborates on the unusual aspect of Breton's autobiographical exploration. In pursuit of the problem of self-discovery, in answer to the question, 'Qui suis-je?' which opens the text, Breton surrenders himself to experience that is apparently outside the subjective realm, 'groping for signposts to help him locate that realm'. The uniqueness of Breton's mode of depicting self is unique, for in contrast to traditional autobiography, in which the author aims the camera at himself, 'Breton's strategy is to point his camera outwards, at that which is *other than himself*'.<sup>87</sup>

The conclusion to the narrative concerning Nadja places the author at the dark centre of a narrative that is to continue beyond the pages of the text. The attachment of an epilogue, as it rises out of this heart of darkness, seems so remote from the main story to attribute to it the presence of a new beginning.

The text presents itself as raw experience, both virginal in the unknown aspect of the exploration (Breton writes as if he is yet to encounter the writing's destination), and worn with sadness by the burden of the journey, and yet it is through the heroine, *Nadja*, that its ultimate reassurance leaps out, when she declares, of the title of Breton's *Les Pas Perdu, Manifeste du Surrealism*: 'Lost Steps? But there's no such thing'.<sup>88</sup>

Breton applies a fascinating emphasis in his description of the eyes of the women encounters who

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<sup>87</sup> *Op.cit.*, p26.  
<sup>88</sup> *Op.cit.*, p72.

have demanded his attention and left a significant lasting impression. Of all the physical features referred to, the eyes speak the loudest, and often almost all other visual observations are abandoned for the supremacy of these.

The eyes, as thresholds to the mind of the person, are in Breton's elaborate descriptions grand entrances whose features provide clues to where the key to the interior may be found.

Cardinal applies a different emphasis in his interpretation of Breton's focus on this feature, linking it to the erotic, and to the occult. These things are connected, of course, to the desire to know the other person, which is the emphasis I place in my reading of the descriptions.

Breton attributes to Nadja's eyes the visual likeness of fern, and although the translation I have read attaches this observation to their colour, (Cardinal, on the other hand, translates it simply as 'eyes of fern'), I interpret a link to infinity, the impression of something constantly unfurling. This may be seen to accord to the heroine's assertion concerning 'lost steps', which implies that there is no dead end to life's journey, (every step leads somewhere pertinent). Her eyes speak precisely of the freedom of ferns, and yet, there is the dark side to this, of the relentless wilderness overgrowth, which entangles and obscures one's path. As with Nadja's plight, freedom and entrapment coexist.

After he wilfully loses sight of Nadja, the author learns of her diagnosed mental insanity and placement in the Vaucluse sanitarium. He reflects on her co-existing strength and weakness, in the idea, in which he himself encouraged her, that freedom, at its exorbitant price 'remains the only cause worth serving'.<sup>89</sup>

He asserts Nadja's destiny to serve this cause, which involves thrusting oneself 'out of the jail – thus shattered – of logic, that is, out of the most hateful of prisons'.<sup>90</sup>

### *Communicating Vessels (Les Vases Communicants)*

The central concern that is expressed in *Communicating Vessels* is in the bridging of realms that are commonly regarded as opposites, with the dream as 'the enabling "capillary tissue" between the exterior world of facts, and the interior world of emotions, between reality and, let us say, the imagination'.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup>

<sup>90</sup>

*Ibid.*

*Ibid.*, pp142-143. Peiry, L *Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art*, (transl, James Frank), Flammarion, Paris, 2001, p32, quoting Eluard. In Lucienne Peiry's discussion of the influence of Prinzhorn's book, *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* on the surrealists, he writes of their worshipping of "divine madness". Peiry quotes Eluard, who challenges conventional attitudes towards madness, asserting on behalf of the mad person in physical confinement that "the country that they have discovered is so beautiful that nothing can turn them away from that place... We know only too well that it is we who are locked up when they close the doors of the asylum: the prison is all around us, freedom inside."

<sup>91</sup>

Breton, A., *Communicating Vessels*, M.A. Caws, and G.T. Harris [trans.], Great Britain: 1990, p ix.

Breton's key concern is to dilute common thoughts that separate sensation from reason, the dream from practical action. The author voices a defence against attitudes that draw a hostile distinction between such realms, demonstrating, with direct reference to his experiences, through the links that are drawn between them, a conviction concerning the importance of understanding their connecting forces and vast potential when brought together in closely knit interaction with one another.

The title draws its metaphor from scientific practice, exploiting the image of vessels joined by a tube, in which gasses passing back and forth establish themselves at the same level in each. Breton's aspirations for Surrealism are summarized in that 'it will be considered as having tried nothing better than to cast a conduction wire between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness, the assurance of knowledge and of love, of life for life and the revolution, and so on...' <sup>92</sup>

Breton emphasizes the conjunction between subjective experience and objectivity, breaking down the separation between the two. As with the separation perceived between dream and waking life, he sees the two as co-joined and in powerful alliance with one another, distinguishable, but by no means separate.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>

*Ibid.*, p86.

<sup>93</sup>

Breton stresses the dissolution by referring to the 'sleeping' and the 'waking' dream. I have applied the same language in referring to my dreams, because it befits the resonance of Breton's attitude to the dream with my own experience of the link between dreaming and waking. I have adopted his language to

The autobiographical component of the text involves a journey in which the author traces a path through specific waking and dream experiences, exploring the inter-relation between them. This linkage highlights the poignant nature of such autobiographical details, and as reader, I was lured into its content by the compelling rhythm of experience and interpretation.

This way of reflecting upon experiences is not unfamiliar to me, nor the melancholy and the tension that much of the reflecting exposed. While reading, I took delight in recognizing the struggle to gain insight from subjective experience. My initial reviewing of the nine months I had documented in intricate detail brought an astonishing observation of the way dreams I had recorded prefigured events that occurred after the dream took place, and has demonstrated, first hand, Breton's conviction about the conjunction between dream and waking life.

Remapping as written documentation a small epoch of his life, Breton embarks on a challenge to unite his apparently incongruous subjective experience with objective concerns. Breton explains that he has chosen, on purpose, to retrace a period that he considers as an irrational time.

He implies error in the temptation to believe the things encountered in the world around him were organized a

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acknowledge the overlapping of my experience with Breton's conclusions.

certain way for him. In these, 'indications' were found, and there was a search for 'promises'.<sup>94</sup>

When reading this passage, I felt the strange jolt of the text talking back at my own thoughts. The twinge of remorse was followed by the comfort of the mutual condition – between author and reader – in the realization that it is the offering of a confession rather than the delivery of an accusation. The fact that I had to remind myself that this is the author's piercingly honest account of his own experience and flawed thinking, may be explained in the way he often presents himself as a fictional character. This connects me to my experience of reflecting on journal depictions of myself, as outlined in chapter two.

In a similar way, the beauty of the mire and melancholy Breton depicts, in terms of his emotional state, transmits a peculiar warmth, which is the author's desire to offer insight to the reader through the re-evaluation of his initial negativity.

The mistake he admits to, and which he suggests he is by no means alone in making, is in neglecting to marry subjective circumstances with the objective conditions among which they occur.

He refers to a series of details among these, which he describes as the 'manifest content' of 'this waking dream', which, over a number of days, 'was at first

glance scarcely more explicit than that of a sleeping dream'.<sup>95</sup>

Breton implies there is a relentless tendency for desire to gather 'in a haphazard manner what can satisfy it'. He stresses that it is a purely mental game to believe that in the waking dream desire *creates*. Furthermore, he states that in the case of its failure, 'so true it is that desire arranges multiple ways to express itself'.<sup>96</sup> Linking this to the devices employed by poets, Breton makes the statement that 'Desire, if it is truly vital, refuses itself nothing'.<sup>97</sup>

### *Mad Love (L'Amour Fou)*

Of the three autobiographical works I have explored, *Mad Love* possesses a heightened optimism. Mary Ann Caws, in her translator's introduction, stresses the author's conviction of the capacity of remaking the world through our own thinking and language.

Chapter four of *Mad Love* introduces his initial encounter with the woman to whom the book is dedicated. To begin with, Breton declares the importance of his having documented in writing details relating to intimate and peculiar circumstances of his life. He emphasizes the necessity for precision, and 'absolutely careful reference to the emotional state of the subject' in order for the effective evaluation of the facts, and points out:

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p108.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p109.

Surrealism has always suggested they be written like a medical report, with no incident omitted, no name altered, lest the arbitrary make its appearance. The revelation of the immediate, bewildering irrationality of certain events requires the most severe authentication of the human document conveying them.<sup>98</sup>

In the following paragraph, however, a further necessity is specified, that of observing the way in which life develops distinct from his individuality. He refers to a tendency to regard 'the spectacle playing out beyond me' as something that 'appears to be set up for me alone, conforming in every way to my *previous* image of it'. He stresses the fantastic quality of the image that appeared to him, and its 'capricious evolution'. Breton goes on to describe the effect on the subject, and the implications of such an experience.<sup>99</sup>

Here, we are shown a communion between what is marvellous to the subject, and what is 'real' in objective terms. The importance of documenting the subjective experience, he implies, lies in exploring the nature of such 'communications' as May 29<sup>th</sup>, (that which is referred to as '*The Night of the Sunflower*'), and 'establishing the law according to which these mysterious exchanges between the material and mental worlds are produced'.<sup>100</sup>

In three consecutive paragraphs beginning, 'This young woman...' Breton provides a poetic rendering of the being that captivates him. He commences by hinting at the uncertainty of description that dominates

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p39.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p40.

in *Nadja*: The subjective and the objective are intermingled and confused. The fluidity and translucency of his account of the vision of the woman is invested with an atmosphere that is ethereal, untouchable.

And yet, he emphasizes with *certainly* that the woman was ‘*scandalously beautiful*’, endowing his subjective impression with remarkable status.

In the days following the encounter, Breton reflects upon an automatic poem, titled *The Sunflower*, which he estimates having written eleven years earlier, although he is unclear as to the precise date. He refers to the poem as being ‘special in that I did not like it and never had’, and yet, its persistence in demanding to be noticed alerted him to identify its after reflection with sentences he had, in the Surrealist manifesto of 1924, attributed the capacity of ‘tapping on the window’.<sup>101</sup>

Following his documenting of the experience of May 29<sup>th</sup>, Breton provides a translation of the poem in fragments, demonstrating the way each fragment prefigures various aspects of the experience that took place on the 29<sup>th</sup> May. He declares with emphasis that there wasn’t ‘anything in this poem of 1923 that did not announce the most important thing to happen to me in 1934’.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp54-55.

<sup>102</sup>

*Ibid.*, p65.

In direct contrast to the Logic of Desire that is attributed to the experience and process of Cornell, Breton aspires to transcend the problem of the distance between the desired object and the subject's desire, portraying, in a gloomy light, attitudes that regard this dilemma as essential to love. From Breton's ideal perspective, the common suggestion that consummation obliterates desire, kills the very idea of love.

In Breton's view, it is only resigned adaptation to social conditions that creates the admission that love is sustained through a lack of knowledge of the beloved being, and that the so called 'phantasmagoria of love', supposedly ceases 'when the being is no longer concealed'.<sup>103</sup>

He goes on to outline the irony that taints that which he refers to as the 'shoddy terminology' including such phrases as 'Love at first sight' and 'honeymoon' but at that point refuses to question the terminology any further, and instead, turns to the account of his own experience to cast a new light on such attitudes to love.<sup>104</sup> Breton implies that the union between two beings exemplifies the breakdown of a distinction between the subjective and the objective.

In *Mad Love*, Breton speaks of the urgency to relinquish 'ordinary logical attitudes', declaring love's possession of superior capacities, in being 'the ideal place for the joining and fusion of these solutions'. He foresees 'the promise of each coming hour contains

<sup>103</sup>

*Ibid.*, p51.

<sup>104</sup>

*Ibid.*, p53.

life's whole secret, perhaps about to be revealed one day, possibly in another being'.<sup>105</sup>

The ambition in Breton's thinking is exemplified by his incentive to observe subjective experience in quest of that which he terms a 'law' from exchanges that he acknowledges as 'mysterious'.<sup>106</sup> In gaining insight, Breton's autobiographical documentations draw from the incisive connections that can be observed between the subjective and the realm it perceives.

There is, however, a tendency for Breton's writing to accelerate towards its sought after revelation, and then become clouded. Always, it is the ineffability of that with which he is dealing that prevents the clarity of his conclusions from being reached. The paradox that permeates *Mad Love* is that while 'love' is its own end, it is an open-ended pursuit.

The fragmented structure of a grand puzzle that is implicit in the way Breton delivers and interprets his experience has illuminated my understanding of my own process, and how and why it compels me with such impulse. It is the structure of a riddle that brings in pieces from outside itself and rearranges its elements accordingly.

My work is my own unique way of mapping and expressing my fragmented existence, and yet, it affronts me that it depends so inherently on the influences of 'whom I haunt'. The decisions I have

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<sup>105</sup>

*Ibid.*, p42.

<sup>106</sup>

*Ibid.*, p40.

made are triggered by the influence of such encounters. It is my own voice, and my own will to respond to these influences, but it is driven by what attracts me.

In the same way that the physical pieces I work with are appropriated, the writing is inspired by that which encircles and demands my attention. That which entices me most is that which feeds my own puzzle, teaching me about myself, by connecting with and interrogating the pieces, providing me with the finest challenges.

The journal impulse, and the preoccupation of the 'memory game' constitute a quest to see myself through the eyes of another. To adhere so unyieldingly to such a quest depends upon a conviction in the ultimate value of such a quest. Bound up in the story contained within the journal, there is also a process of an acceptance of past and adaptation to present circumstances, and of aspiration towards future potential, an evolution that flows in response to surrounding influences, in particular to people and places.

### *The Studio*

My process consists of acquiring discarded fragments of wood, sanding them, painting some of the surfaces, and joining them into objects that resemble letters of the alphabet, or into structures into which the letter objects are incorporated, or from which letter objects emerge. I alternate the hand-writing onto the surfaces of the object fragments with their construction. The process is intuitive and improvisational.



**Figure 17:**  
Amanda Connor  
*Between Autumn*, Installation, (2002)  
Mixed media installation (detail)  
dimensions variable

The memory game is an extension and intensification of that which I began in childhood. While the game invented in childhood involved collecting occasional photographs of moments, the game derived from my recent journals is a mental catalogue of all the memorable experiences that have taken place over the last thirty-four months. It is one of my most important resources, an extension of the value of the diary.

I have not ordered the text on the objects in the exhibition to correspond to the way I have attempted to file them in my mind. This is firstly a decision that relates to the issue of privacy, and secondly, my aim has been to communicate an immersive experience of the chaotic rhythms of the memories, in which a detailed ordering system is not relevant. Even despite the catalogue system, I don't experience those memories in chronological order, though knowing their order is a way of examining their patterns. The patterns created by the rhythm of colour, shape and text, in the visual work, correspond to the experience of observing the sequence of the memories. The fluid

arrangement of the text and the objects reflects the connections and patterns that memory makes from experiences.

For a while, I tried to build a chronological framework into the transcribing, but it inhibited the rhythm and speed of the process. I have tried to make decisions about the placement of textual fragments as fluidly as possible. Where each fragment is placed often depends on the width of the section of the wood on which I am writing, and ultimately, I have allowed the visual effect to dominate over the content of the writing. Therefore, entries from different eras overlap each other on the same surface.

I work on many different objects alternately, partly because the ink from the pens I use smudges if the surface on which I have been writing is handled, but also because it allows a gradual build up of the layers, *and* time to revise the visual effects of each surface and object.

Furthermore, there is a notable hierarchy in the content of the writing, which corresponds to the degree to which I desire to expose various fragments of text. I vary the size of the writing and the dominance of different pen colours on different surfaces, considering the contrast between pen colour and surface, in accordance with this hierarchy.

The alternation of focus on the written word (corresponding to experiences I am memorizing), and the visual appeal of the object's surfaces, is a constant

juggling act. Occasionally, I encounter the need to write over a line of text that is too private, or inadequately worded, or because, even when the surface appears resolved I am not happy with the way I have fragmented a certain phrase. Having established that the visual bears more status in the presentation of the work, this creates some dissatisfaction.

When I began making the objects I laid them out on the floor, creating sentences, and painted them after they were joined. Incorporating the text (which was a process that began in the second year of my research), I wrote over the surface of each letter. Eventually I discovered, first of all, that the process was less awkward and much more efficient when I painted various surfaces of the individual pieces of wood, creating building blocks from which to construct the objects.

As the incorporation of hand-writing evolved, I achieved more appealing results when writing on parts of the objects before making joins that would make these surfaces inaccessible. In re-working the older letters and (particularly the larger) structures, I have encountered immense frustration in trying to place text on areas that are difficult to reach. The adaptation process has also involved developing a spontaneous capacity to judge the distance covered by each phrase to co-ordinate the flow of the writing with the fragmentation of phrases. I can more easily assess the size and angle or curve of the writing in order to span the chosen fragment across the width of a particular surface.

## ***Moving Images***

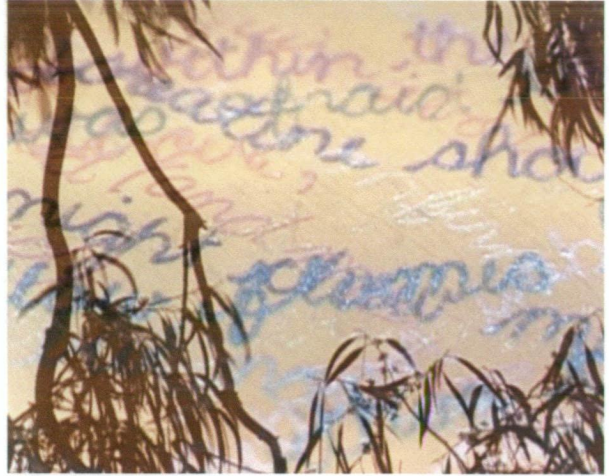
*'I looked at the walls covered with blue paper, da Vinci's Saint Anne, the crucifix: Zaza had left open on her desk one of her favourite books: the Essays of Montaigne. I read the page she had left it open at and that she would continue reading when I wasn't there: but the printed symbols seemed to me as remote from my understanding as in the days when I didn't know the alphabet. I tried to see the room with Zaza's eyes, to insinuate myself into the internal monologue that was always going on inside her; but in vain. I could touch all the objects that were expressions of her presence; but they did not give her up to me; they revealed, but at the same time concealed her; it was almost as if they defied me ever to come close to her. Zaza's existence seemed so hermetically sealed that I couldn't get the smallest foothold in it.'*<sup>107</sup>

-Simone de Beauvoir,  
*Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*

In the final year of my research, I utilized moving images captured on video-camera in an attempt to illuminate concerns that lie at the heart of my work. As my exploration developed, I discovered this medium had the powerful capacity to enhance and magnify my own voice in the work, and to fill an area of visual exploration relating to subjectivity that was not fully implicit in the sculptural objects.

<sup>107</sup>

de Beauvoir, S., *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, J. Kirkup [trans.], Penguin Books, Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: 1958, p120.



**Figure 18:**  
Amanda Connor,  
*not entirely 2* (2004)  
multimedia video installation (still)

The exploration evolved from an idea (since then modified) that I would recreate my studio in the gallery as part of my final submission. It struck me that a crucial feature of my studio was the series of three windows and the integral role the view from my studio plays in my current life and work. As part of the studio installation, I decided I would include a real time projected image of the scene viewed through my studio window. As a counter-part to this idea, I proceeded to shoot moments in time that exemplified my studio existence. The initial compilation of four hours on tape was a patchwork of large-scale scenes from my window that included part of my studio in the foreground, interspersed with close-ups of the scene viewed from the window, and objects contained within the studio. Now and then, I would walk in and out of the scene, acting as though the camera was not there.

An unexpected discovery was made when viewing the more spontaneous scenes that included images of myself, most often with my back to the camera, sitting at my desk, near the window. It seemed to evoke the painful preoccupation with wanting to see the world through someone else's eyes, and to know how I am perceived through the eyes of this 'other'.<sup>108</sup>

I have endeavoured to explore the window as a metaphor with a number of twists. The starting point is the dichotomy between the window as barrier, and as a transparent surface from which the beyond can be observed, allowing the potential for interaction between both sides.

In my initial compilation, reflected images featured, which I associated with the confusion in trying to gain an intuitive understanding of the mind of another. I have experienced and written of the dilemma of not knowing if what I have interpreted as flickers of direct or spontaneous understanding of someone, are merely reflections, of my mental and emotional state, bouncing back at me.

The intricate memory game that developed from my journals is linked ultimately to the ambition to gain that which de Beauvoir refers to as a 'foothold' into someone else's personal realm, and to defy its

<sup>108</sup>

Breton, A., *op.cit.*, p112. The final chapter of Breton's *Mad Love* is a letter Breton wrote to his eight month old daughter. The letter, which was projected into the future, as if speaking to her at the age of 16, expresses the desire to see her through her eyes, to see himself through *her* eyes. (I have quoted the relevant sentence to emphasize the evolution of this thought as Breton articulates the specific desire. 'What am I saying, to look at you, no, rather to try to see through your eyes, to look at myself through your eyes'.

‘hermetically sealed’ nature. The journals I have written beyond early 2001 are unusual in comparison to previous volumes in that they try to challenge this problem of inaccessibility, while previous volumes accepted it, and even, to some extent, revelled in it. This transformation was the element of surprise that confronted me in my research.

It has been my aim to ensure that enough of the written text be accessible to delicately expose to the viewer the tension implicit in this theme. The moving images contribute to the work by emphasizing the theme.

The selective process of framing scenes on video camera, as well as the spaces created as installation, parallel dream and imaginary spaces, in that they do not accurately correspond to any real space, but are mutations, hybrids, or essences of these. The result is something new and mysterious (the scenes shot from my window, for example, do not resemble what I literally see from my window, and form a dream parallel). This was the success I attributed to *not entirely*.

Later on, I sought help to professionally edit the video footage, and in this process, selected a number of idyllic scenes that I had shot from my studio window, with surfaces of the objects overlaying the scenes in moments interspersed through the video, employing dissolves between the shots.

I see the movement captured through the video camera as useful to the evocation of remembering, in externalizing and conveying a sense of the mind as inner space. While an effect of movement is captured through the kaleidoscopic patterning of coloured writing, and a heightened suggestion of activity through the capacity for rearrangement of the objects, there is a lack of cohesion in the representation of experiences to which the writing corresponds. The interaction of the video images with the objects serves to fill in this dimension. There is a crossover between the two mediums in that both hinge on the use of illusionistic space as a metaphor for the inner mind, and both highlight the importance of memory.

The layering of object surfaces over scenes shot from my window creates an effect that resembles the after-images that follow me (and in which I delight), when I have been working text over the objects for lengthy periods. This effect plays at luring the viewer into my realm of perception, offering the experience of what my eyes see.

### ***The Exhibition***

*It bothers me if I don't have some problem to work on that I don't understand... That's when I become unhappy.*

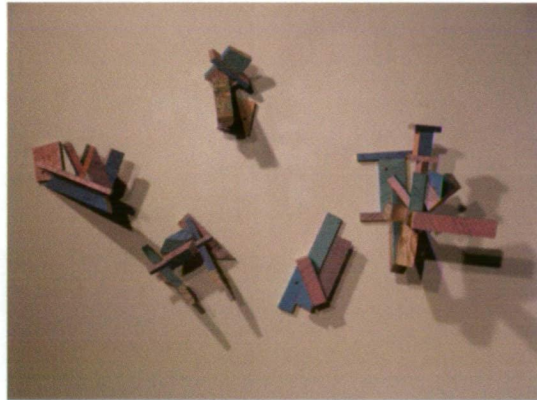
-Alice Aycock<sup>109</sup>

The hunger to cultivate a network of dilemmas may be understood in the way that such a network constitutes

<sup>109</sup>

Poirier, M., 'The Ghost in the Machine' in *ArtNews*, v85, October '86, p 85.

the mind's playground. If it is intricate and boundless, a child will never grow bored. This mind-set reminds me of the way I luxuriate in my own working process, with relevance not only to my accumulation of theoretical sources, and the problems the diary absorbs, but also to my studio work. Whenever a considerable proportion of the objects begin to look accomplished, there is an irresistible urge to return to the frenzy of sanding, painting, and constructing fragments,



**Figure 19:**  
Amanda Connor  
*Imaginary Letters* (2004)  
Wood, paint, pen (detail)  
140x101x70cm

resulting in the accumulation of a new set of objects to resolve. While the desire to build considerable layers of text, and a visual balance, is undeniable, the drive to perpetuate the vast potential for the work's proliferation is far greater. I have presented the work in such a way as to express the joy in this two-fold dilemma, of having and wanting too much.

I have included moving images in an installation that draws upon elements employed in my work titled *not*

*entirely...*(2001) to which I referred in chapter one. In the final exhibition, I have incorporated moving images into the scene, in place of the still shots from my family home, which featured in *not entirely...*(2001).



**Figure 20:**  
Amanda Connor  
*not entirely 2* (2004)  
Multimedia installation (video still)

I decided to resolve serendipitously the dilemma of presenting the work in a gallery setting, adopting the same liberating spontaneity that allowed the flow of decision making essential in creating the work. I built various objects into structures that could be attached to the walls. I have placed the remaining objects on a variety of benches and tables, bringing the fluidity of the studio environment into the gallery, defying any suggestions of a static interior.

The fluidity both of the assembling and of the placement of the objects draws upon Pfaff's mode of creation. I have endeavoured to establish a lyrical

composition in the arrangements on the walls, which forms a connection to the language of music.

One of the most crucial features of the arrangement of objects in the exhibition, is the element of play. Don Quaintance refers to the 'shuffling principle', highlighting its part in the dossier works of these artists.<sup>110</sup> This 'shuffling principle' is a key aspect of my own work.

I have deliberated how much license I should allow the viewer because it is important to maintain a degree of inaccessibility that reflects the work's tension. The kaleidoscopic complexity of the work encourages the viewer to consider rearranging its components. The work is designed to entice the viewer, and to cultivate an awe of the marvellous potential of the universe's meandering rhythms.

I have struggled to create a desirable degree of intimacy in my work. Although I considered building the work on a larger scale, I decided against this for the purpose of my research project, because the current size of the objects enhances a sense of the precious and personal, and evokes the tentative voice of the journal. I have endeavoured to create intimacy through the placement of the wall pieces, compelling the viewer's curiosity and encouraging an urge to view the pieces intimately.

<sup>110</sup>

Quaintance, D., 'Ephemeral Traces' in P. Koch [ed.], *op.cit.*, pp245-267.



**Figure 21:**  
Amanda Connor  
*Imaginary Letters* (2004)  
Wood, paint, coloured pen  
(37x31x28)  
Detail (Willow)

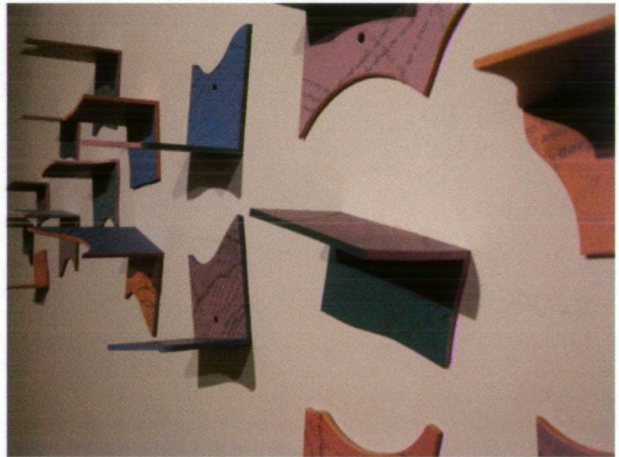
From a very close range, the viewer must peer around the edges to visually access nooks that face the wall. This effect links to childhood memories of architectural spaces that can be viewed but not easily entered. It also draws upon observations made of Aycock's work, and the inspiration derived from the children's stories to which I referred in chapter one.



**Figure 22:**  
Amanda Connor,  
*Imaginary Letters* (2004)  
Wood, paint, coloured pen  
27x27x8cm  
Detail (Door)

A small proportion of the objects possess organic line, providing a cross-over between the flowing form of the hand-writing, which exemplifies subjectivity, and the outer objective framework, suggesting the potential for dissolution of the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity.

Among these are a series of objects that were originally intended to serve a purpose as shelves for some of the smaller objects, but with the addition of hand-written text, at a later stage of my research, they now perform a function as objects that stand on their own.



**Figure 23:**  
Amanda Connor  
*Imaginary Letters* (2004)  
Wood, paint, coloured pen (Detail)  
(37x31x28)  
Dimensions variable

Presented in a layered sweep across a wall at one end of the gallery, they appear as mutations of shelves, book covers, and forms resembling shadows, enhanced by the echo of actual shadows.

Their ambiguity lies in the contrast between their designed utility (before applying hand-written text onto their surfaces, they acted as shelves in the exhibition *Between Autumn* [2002]), and their presence as objects.

As objects, they exemplify a paradox involving yearning and visual expression. By providing 'yearning' (a craving for an absent counterpart) with a mode of expression, they become complete. They are embodiments of yearning that is fulfilled in the visual evocation.

### ***Imaginary Letters***

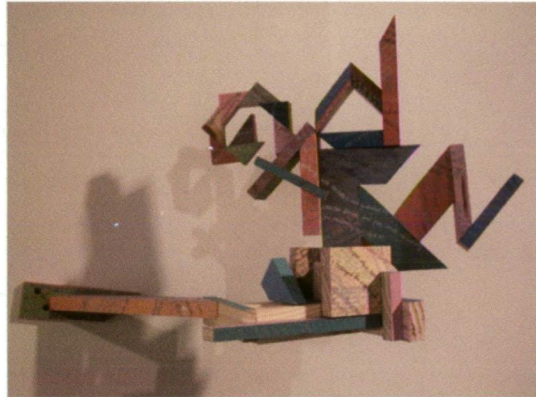
I refer to my wooden objects as 'Imaginary Letters'. The intention is to express a double meaning, referring both to letters of the alphabet, and letters that are written to someone.

The journal-derived content of the writing embodies a current need for secrecy that encloses them in a strictly personal clutch. As words that want to be speaking to someone but are held back; they constitute the fabric of letters that are written without being sent, or for which the decision to send is suspended.

The objects are forms that represent letters of the alphabet but, as disconnected entities, they signify nothing; mere shapes that form random patterns embodying a tentative search for meaning, and their haphazard organization offers no intelligible reading. They are coated in handwritten words that are

fragments of a boundless stream of self-talk that paradoxically wants to be heard.

The work contains a degree of agnosticism. While the diary content is a search for meaning, in the fluid form of handwriting, it is trapped within a predominantly geometric structure of sculptural objects.



**Figure 24:**  
Amanda Connor  
*Imaginary Letters* (2004)  
Wood, paint, coloured pen  
34 x 54 x 32cm  
Detail (*Garden*)

The exception to the incoherence of the arrangements of alphabetical letters is the sentence ‘There is a doorway in the willow tree that sits at the edge of our garden’. I have constructed the words and arranged them into a sentence comprising one installation in the gallery. This stems from the earlier part of my research, when I was making sentences from the wooden letters, and constructed the beginning of a children’s narrative I had written, exemplifying my fascination for doorways into other worlds.

I wanted to place the introspective alternative of childhood imagination into the context of the exhibition and, in coating it with hand-written text

from the journals, to incorporate the notion of a journey in quest of truths that lie beyond the self.

That every word on the surfaces of the objects is handwritten emphasizes the personal value of the act of writing, which is inextricably linked to the value of remembering.

## ***Conclusion***

*'I would like my life to leave after it no other murmur than that of a watchman's song, of a song to while away the waiting. Independent of what happens and what does not happen, the wait itself is magnificent.'*<sup>111</sup>

*-André Breton, Mad Love*

Since the mysterious entity haunted my dream world, my journal record has exceeded a quantity of one million words. I have spent my waking and my sleeping hours pursuing insight into this mystery, which evidently possesses a mind distinct from my own, and like a crazed detective, I have recorded each miniscule fragment in words, reviewing and memorizing the moments with greedy tenacity.

My quest will continue to unfold, beyond the phase of investigation that constitutes this research. In this, there is the discovery that mysteries can be nurtured and constantly renewed in the making of visual objects, as well as in writing, and that combining the two enhances the impact of their projection. My evaluation is of a vast potential for a visual practice to

<sup>111</sup>

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*Op.cit.*, p33.

develop ways in which to illustrate an awareness of worlds within worlds, and I have established, both through my own practice, and through an investigation of related visual and writing practices, that there is a value in drawing upon subjective experience to create work that is capable of transcending the barrier of subjectivity.

My research is complete only in my having applied adequate time to make sufficient discoveries under the massive umbrella of mystery that embraces it. The way that my thinking has evolved, as an outcome of the research, resembles a progression from my initial outlook about the privacy of consciousness, to the potential for freedom that a more fluid approach to consciousness offers. It is a substantial field of investigation, and I intend to devote further exploration to it.

The relentless murmuring presence that is attributed to the 'watchman' in Breton's metaphor, is the voice I strive to evoke in my work and which is embedded in the fabric of the journal.

Within its pages, I have sometimes referred to myself as a 'detective', positioned at various windows, with pen poised to record that which unfolds around me, while revelling in the lunacy and magic of such an existence. I have written of what I have observed, while waiting, insatiably, for more. From my accumulation of words, I have sifted and searched, interpreting patterns from threads of documentation, with uncertainty as to their status, perhaps illusory,

perhaps trails to some desired disclosure. I have waited for the poetry to unfold, eager to be transported, and yet, at times I have acknowledged the contentment in being among the fragments, absorbed in the mystery of my search for not entirely tangible insights.

This realm of being reflects the logic inherent in Cornell's process, supporting the magic of the distancing between object and desire.

My work is driven by an urgency to pursue and perpetuate mysteries, and there is a compulsion to create many more than can possibly be solved.

Beyond this research project, I have an abundance of avenues to explore. I intend to pursue my interest in the documentation of experience, and to investigate the ways various artists, in all fields, have drawn upon this as the foundation for their work.

### *Sophie Calle*

I have recently become interested in the work of Sophie Calle, and the way her work demonstrates the intermingling of fact and fiction. The fiction that may be woven out of the recording of detailed documentation is connected to the link between truth and the imagination.<sup>112</sup> The work also explores the

<sup>112</sup>

A short children's movie inspired me long ago, and came to mind when I was reading about Calle. It set a scene in which a family were travelling on a lengthy journey by car, and invented various games to keep themselves amused, one of which involved choosing a house viewed from the road and creating stories about the people they imagined to be living in the house. I began to play this game, silently, when travelling with my own family by car. It

intrusion of one personal identity on another, which links my interests to Breton's notion of the haunting subject.

## ***Sound***

André Breton declares expression in music as 'the most confusing of all forms'<sup>113</sup>. My assessment is that the power and the *confusion* of music relate to its ineffability and its impact on the emotions. The philosopher, Schopenhauer, held that 'of all the arts, music stands closest to the ultimate reality of things which we all bear within ourselves, and speaks "the universal imageless language of the heart."'<sup>114</sup>

Acknowledging its supreme status as a language, I consider it necessary to pursue my interest in sound, which time has not allowed me to explore.

## ***Reflections on Love***

My investigation into Breton's autobiographical texts led to an incentive to further pursue research concerning the experience and expression of love. My specific interest is in ways the arts may act as a tool for the projection of love, but I am also eager to research philosophical writings on the topic of love. I expect to

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<sup>113</sup>

demonstrated to me the enticement of contemplating life's complexity, and the powerful role fiction plays in actual life. Breton, A., *Surrealism and Painting*, S.W. Taylor [trans.], Macdonald and Co, Great Britain: 1972, p1.

<sup>114</sup>

The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, P. Edwards [ed.], Macmillan Publishing, New York: 1967, vol. 7-8.

revisit the theories of Eric Fromm,<sup>115</sup> and of C.S Lewis, *The Four Loves*, exploring the junctures and discrepancies of various outlooks on love.<sup>116</sup>

As an extension of my interest in Breton's writing, I have begun reading about various women's influence on Surrealism. Rosemont's *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* includes responses to an Inquiry on Love that was published in an issue of *La Revolution surrealiste*, in which Susan Muzard delivers her convictions concerning love in answering four questions concerning love. Her thoughts interest me particularly because, in reading *Communicating Vessels*, I found particularly powerful the evocation of Breton's loss in separation from her. Part of this is the mystery with which her absence is laced, and the necessity Breton applies to the concealment of her identity. Breton was impressed by her answers to the inquiry and added a postscript, expressing his support for her response.

Muzard's forceful and convincing ideals challenge many patterns of thinking to which my experience has previously led me. Her answer to the first question, for example, expresses a desire for love, on a personal level, to be all encompassing. In another, she states that love is 'to be sure of oneself', and denies the acceptance of nonreciprocal love, rejecting that 'two

<sup>115</sup>

<sup>116</sup>

Fromm, E., *The Art of Loving*, Harper and Row, New York: 1956.  
Lewis, C.S., *The Four Loves*, Harper Collins, Great Britain: 1977.

lovers might be in contradiction on a topic as serious as love'.<sup>117</sup>

### *Memory*

I plan to devote more research to understanding memory, and to the expression of memory, as a powerful experiential impulse. The palimpsestic structure of memory creates an ideal concept for visual expression, while its vast potential embraces a multitude of avenues for its exploration through all forms of art.

I will continue writing my journals, and playing and developing the memory game.

<sup>117</sup>

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## **PART ONE**

### ***Relevant Artists: Alice Aycock and Judy Pfaff***

#### **Figure 1**

Alice Aycock  
*The City of Walls* (1978)  
Pencil on Vellum  
105 x 113cm  
Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York

#### **Figure 2:**

Alice Aycock  
*Studies for a Town* (1977)  
Wooden construction  
90-300cm (variation)  
330-375cm (diameter variation)

#### **Figure 3:**

Alice Aycock,  
*The Angels Continue Turning  
the Wheels of the Universe Part 11* (1978)  
7000cm square x 5000cm high (tower)  
Executed for the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (destroyed)

#### **Figure 4:**

Judy Pfaff  
*Rock, Paper, Scissors* (1982)  
Mixed media installation  
Dimensions unknown

#### **Figure 5:**

Judy Pfaff  
*Cirque, Cirque* (1995)  
Mixed media  
700 000 square feet

## **PART TWO**

### ***Talking to Myself? The Journal's Voice***

**Figure 6**

Amanda Connor  
*not entirely ...* (2001)  
multimedia installation  
3000cm x 3000cm x 3000cm(approx.)

**Figure 7**

Amanda Connor  
*not entirely...* (2000)  
multimedia installation (detail)  
3000cm x 3000cm x 3000cm(approx.)

**Figure 8:**

Janet Sternburg  
*Splendor, San Miguel de Allende* (1999)  
Photograph  
Dimensions unknown

### ***Work in Context***

**Figure 9:**

Joseph Cornell  
*Untitled (Encrusted Clown [Souvenirs for Singleton])*  
c. mid 1950-s Box construction  
44.8 x 29.8 x 11.1cm  
Collection: Edward and Julie Minskoff

**Figure 10:**

Joseph Cornell  
Collage of Berenices, in  
*The Crystal Cage* (1942)  
Courtesy Richard L. Feigen, New York

**Figure 11:**

Susan Hiller  
*Sentimental Representations*  
*in Memory of My Grandmothers*  
*(Part Two for Rose Hiller) (1980-81)*  
section 1: rose petals in acrylic medium,  
ink on paper, photocopies  
section 11: photographs  
1380 x 1080; 330 x 200cm  
The John Creasy Museum, Salisbury

**Figure 12:**  
Susan Hiller  
*Lucid Dreams 1* (1983)  
Drawing ink on colour  
photographs on board, 4 panels (detail)  
555 x 455cm

**Figure 13:**  
Susan Hiller, *Dream Mapping* (1974)  
Vitrines containing notebooks  
with dream maps and documentation,  
wall drawing, 7 vitrines, each  
412 x 465 x 219cm

**Figure 14:**  
Robert Rauschenberg  
*Random Order*  
*Document published in Location*,  
Spring, (1963)  
4 of 5 A4 pages

**Figure 15:**  
Kurt Schwitters,  
*Picture with 2 small dogs (1920-1939)*  
*Collage, montage, mixed media on board*  
96.5 x 68cm

**Figure 16:**  
Louise Bourgeois  
(left image) *Femme Maison 103* (1945-1947)  
(right image) *Femme Maison 105* (1946-1947)  
Oil and ink on linen  
36 x 14 inches (each)  
John D. Kahlbetzer collection, Santa Barbara

## ***PART THREE***

### ***The Studio***

**Figure 17:**  
Amanda Connor  
*Between Autumn*, Installation, (2002)  
Mixed media installation (detail)  
Dimensions variable

### ***Moving Images***

**Figure 18:**  
Amanda Connor  
*not entirely 2* (2004)  
multimedia video installation (still)

## ***The Exhibition***

### **Figure 19:**

Amanda Connor

*Imaginary Letters* (2004)

Wood, paint, coloured pen (detail)

140x101x70cm

### **Figure 20:**

Amanda Connor

*for not entirely 2* (2004)

Multimedia installation (video still)

### **Figure 21:**

Amanda Connor

*Imaginary Letters* (2004)

Wood, paint, coloured pen

(37x31x28)

Detail (Willow)

### **Figure 22:**

Amanda Connor,

*Imaginary Letters* (2004)

Wood, paint, coloured pen

27x27x8cm

Detail (Door)

### **Figure 23:**

Amanda Connor

*Imaginary Letters* (2004)

Wood, paint, coloured pen (Detail)

(37x31x28)

Dimensions Variable

### **Figure 24:**

Amanda Connor

*Imaginary Letters* (2004)

Wood, paint, coloured pen

34 x 54 x 32cm

(Detail) *Garden*

## APPENDIX 2:

### E. Curriculum Vitae

#### **Amanda Jane Connor B.F.A. (Hons), B.A., Tasmania.**

1988 Bachelor of Arts, (Philosophy and English),  
University of Tasmania

1997 Bachelor of Fine Art, University of Tasmania

1999 Bachelor of Fine Art (Hons.1),  
University of Tasmania

2000-04 Ph.D Research, (Tas. School of Art, University  
of Tasmania)

#### **Awards**

Alfred Houston Senior Prize. (Philosophy), 1987

Australian Postgraduate Award, 2000

#### *Selected Solo Art Exhibitions*

*Between Autumn* (1987)

Entrepot Gallery, Hobart

Mixed media installation

#### *Selected Group Exhibitions*

*Half Way There* (2001), Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart

Title: Not Entirely (2001),

Multimedia and mixedmedia installation

*Island Nights* (2001), The Loft, Hobart, (as part of Ten  
Days on the Island Festival)

Title: Meandering Blossoms (2001),

Mixedmedia installation

*Red, Hot and Art* (2000), Long Gallery, Hobart

Title: *6 Untitled Works* (2000)

Mixedmedia installation

*Images of Tasmania*, (1999), Long Gallery, Hobart

*12 Untitled Works* (1999)

*Showing Off*, (1999), Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart

Title: *If id had my way at infant school* (1999)

Mixedmedia installation

*Tears*, (1999), Storehouse Gallery, Hobart

Title: *Castle of Tears* (1999)

## Mixedmedia installation

True Voyages, (1999), Storehouse Gallery, Hobart  
Title: Voyage In The Quest Of My Heart's Desire  
Mixedmedia installation

## Reviews

Andersch, J., 'Gallery Watch' [Between Autumn], *The Mercury*, April 27, 2002.

Andersch, J., 'Gallery Watch' [Tears], *The Mercury*, September 27, 1999.

Andersch, J., 'Gallery Watch' [True Voyages], *The Mercury*, June 5th, 1999.