Translating Erasure

Proposing auto-theory as a practice for artistic enquiry and analysis

while comprehending personal grief

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of

the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy

at the Royal College of Art

January 2022

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

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Date: 11 January 2022

Abstract

Erasure as an artistic technique has developed in my moving image work after my father's passing. I export videos into sequences of thousands of images and erase outlines of the targeted objects in each frame. The repetitive and low conscious labour is a way to ease the agony and to grieve my father. Hours compressed into thousands of frames, turning into a glimpse of illusion and leaving a ghostly emptiness on the images. Both its visual presentation and making reflect the life events and encounters I've experienced in the UK and Taiwan in the past years.

I consider an artwork embodies interconnected relationships between one's personal impulses and artistic training. As an art student, I have found it challenging to describe such a creative process with conventional academic writing. Within a construct that inclines to present thoughts as reasonable and rational arguments, my personal experiences and the intensity of feeling seem out of place. Within an academic framework, how can I make an argument out of how I have developed the erasure in my artwork to perform the grief, fading memories of a loved one, existential crisis and what's in-between?

Through auto-theoretical approaches to writing and making of moving image work, this research aims to build a structure that can express both the intimate and intellectual aspects of an art practice. This writing up process interweaves my personal stories that motivate my artistic expression into art theories. The memories about my late father, my relationship with languages, and my lives between the UK and Taiwan meet with different artists' uses of erasure.

As the conversations between the introspections and theoretical analysis accumulate, my writing and moving image work unravel an art journey that encompasses the nuances and struggles I've experienced as an international student. Within the search for an ideal model to illustrate an art practice, this research further generates profound understandings of memory, grief, loss, language, conflicted identities and cultural belonging.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to give sincere thanks and gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Joanne Tatham and Dr Melanie Jackson. I was highly fortunate to have their support and patience throughout this journey.

I would like to thank my partner, Howard, who has been a constant source of support. My thanks also to his mother, Melanie, who too has encouraged me. I also would like to thank our puppy, Maxwell, who offered his company during the making of this research.

謝謝媽媽一直做我的後盾，讓我能無虞地堅持自己的目標。

(I thank my mother for always believing in me and supporting the things I do.)

謝謝爸爸，這件作品獻給你。

(I thank my father. You are my one true inspiration.)

introduction

The Drawing Class

In those late afternoons of my university years, I remember we sat on stools facing a spread of papers lying on the floor. In the last half an hour of every drawing class, we gave comments on each other's work. After a whole year of basic technique training, from sophomore year, we had more opportunities to work with different media and to develop our individual focus. I enjoyed the freedom a lot, as well as the critique section.

In those drawing classes, I found something stuck with me after a whole semester of students answering a recurring question from our tutor - does that combination / that stroke / that colour / that object / that material in your work represent the same metaphor to others as to you? The answer was usually 'No'.

Over the years, I had considered my work from this perspective, taking a pessimistic view of this problem. How could my actions in the making of an artwork and my material choices signify the same feeling, meaning and experience to an audience? I buried this concern after graduating from university. During the years working as an admin in a gallery it ceased to be my problem.

I did, however, from time to time, peruse writing by fellow artists on their own practices. Those texts reminded me of that drawing class and gave me a chance to revisit that stubbornness I felt over the expectation of producing something that can be invariably decoded without discrepancy. If symbols are not always universal but mostly personal, perhaps I should rephrase the question into a less fatalistic one: how can I analyse and understand my personal symbols so I am able to articulate it to an audience, as well as to myself?

Through reading critics' reviews and artists' statements, I thought I could find clues to this conundrum. I used to believe there was an absolute answer as to how language can transport meanings of artworks to an audience that's true to its creator and also true to its guests.

A Glass of Water

A Glass of Water is a series of moving image works created between 2016-17. Each approximately one-minute video documents the moment in which liquid is being poured into an invisible glass. In the making of this series, videos are deconstructed into thousands of individual images. The outline of the glass is erased in every single frame of the sequence, presenting water falling into an obscure space. The shivering light and shadow signify the ghostly absence of the container. The quietness and movements of water compose a poetic image while the relics of erasure reflect a certain degree of violence.

This series marks my introspection during my first two years in London. The physical distance between a new city and my home town divided my future and past. I became aware of the conflicts between different identities and responsibilities. I meditated on the self in relation to art practice, environments and family. Through the repetitive, low conscious labour in the making of *A Glass of Water*, I tried to ease the agony and grieve my father's passing. Hours compressed into thousands of frames, turning into a glimpse of an illusion.

This series and its ongoing development continue to portray a sense of loss through erasure. It embodies the thoughts and experiences accumulated with time that became a complex mass, from which I can't easily tease apart the intricate story behind the images.

The purpose of asking how language can untangle that convolution is not to find an answer that simply rewords what images have communicated with verbal language but to establish a structure that can better identify and convey that particularity of the relationship between the symbols and the created images.

Growing up, written language had been the most predominant medium to deliver knowledge. In my learning experience in Taiwan most classes were designed for students to efficiently get a good mark. The language used in the classrooms framed the facts and history of human intelligence within the textbooks. It determined what's true without much negotiable space. Although this impression of language still represents the shape of knowledge in academia for me, I seek to establish a more appropriate system of utilising language that does not only help communicate messages to an audience, but might also assist practitioners with clarifying their creative processes.

With a creative process that's highly emotionally motivated and intuitive, I felt the restrictions in trying to articulate decision making with conventional academic writing. Within a construct that inclines to present thought as reasonable and rational arguments, my personal experiences, juxtapositions and metaphors, and the intensity of feeling seem out of place.

Translation

My drive to articulate my art practice has become even more paramount in recent years of pursuing my post-graduate degree in the UK. After a long journey of exploration, I eventually realised (or accepted) that there was no such thing as an ultimate formula for expressing equivalence from visual to spoken or written language. Yes, I could talk about shapes, colours, materials and all the other components in an image, but that didn't necessarily answer the question from the drawing class or even explain why I implemented those symbols in the first place.

In their research on developing a better structured creative process, which integrates both students' theses and makings of artwork, Linda Apps and Carolyn Mamchur ascribe the urgency of such an investigation to the feeling of disengagement from writing felt by practice-based students. While articulating artworks with language is requisite in accomplishing one's academic achievement, students found writing as obstructive and regard the activity as "additional" to their creativity since the process has already been "expressed visually".[1]

I can relate to such a reluctance towards translation between images and texts. I found it difficult to talk about my practice as I saw the making of my videos as simply a process of transforming internal images into an externally perceivable body. I rarely have sketches or notes that record how the images are formed but that doesn't mean there's no contemplation involved.

I see that the composition of my images - the arrangements of visual components - embody physical and mental responses to the world through artistic training and experiences. These experiences can be traced further back to the first drawings of my childhood - that long period of internalising visual symbols.

This thinking process does not take the form of spoken language but because I feel obliged to turn this abstract form of thoughts into text, sometimes it seems as if language is the only way to structure my rumination.

Compared to a syntactical and grammatical thought, the emergence of an image in my mind is much more immediate and automatic, as a condensed body of all information and emotion. We often call such a result, without a linguistic structure and context, intuition. The challenge of writing for me, therefore, is to articulate those intuitions, and intertwine conscious and unconscious thoughts without diminishing their potency.

I needed and allowed that blurred status of shapes and colours in my work as a place from which to generate imagery but then struggled to express the finished work verbally. In order to make sense of the indescribable, I used to give each component of my images a general symbolic definition and try to

[1] Linda Apps, Carolyn Mamchur, 'Artful Language: Academic Writing for the Art Student', *The Authors. Journal Compilation*, 28.3 (2009), pp. 270.

piece them together into a logical story. I thought that through these rationalisations, I would understand my images and others could also read and follow them. The result of such attempts was predictable. The process of translation became frustrating and sometimes misleading as I tried to explain my subjective perception from an external distant point of view.

Shape of Knowledge

I found some answers as to why I failed to write in line with my creativity as I encountered Elizabeth Price's talk on the challenge of academic writing in Fine Art and studies on how the academic form of the discipline has evolved.

In her talk "The Form of the Academic Thesis - An Artist's Perspective" Price states that the success of a project within the humanities in the UK often relies upon a narrow and particular form of academic thesis that's upheld by unstated convention and explicit regulation.[2] Price argues that not only have women historically long been excluded from such academic structures, but that the discipline of art is also relatively new to a mode of writing that is predominately developed by other existing fields.

As explained by Christopher Brighton, Fine Art wasn't part of higher education until the 60's.[3] As a newcomer in higher education, forms of evaluation within Fine Art research were established upon the precedent rules and regulations of the universities, research cultures, and policies and contribution of knowledge defined by authorities such as Council for National Academic Awards.[4]

The short history of art as an academic discipline was accompanied by the changes in the UK's education system that further challenged Fine Art research to develop its own academic form. Policy changes such as Education Reform Act in 1988, since when institutions transformed from public-funded services into commercial organisations selling specific products to their "consumers", as well as in the 2010s when the government consolidated the strategy, accelerating the marketisation of the UK Higher Education.[5] [6] [7] Faced with increased pressure to secure funding and with competition for students Higher Education Institutions have adopted increasingly corporatised approaches. Price suggests that many art departments are forced to develop their research degrees expeditiously in accordance with the institutions' speedy expansion while still figuring out its doctoral form. She further addresses how as a result, art discourse borrows forms from neighbouring disciplines such as art history, cultural theory or philosophy.

In art history, a research paper should be presented in a rigid and logical manner from an objective perspective, as noted in the writing guideline of Art History of Stanford University: "[a]rt writing

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[2] Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities, *The Form of the Academic Thesis - an artist's perspective by Prof Elizabeth Price*, YouTube, 29 June 2021 <https://youtu.be/Sz9sy8woVcg> [accessed 6 August 2021]

[3] Christopher Brighton, 'Research in Fine Art: An Epistemological and Empirical Study' (published PhD thesis, University of Surrey, 1992), p. 9.

[4] Ibid., p. 20.

[5] Roger Brown and Helen Carasso, *Everything for Sale? The marketisation of UK higher education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

[6] Lee Parker, 'University corporatisation: Driving redefinition', *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 22 (2011), p. 434-450.

[7] Louise Bunce and others, 'The student-as-consumer approach in higher education and its effects on academic performance', *Studies in Higher Education*, 42:11 (2017), pp. 1958-1978.

further gains in persuasiveness by avoiding projection or personal narrative".[8] Applying such academic conventions runs the risk of overlooking the personal engagements with the material, visual, imaginary and intuitive aspects of an art practice. The imbalanced focus on the production of written theses also leads to artworks themselves being given the secondary attention in PhD submission, which Price describes as a form of erasure.

Kerstin Mey in her essay *The Gesture of Writing* also argues that the academic disciplines of art and design's emphasis on contextual studies - understanding the context of a creative process in relation to wider social and cultural developments, usually relies on the practices of writing on art with a focus on history or theory of art.[9] Mey states "On the one hand, we find ourselves in a situation where the debate and commentary on current art and visual practices still struggle to be recognised as a wholesome academic endeavour. On the other hand, higher learning remains largely a text- and symbol-based curriculum."[10]

These discussions show that the challenge doesn't only concern the natural differences between visual and verbal languages but also pertains to how knowledge is formed and delivered within some traditional academic expectations.

[8] 'A Brief Guide To Writing In Art History', *Stanford Department of Art & Art History* <https://art.stanford.edu/sites/art/files/a_brief_guide_0.pdf> [accessed 14 November 2021]

[9] Kerstin Mey, 'The gesture of writing' in *Thinking through Art - Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) pp. 203.

[10] Ibid., pp. 203.

Questions

Protesting that expectations, artists in advanced higher education seek more coherent ways to articulate their practice and challenge the current PhD submission requirements. As an example, Price's text *sidekick* from her research writes around the making of her installation *Boulder* (1997) in a style of soliloquy.[11] *Sidekick* contemplates the materiality and physicality in the making of the artwork within its theoretical contexts informed by Marxist materialism. She includes detailed descriptions of how the unwinding and rewinding of packing tape shaped the mass presence of *Boulder* while meditating the essence of this project, how the artwork will be perceived through its materials and form, and also through the written text. Her enquiries are phrased candidly as an inevitable doubt that happens in a creative process as she writes "[s]ometimes I am not sure myself if the boulder has been made in the way that I claim."[12] Price's writing gently connects analysis to personal rumination, which is not always communicable through a conventional academic writing. In her viva, Claire Makhlouf Carter hires a polygraph examiner as an outside witness and arranges an abduction of herself. Her thesis submission is a purposely produced thick heavy hardback publication. Carter explains her decisions: " Having critically reflected on the essential methods in my work, which stem from particular genres such as delegated performance and institutional critique it became unthinkable for me to treat the PhD viva as simply an exam and not register, question and present the interactions on which the exam relies."[13]

Carter confronts the protocol in a formal institutional setting through her developed research form that's aligned with the artist's methods and interest. Price's soliloquy *sidekick* negotiates the complexity of a creative process that encompasses explorations of materials, physical engagements, theories and the artist's intuition. I ask how can I also develop a structure that articulates my practice in a corresponding way? How can it embrace the subtlety, the quietness but also the uneasiness that are embodied in my moving image works? How can it illustrate the tension of withholding reflected by the muted twitches spotted in the sequence of frames and the suspensions within the slow movements taking place around the erased objects? How does this structure consider the longstanding problem from the drawing class, of how I can understand and communicate my visual languages? Within an academic framework, how can I make an argument out of how I have developed the erasure in my moving image work to perform the grief, fading memories of a loved one, the feeling of being removed from language and from the sense of belonging?

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[11] Elizabeth Price, 'sidekick' in *Thinking through Art - Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) pp. 122-132.

[12] See note 10, pp. 130.

[13] Lee Campbell and Claire Makhlouf Carter, 'Bad Document: the Antagonistic Document', Performing Document, University of Bristol, Bristol, 2013 <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/arts/migrated/documents/campbell-carter.pdf> [accessed 15 November 2021]

As part of this PhD I took up free writing as a method to shatter my pretend objective voice that aligned with what I previously considered as the right way to talk about my work. I allowed myself to write whatever thoughts came to my head, without a pre-planned structure, without knowing where it was heading. No assumptions, not caring about grammar or spellings. I noted down those random monologues that frequently visited me during sleepless nights.

I stopped writing about what was present in the images, pivoting my focus to what happened in my mind and in my surroundings when those images were created. Through this writing practice, I gradually recognised the connections between my work and some life events. As the origin and resonance of those personal symbols gradually surfaced, I came back to the question of how to articulate those indescribable tensions that incarnate in images; how my words communicate the intensity and complexity of an experience that is compressed into a one-minute-long video; and how to express those intuitively allocated symbols.

In that drawing class, it opened up the complexity of visual expression, but I was left without a system to express my personal relationship with the images I created, neither to others nor to myself. To articulate the relationship between a visual representation and private experiences is to explicate an important part of one's creative process that is collectively cultivated through artistic training, intuitions and, conscious and subconscious contemplations. This challenge requires a more comprehensive structure that is able to encompass the personal and the intellectual aspects of a practice.

This research aims to build a structure that can perform or enact distinct thinking processes: the emotional and intellectual digestion of life encounters and the intuitive decisions in creating cultivated by personal history with symbols and art training. I propose that an auto-theoretical approach, a form of hybrid practice that integrates personal experience with a larger intellectual framework can bridge these modes of thinking and the quality of my practice by combining autographical materials and theoretical analysis.

As a mode of writing, auto-theory can be traced in various spheres and has been present in theoretical writings since at least the 16th century, such as the work by the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne.[14] In the early 2000s auto-theory became more widely recognised as a viable academic form; this followed on from its development through feminist practice, queer theories, post-colonial and Black studies. Representative works of literature include Chris Kraus' *I Love Dick* (1997), Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* (2008) and Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015).[15] [16] [17] In her *I Love Dick*, Kraus tells of her obsession for the cultural critic Dick. The film artist writes to Dick in an academic form in the hope of being intellectually appreciated by the critic. Referencing philosophers and scholars such as Søren Kierkegaard, Joan Hawkins, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Luce Irigaray, Kraus' intellectual exchange with her pursuit of intimate love provokes a different way of contemplating marriage and female identities. First published in Spanish in 2008, Preciado's *Testo Junkie* documents a three-month experiment of him taking testosterone as a political performance. Preciado writes about his bodily and relationship changes during this period, entwining his theoretical and political views on the pharmacology and pornography industries. *The Argonauts* is Nelson's love story with her partner Harry Dodge. It tells of Dodge's treatments to become bodily masculine as a biological female, their marriage, Nelson's pregnancy and motherhood. Nelson presents their journey alongside quotes of

[14] Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press Kindle Edition, 2021), p. 38.

[15] Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e); London: MIT Press, 2006).

[16] Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013).

[17] Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (London: Melville House, 2015).

philosophers, academics and artists from various disciplines, who Nelson considers to have sculpted her thinking and helped her form a better understanding of life.

Zwartjes attributes auto-theory's growth to it having traits that allow the emotional characteristics of knowledge to be fully expressed through its inclusion of private accounts. She states "[o]ne reason Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* has been so popular, and that other works of auto-theory including Cvetkovich's book *Depression: A Public Feeling* have been so powerful, is that they are vulnerable books, divulging very personal details in ways that are neither confessional nor egoistic, but are instead an offering to readers: here is mine. In this way, they have the power of giving voice to experiences and lives that are more often sidelined, discounted, silenced, marginalized."[18] Auto-theory values self-reflection and vulnerability as a crucial form of intellectual engagement. I found this focus of auto-theory encouraging as it recognises my life encounters as part of a knowledge shaping process, where I thought they didn't belong. Such an acceptance of the self contrasts with conventional theoretical writing within which knowledge is often presented in an objective and rational voice.

The tendency of praising objectivity and rationality by part of the academic culture is identified by Carmen Gonzalez and Angela Harris in the introduction to *Presumed Incompetent* (2012), in which they connect such an inclination to the love for the idea of science, an assumption that science is universal and the "hard" truth.[19] Gonzales and Harris further argue that the hard science is traditionally tied with the dichotomous idea of masculinity/rationality that is opposite to femininity and it produces works that are "value neutral and politics-free and, therefore, that questions of social hierarchy and caste are irrelevant."[20] However historically the development of scientific disciplines such as geography, botany and tropical medicine heavily links to Europe's colonial enterprise, providing services to Europe's empires. It showcases that the problem of racial hierarchy is still present in some of the academic traditions such as methods and approaches. Fournier points out that feminist creatives challenge this form of knowledge that roots in white-centred, patriarchal and colonial systems by redefining "what it means to produce theory or to *theorize* as part of living in the contemporary world" through a different voice, such as one that is shaped by auto-theory.[21]

Auto-theory also examines the characteristics of autobiography, a genre that has developed since the 18th century, celebrating the lives of individuals and giving first-hand accounts of historical events. However as theory, traditional autobiography also becomes aligned with gendered positions – either of the grand 'masculine' narratives Serge Doubrousky highlights or the feminized, subjective position long

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[18] Arianne Zwartjes, 'Autotheory as Rebellion: On Research, Embodiment, and Imagination in Creative Nonfiction', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 23 July 2019 <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2019/07/autotheory-as-rebellion-on-research-embodiment-and-imagination-in-creative-nonfiction/> [accessed 20 April 2020]

[19] *Presumed Incompetent - The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, ed. by Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs and others (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012), p. 4.

[20] Ibid., p. 5.

[21] See note 14, p. 6.

dismissed in women's writing described by Jennifer Gingerich. Gingerich states that women writers have to find what French feminist Hélène Cixous calls "elsewhere" to tell their stories as these stories don't echo men's definition of outstanding experience.[22] This sense of superiority is acknowledged by Doubrosky when he distinguishes his work from autobiography because autobiography is "a privilege reserved for the important people of this world, at the closing of their lives, in a beautiful style."[23] The "elsewhere" exists outside the notion of autobiography or memoir understood by Doubrousky as a form of writing that is exclusively used by men with certain achievements and power. Gingerich exemplifies autobiographies by women such as Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* (1981) and Lauren Slater's *Lying* (2000) to argue how their writing opposes the traditional male autobiography and redefines "extraordinary". Gingerich explores that how, again, these works are distinct from the male perspective, from which the story often has a clear start and an end concluding a "successful" life. Instead, the story in a woman's autobiography is often fragmented and, in construction of the self, a fluid and unsettled definition of the self.[24] [25] In *Storyteller* Silko tells the stories of her life, of others and of fictional characters in the first-person narration accompanied by photographs and poetry. Her autobiography explores subjects of memories, alienation, power and identity as a Native American. *Lying* presents Slater's experience of Munchausen's Syndrome, in which she talks about her ways of getting attention by lying, faking seizures, or joining an AA group to tell her stories, even though she doesn't have a drinking problem. Slater's work also documents her recovery, yet keeps reminding her readers that she's not a reliable truth teller/narrator.

These women's voices don't align with the concept of the traditional autobiography such as Edward Bok's *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (1920) and Jacob Riis's *The Making of an American* (1924), exemplified by linguistic researcher Aneta Pavlenko, both of which focus on their male protagonist's heroic adventures.[26] In works such as these, which glorify the journey of becoming a successful immigrant of America, Pavlenko points out how nuanced yet inevitable struggles, such as miscommunications in a second language, or the transitions between cultures, are insufficiently illustrated. However the "elsewhere" usually resides in those small things that accumulate in the everyday. It reflects on our relationships with the environment and with ourselves. Those details can provide important understandings of class, history, ideology and ethnicity. To engage with them is when the observations become personal. The rise of auto-theory manifests the urgency to recognise the important intellectual input of the valuable insights shaped by these "insignificant" moments as they offer inclusive and diverse perspectives to the subjects we try to understand.

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[22] Jennifer A Gingerich, 'Establishing an Elsewhere in Contemporary American Women's Autobiography' (published master's thesis, Marshall University, 2003), p. 1.

[23] Émile Lévesque-Jalbert, '"This is not an autofiction": Autoteoría, French Feminism, and Living in Theory', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 76:1 (2020), pp. 71.

[24] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

[25] Lauren Slater, *Lying* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

[26] Aneta Pavlenko, 'Language Learning Memoirs as a Gendered Genre', *Applied Linguistics*, 22/2 (2001), pp. 219.

Representation

The political position of auto-theory that reconsiders the form of knowledge in relation to existing systems, authority and genders is an important context as to why I think an auto-theoretical approach is appropriate for my practice. As an international student my experience is likely to be oversimplified as "culture shock" with uneventful moments of little inconveniences.[27] However Pavlenko argues that immigrant women's stories offer understanding of how the factor of gender complicates the struggles around identity.[28] She also emphasises that recognising the diversity of immigrant women's voices, that are not confined in a prototypical immigrant story of coming from poverty or disadvantaged circumstances, is crucial for us to appreciate the complexity of identity formed through intercultural experiences.[29] Through my stories, this research contemplates on the questions of identity around grief and around an overseas study experience while developing a research form, it also concerns how a "soft" voice of a minority member constructs an intellectual body of work.

I seek to tell the story of loss that stretches across insignificant and ordinary moments in the mundanity. They are like the repetitively dull behaviours implemented in the removal of objects in the making of my artworks — the waiting for thousands of still images being exported from an one-minute video of water falling into a glass, the moving back and forth of the virtual erasure's tip, the mistakes which occurred every now and then forcing a re-do of a whole batch of images and other fiddling details involved in this slow process — they all seem very trivial, sometimes pointless and absurd. The sentiment of loss resides in this fragile but constant balance that quietly presses things forward. The balance between the borderline where the erasure is confined in and the other side beyond its reach. The flow of thousands of frames shows the frontier being pushed and pulled by the erasure thirty times a second. They are uneventful moments trying to pretend a sense of stability out of that unstoppable subdued quiver. Like the accumulation of this heavily present yet invisible labour, the trifling vignettes of the everyday eventually become a moving picture that illustrates the nuances, tensions and conflicts between responsibilities and my different identities — as a daughter, an artist, a research student and a foreigner exposed to constantly shifting cultural scenes.

As an international student I had never considered myself to be disadvantaged. On the contrary it requires a great degree of privilege to be in my position. The struggles I face on a daily-basis, ranging from barriers of language when accessing simple services, to learning institutional and cultural differences, or experiencing occasional obscure racist encounters, to the financial difficulties of living in London might not seem anything spectacular. But day by day this string of subtle experiences piles up and develops into critical rumination concerning what it means to be who I am and how I see others as

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[27] Tiago Bittencourt and more, '"We See the World Different Now": Remapping Assumptions About International Student Adaptation', Journal of Studies in International Education, 25:1 (2021), pp. 36.

[28] See note 26, pp. 220.

[29] Ibid., pp. 220-221.

complex beings like me. The death of my father opens up the conversation with myself, who seemed to have a propensity to dismiss what she considered as weak, negative or unproductive. Perhaps I had waited until such a major life event to finally allow myself to be true to my feelings, to be more honest in observing my situation. I compare my lives in Taiwan and the UK, as well as social movements taking place in the West and East, such as the focuses around racial and gender inequalities, to reflect back to see my relations to those issues and to untangle the convoluted question of identity.

This research articulates the relationship between an art practice, personal history and environmental factors such as of an international study experience. I believe this exploration is relevant to many students like me, whose academic practices are in the intersection of self-construction and, social and political conditions on a larger scale.

Suggested in many studies that women doctoral students, compared to their male counterparts, face more challenges in balancing their personal life and studies.[30] [31] This can be caused by many factors, including an academic organisational culture that is associated with masculine judgement and general expectations toward women.[32] As Pauline Leonard states, women's time "is understood as in relation to other's time and daily lives."[33] Researchers also identify that women of colour in academia, apart from the difficulties that are already imposed on women, also face racial discrimination. In Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen's study on international women postgraduate students' experiences in Australia and Canada, it shows the struggles including being treated differently or looked down in the classroom as well as presents their thoughts on representation.[34] For example a Japanese student expresses how although she had invested in understanding her host country Canada, "she remained locked into non-citizen status."[35] Furthermore, particularly responding to the negative public opinion on international students in Canada "[s]he felt disappointed that, despite her psychological investment in Canada as her home and despite longing to feel part of the society, she was still constructed as a foreigner, indeed, as an intruder".[36] In her analysis of open-ended questionnaires with twelve women of colour among faculty members in the academic settings of geography in North America and the UK, Minelle Mahtani reveals that within the departments that have a very low percentage of visible

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[30] Christina Sánchez-Martín and Lisya Seloni, 'Transdisciplinary becoming as a gendered activity: A reflexive study of dissertation mentoring', *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 43 (2019), pp. 25.

[31] Claire Aitchison and Susan Mowbray, 'Doctoral women: managing emotions, managing doctoral studies', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18:8 (2013), pp.859-870.

[32] Sarah Wall, 'Of heads and hearts: Women in doctoral education at a Canadian University', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 31:3 (2008), pp. 220.

[33] Pauline Leonard, 'Organizing gender? Looking at metaphors as frames of meaning in gender/organizational texts', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 9:1 (2002), pp. 72.

[34] Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen, 'Self-representations of international women postgraduate students in the global university "contact zone"', *Gender and Education*, 15:1 (2003), pp. 5-20.

[35] Ibid., pp. 14.

[36] Ibid., pp. 14.

minority women all her twelve interviewees expressed that they experience discriminations. As one comments "[n]on-white women are discouraged, found flawed (accents being used as a reason not to hire are a good example of this), and problematic."[37] Some explain that their professionalism is challenged as others think their obtaining of academic positions is based on their minority status. One explains "The presumption is based on racist and sexist reasoning—a woman of colour PhD is objectively less than a white man PhD, and thus she must have gotten breaks via affirmative action."[38] Conducted within PhD programmes in sociology, Eric Margolis and Mary Romero's study also uncovers racial discriminations such as students of colour being excluded from accessing informal research resources that are offered by the faculty members.[39] In Abdul Jabbar's interviews with the UK's academic tutors of higher education, it reveals different attitudes towards teaching international students.[40] While some comment that cultural backgrounds shouldn't be the reason for students' poor response to an unfamiliar teaching style, others identify such factors as crucial to their learning. However the teachers who are willing to implement different approaches to improve students' performance found themselves lacking resources and time. Jabbar's paper concludes that institutions should develop policies and supports for academics to assist their teaching in the era of globalised education.

I believe for the educational system to understand the issue and to establish corresponding methods it is important to acknowledge the complexity of a student's identity and recognise it as an intricate component. Jasper Kun-Ting Hsieh emphasises that Taiwanese identity, which shares similar culture and language with Chinese students, is at risk of being neglected and becoming simply a subset of data in research on Chinese-speaking students' adjustments to intercultural learning.[41] In contrast to Chinese students taking up thirty-five percent of the non-EU international student demography in the UK as the top number and the majority among their Far-East peers, students from Taiwan is only one percent of the number.[42] [43] Noted in the curatorial statement of "Where I'm Coming From", along with

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[37] Minelle Mahtani, 'Mapping race and gender in the academy: The experiences of women of colour faculty and graduate students in Britain, the US and Canada', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 28:1 (2004), pp. 93.

[38] Ibid. pp.94.

[39] Eric Margolis and Mary Romero, 'The department is very male, very white, very old, and very conservative: The functioning of the hidden curriculum in graduate sociology departments', *Harvard Educational Review*, 68:1 (1998), pp. 9-10.

[40] Abdul Jabbar and more, 'Academics' perspectives of international students in UK higher education', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44:3 (2020), pp. 350-364.

[41] Jasper Kun-Ting Hsieh, 'An Ethnography of Taiwanese International Students' Identity Movements: Habitus Modification and Improvisation', *Journal of International Students*, 10:4 (2020), pp. 836.

[42] 'International student recruitment data', *Universities UK*, 27 July 2021 <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/explore-uuki/international-student-recruitment/international-student-recruitment-data> [accessed 1 October 2021]

[43] 'Where do HE students come from?', *HESA*, 9 February 2021 <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from#detailed> [accessed 14 November 2021]

other migrant communities that contribute to the UK's vibrant environment Taiwan is "highly invisible".[44]

Within the scarcity of studies on Taiwanese identity in the UK, I see auto-theory as the "elsewhere" to tell my story. A story documents the journey of exploring old and new selves through grief, art and language. It illustrates the process of identifying myself as a minority contrasting to my upbringing in Taiwan, having difficulties in expressing myself with language, juggling relationships and careers, coping with the loss of a beloved one, the loss of the self, alone, with doubts and guilts. With theoretical support the lived experience is not just a random collection of anecdotes but possesses the authority to examine the intricate social and cultural conditions I am presented with.

[44] 'Where I'm Coming From', *Inventory Platform*, 2020 <https://ia904500.us.archive.org/4/items/wicf_press_release_/wicf_press_release_.pdf> [accessed 1 October 2021]

An Auto-theoretical Approach

This written thesis is comprised of studies on how visual artists have used erasure in various media throughout history to demonstrate the practical and metaphoric functions of artistic expression, while interweaving these with my memories of my father and my life in the UK and Taiwan. The telling of memories about my father, which in an emotion-restraining tone weaves into my encounters of the artworks, the analytical parts of this research also possess a certain degree of self-reflection. These conversations between subjective and objective explorations unravel the development of my own visual representation of erasure. Intertwined with these conversations are reflections on the use of language which I've observed along my art journey, presenting a series of meditations on how languages function not only as a tool for general communication, but as a determinant in shaping one's individuality. Through my auto-theoretical approach the investigation of erasure is the thread of story-telling that connects and draws the emotional and intellectual understandings of family, memory, grief, loss, language, conflicted identities and cultural belongings.

Artists engage with auto-theory through citations, footnotes, performing with or presenting a physical representation of the referred theories in their works. In Cauleen Smith's *Human_3.0 Reading List* (2015), the artist publishes a manifesto advocating the power of reading theories and literature to raise consciousness, promote equal rights and establish a sustainable life for African-Americans. Along with the manifesto are Cauleens' hand-drawn book covers of her recommended reads such as *Women, Race & Class* (1981) by Angela Davis and *Black Skins White Masks* (1952) by Frantz Fanon. Artist duo Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue explores the fluidity of identity through feminist queer study. The artists transform their theoretical reference into an art piece. For their installation, they produce enlarged papier-mâché versions of book covers of Monique Wittig's *The Straight Mind* (1992) and José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009). For the creatives, theory and philosophy are their strength and source to navigate life in a world that has a different set of rules. In Nelson's *The Argonauts*, names of philosophers sit side by side to her love story with Harry Dodge. Nelson calls them "the many-gendered mothers of my heart" that nourish and guide her throughout her journey.[45]

The display of citation is performative and a key feature in an auto-theoretical practice. It highlights a sense of consolidation of a community - feminist, queer and minority communities in the case of auto-theory. In the works exemplified above the artists' political and philosophical views are emphasised through their cited theories for situating their studies of complex questions regarding identity and equality.

[45] Hilton Als, 'Immediate Family: Maggie Nelson's life in words', *The New Yorker*, 18 April 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/04/18/maggie-nelsons-many-selves> [accessed 1 Oct 2021]

In my moving image works there is no direct referring to what I footnote in my written thesis. Instead, only the personal stories included in the thesis are present as scripts for the videos or exhibit as fragmented texts sitting between the moving image works. The analytic investigations - the explorations of the artistic expression and language in this written research, pave the way for me to tell my stories and endorse their crucial role in my practice.

I don't categorise this project as strictly auto-theoretical, it also uses art history to locate erasure as a technique and understand my fascination with the act of both erasing and remembering as a dynamic of grieving, and of making representation. There is a tension and a conflict between erasure as an act of generosity of forgetting and forgiving, and as an act of violence, of censure. Memory likewise is filled with love and remembrance, and moments of trauma – of repression, of things said and left unsaid, that continue to resonate. Rather it implements an auto-theoretical approach that allows me to express myself freely and validates my experience.

Although auto-theory inherits a bonding to feminist and queer practices, it is also adopted by other approaches as a methodology. *Detailing Trauma* (2012) by Arianne Zwartjes, where the author explores living meaningfully through and with suffering through individuals' experiences and examinations of physical pain.[46] *The Life of Stuff* (2018) by Susannah Walker and *In the Dark Room* (2005) by Brian Dillon present two personal journeys grieving through investigations of everyday objects and memories.[47] [48] In her moving image installation *Gyres 1-3* (2019), Ellie Ga presents a full wall projection of her video distinctively divided in halves. On the top a hand moving transparent pictures around on a light table, at the bottom is another shot of a light table that seems to be where the artist picks up the pictures from and returns them after shown in the other. The sliding of the photos and occasionally other footage positing next to the top video, are accompanied by the artist's narrative. The photographs of stones, artefacts and remnants correspond with the voiced content that combines the artist's research of gyre, a form of ocean current that gathers debris in the water and pushes them ashore, her encounters with beachcombers and an oceanographer who collect and study those objects, history of migration, rituals of Greek islands, and the artist's personal anecdotes. Through these disconnected stories and recollections Ga composes a poetic meditation on loss and re-engagement. These works from literature to film might not have a direct focus on politics but it is a methodology that assists them to communicate powerfully through vulnerability and a personal lens. Through my use of an auto-theoretical approach I connect my innermost feelings to the images I create while also analysing the work theoretically. I see auto-theory as a catalyst, a permission in my practice that maps out an intellectual and self-reflective journey traveling through significant realisations of the self in relation to a greater scale of human interactions.

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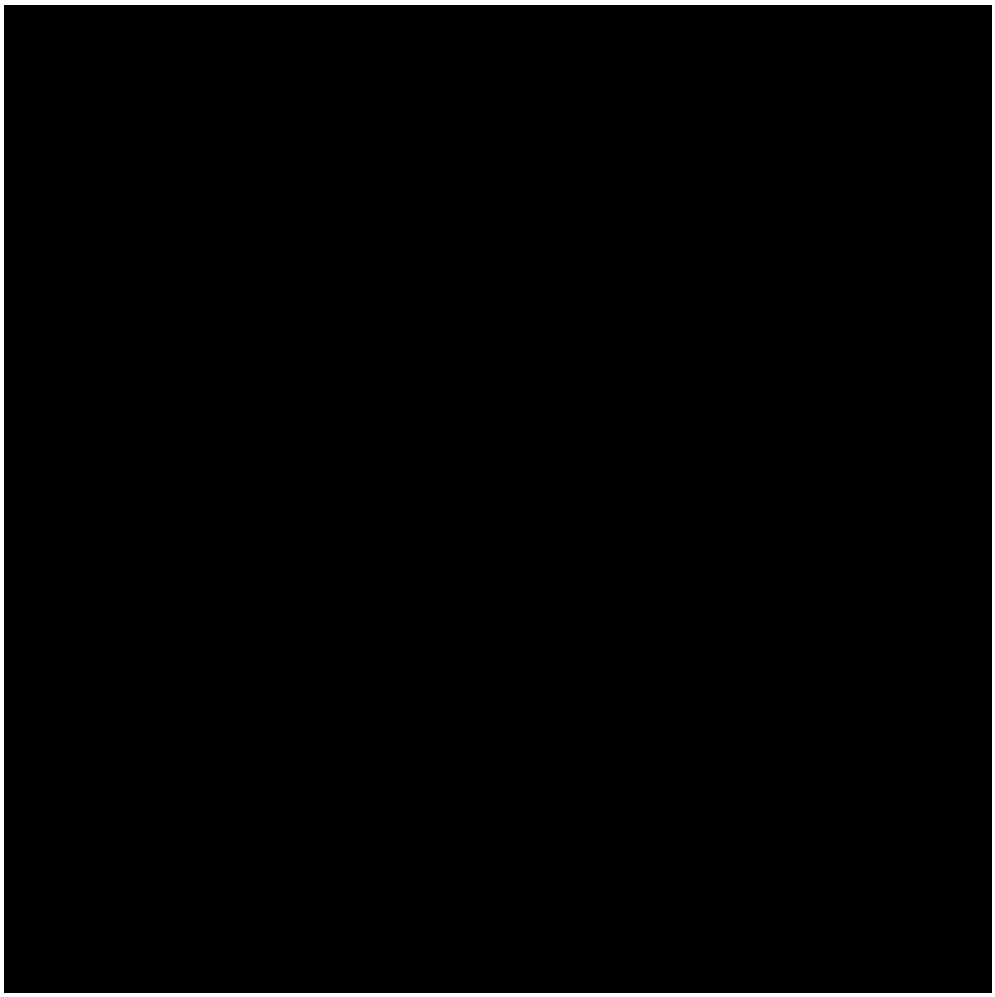
[46] Arianne Zwartjes, *Detailing Trauma* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press: 2012).

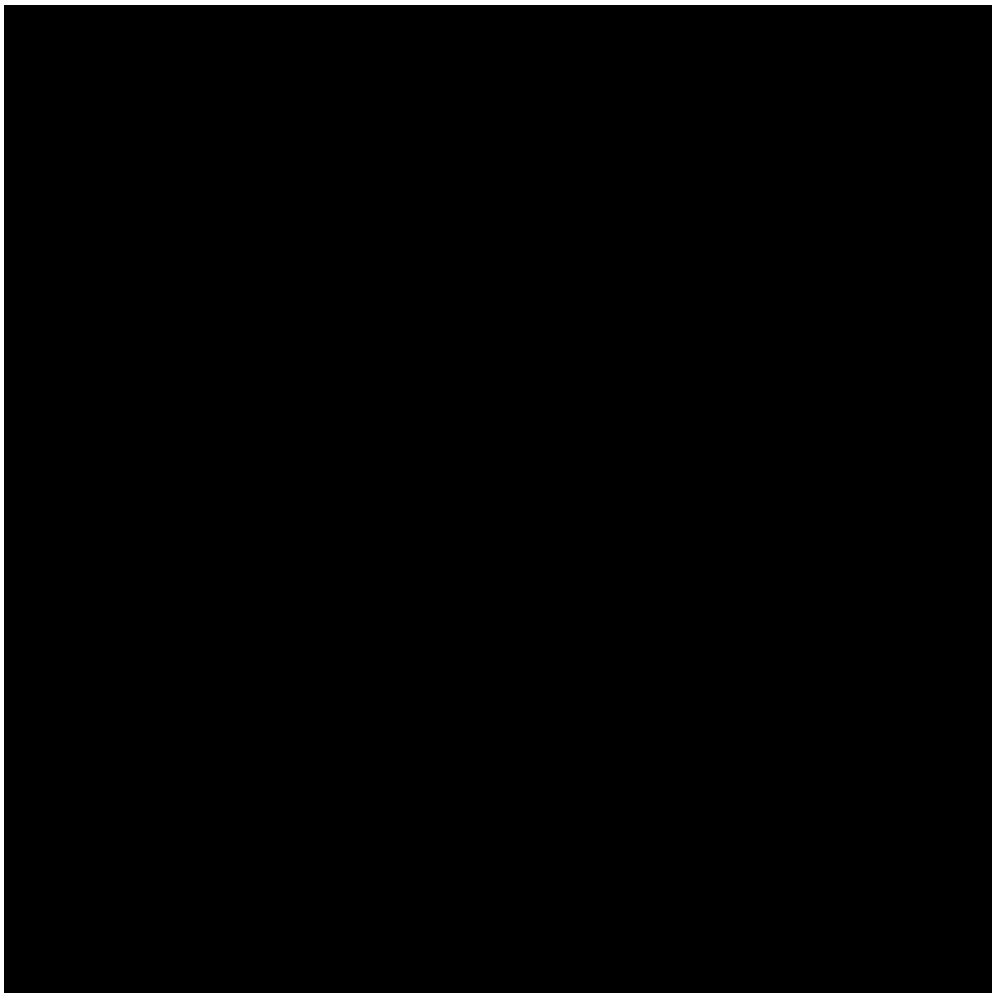
[47] Susannah Walker, *The Life of Stuff* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2018).

[48] Brian Dillon, *In the Dark Room* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2018).

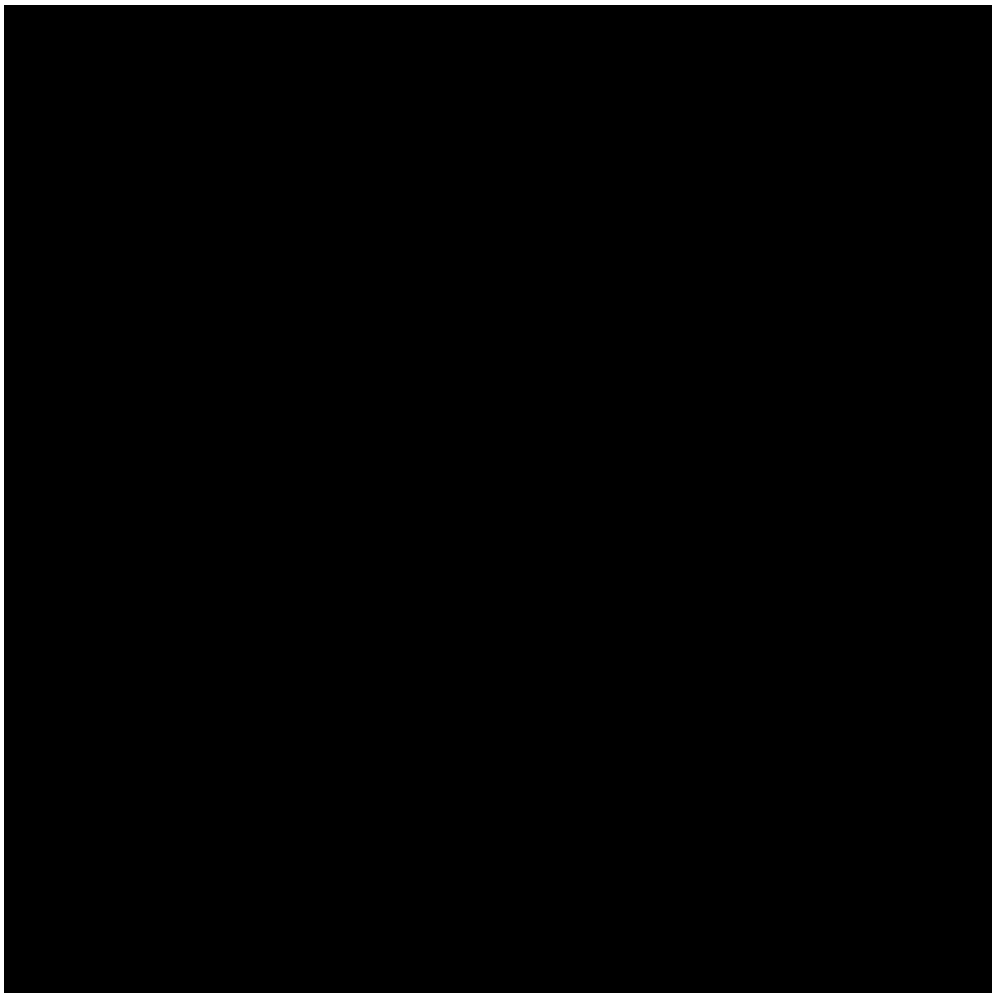
For this research the use of auto-theory begins from the question of how a personal relationship with a visual expression can be articulated verbally within an academic framework. As the blending of exploration of erasure with my personal notes progresses, it expands to the comprehension of the interconnected relations between the art practice, identities, cultures, genders and languages. This research presents an art journey that's nurtured by intuitive and analytical forms of knowledge, heading towards a profound understanding of personal grief.



Cauleen Smith
Human_3.0 Reading List
2015



Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue
I'm Not Myself At All
2015



Ellie Ga
Gyres 1-3
2019

Overview of Chapters

The first chapter ‘Memories’ reflects on the use of everyday objects and living spaces in my moving image works. It begins with an investigation of the formation and retrieval of memory in relation to our interactions with everyday objects and spaces. Reading artworks by Candida Höfer, Rachel Whiteread, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, this chapter focuses on how memories are shaped through our material surroundings, especially when an object or space is deprived of its original purpose, left unused and functionless. It examines how objects that are left behind by loved ones connect to our memories of the deceased. The emptiness of loss manifested in material objects leads to the next chapter.

‘Dreams’ explores the behaviours of erasure as an artistic technique. It investigates how this technique has evolved in art, especially after Sous Rature (Under Erasure) as a philosophical device was introduced by Martin Heidegger and developed by Jacques Derrida.[49] This chapter discovers the various uses and forms of erasure in artworks, from Robert Rauschenberg to Glenn Ligon, illustrating how this artistic device provokes imaginations after its execution, and how this property is utilised in different contexts in relation to time, memory and history.

The final chapter 'Passing' begins with the emphasis on the connection between moving image and memory-recall in its time-based nature by exploring Sophie Calle's and Bill Violas's documentation of the deathbeds of loved ones. It then looks at such works by Ana Teresa Fernández and William Kentridge, examining how erasure is used in moving image practice to portray identity conflicts in complex cultural and political states.

Each of the three main chapters contains several subchapters that illustrate other artists' practices, my personal stories and discussions on language in art. At the end of these chapters, I present a series of moving image works that portrays the included anecdotes.

[49] Derrida, J., *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. xiv.

memories

Childhood Home

I tried to recall my memory of Dad, the memory of him being healthy and perhaps more 'normal', like the time he talked when there were no medical treatments messing up his mind, that kind of normal. I found it difficult to retrieve those memories since he had been poorly about a dozen years. His image has been replaced by his illness. I enjoyed listening to Mum and my sister tell his story, and the funny memories we had with him, as I wouldn't have been able to recall those precious times by myself.

To recover the early memories of him means to pick up fragments from my childhood, when he was very active and taking pleasure in his hobbies and career. But the memory of my childhood, even until the first year of my high school when he collapsed, are disconnected, with bits hidden deep somewhere in my mind. I know I chose to forget most of it, not because they are particularly dreadful, and I certainly remember some of the big events, but simply because it's tough to be a kid and a teenager who constantly felt insecure and embarrassed about what she did or said. I pretended that I didn't remember anything when someone asked for the first time, or the second time, and in the end, it became my truth. I am curious about what others' childhood memories look like. Are theirs as blurry as mine? I am amazed by people who remember the very early days of their childhoods, as well as by how easy it had been to forget what was once around me.

I remember around the age of five or six, it was a glorious year of me proudly claiming my age to every adult around me. Anything else that happened around that time, I probably can't recognise if it was earlier or later than that year. In an attempt to retrieve those discarded moments of my childhood, I searched for methods that might help. I looked up the TV programmes, films and music my family and I used to enjoy. The children's programme called *Popcorns* that my sister and I used to love was first broadcast a year before I was born and continued until I was five. Few minutes before the programme was on, my sister and I would dance in front of the clock and count down. I can still hum the rhythm of a cassette of a very popular song that Mum bought in 1993. Two of Dad's favourite movies — *The Labyrinth* (1986) and *God Must Be Crazy* (1980) were released before I was born; this doesn't help me mark the year of the memory, but I still remember *The Labyrinth* was too scary for the little me. I didn't even realise David Bowie was in my childhood until recently.

I then figured out a way that to some extent it's easier, or perhaps more structural, to recollect and reframe my childhood memory as a more complete vision. Inspired by 'the method of loci', I pinpointed a corner, a piece of furniture, or a room in the flat where I grew up until we moved out when I was ten, and I tried to think of something that has taken place around that spot.

I visualised the floor map of my childhood home. I imagined walking through the main door of the flat into the porch which connected the flower balcony and the lounge. A large shoe storage in the corner facing the balcony. There was a stack of A3 white papers inside the cabinet. The colour gradually turned cream-yellow with time. I remember the smell of wood combining with a blow of damp air when I

opened its door. I used to spend all day drawing on them as when I was little I didn't go to a nursery or preschool like my sister had. I entertained myself with drawing when I was with Mum, or with a group of her friends, while Dad and my sister were at work and school. Turn left and slide open a pair of screen doors to the lounge, where we had a set of wooden and bamboo sofas and a wall of bookshelves. I jumped around them and imagined that the ceiling-high bookshelves were big mansions for my miniature glass animal figurines. I remember that we bought those small colourful gadgets in the night market. I loved going to the night markets with my family.

Between one of the armchairs and the dining area sat Dad's desk where he did his botanical research and wrote his books. His desk looked so tiny in my memory as it was always piled with heavy books, papers and boxes of films. They were all covered with the smell of cigarettes. Dad looked at his slides of plants, holding them up between the ceiling lights and his glasses. He showed me those photographs he took when occasionally there were also human figures. Behind his desk was our wide and heavy round dining table. Not long ago I saw the table again, and it turned out it wasn't as gigantic as I remembered. I must have compared its volume to my child-sized body, which was perfectly covered by the table's shadow when I hid underneath it.

The Method of Loci

In his *De Oratore* Cicero tells a story of the Roman poet Simonides who was the only survivor of a building collapse and was able to identify the bodies of the dead by recalling the location where each guest was around the table.[50] This occurrence led the poet to develop a mnemonic technique that utilises links between locations and images to generate strong memories.

To use this method, one firstly needs a space in their mind to store information they desire to remember. They then visualise a logical route that connects each rooms and location. This space can be a familiar place like one's home. For instance, from the front door to the hallway, lounge, dining room, kitchen, going up the stairs, enter the main bedroom, a guest room, home office and bathroom, all the way to the back of the house. Every corner in each room and all of the furniture can serve as a location.

The information would be designated as individual representative symbols placed at different locations. When one recalls the information, they imagine walking through the place to pick up those stored items. These symbols can be designed as illogical images to strengthen their impressions in one's mind. For example, if one desires to remember a long shopping list, milk could be an image of a cow eating grass in their front yard. When they enter the lounge, a fan by the sofa becomes a windmill producing flour, which serves as a reminder of getting a loaf of bread. This allocation of symbols grows further as items increase.

This technique is known as the method of loci and was prevalently utilised by orators of Ancient Greece and Rome as part of the training to be able to remember their speeches and to also refer to arguments by others. It retained its popularity until the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

One of the famous applications of the method of loci is Giulio Camillo's *The Theatre of Memory*. This life-time project is the Renaissance polymath's ideal architectural structure that embodied all human knowledge in the world. Unlike the method of loci, which inserts information into an existing place, Camillo's theatre is an architectural structure that is specifically designed to materialise human memory and collective knowledge. Although he wasn't able to find a patron to complete the project into a physical building, Camillo realised it with a wooden model.[51] In his design, Camillo's viewer stands in the centre of a Vitruvian amphitheatre. The theatre is divided into seven cloves and is structured on seven levels of steps defining forty-nine areas, each one associated with a symbolic figure that contains a different sphere of knowledge.

This technique of reinforcement of spacial images continues to assist practitioners to memorise various information in the present day. Lynne Kelly, the mnemonic and orality researcher, uses her house and

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[50] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. by E. W. Sutton (London: William Heinemann LTD; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 465.

[51] Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London; New York: Routledge, 1966), p.131.

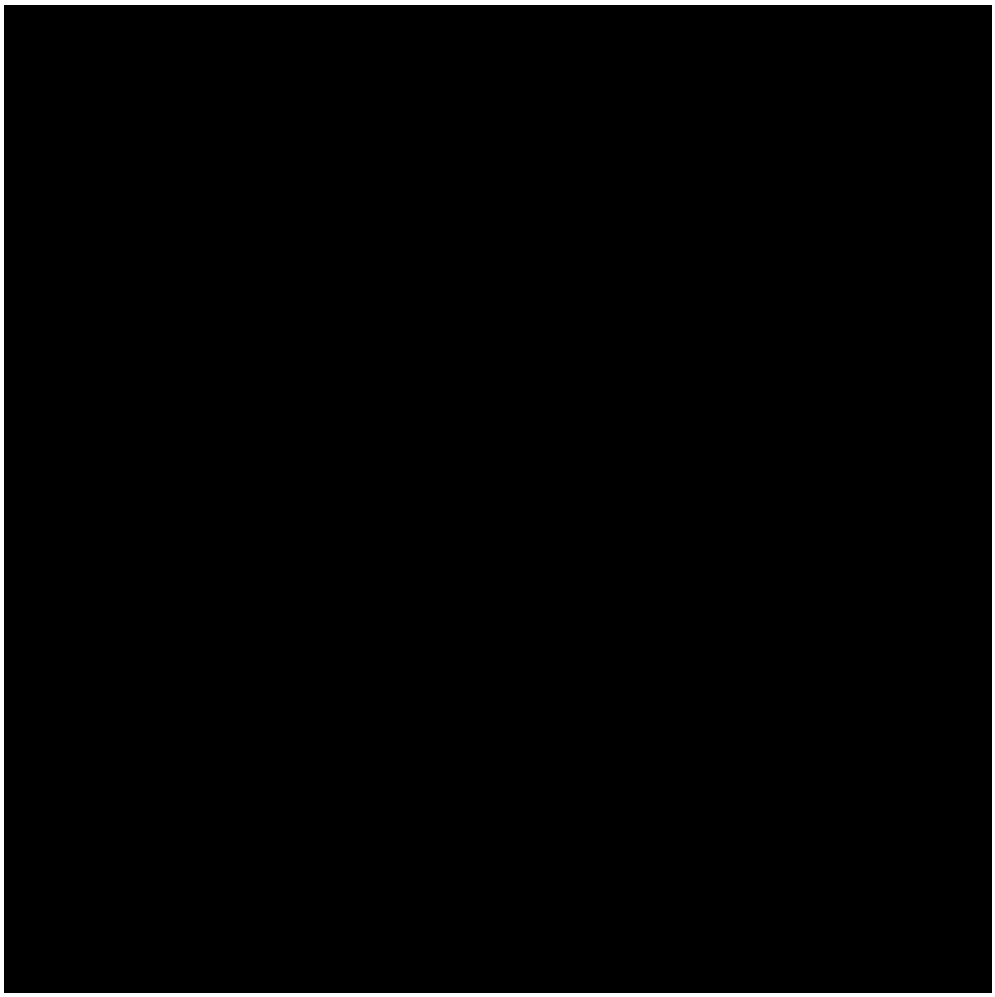
garden to mark the one hundred and ninty-eight countries and fifty-three independencies in the world.[52] The World Memory Champion of 2016, Alex Mullen, used this method to remember the correct order of a deck of cards in 21.5 seconds.[53] [54]

While the method of loci is created to help memorise information for future use, my own application of the method is intended to reclaim moments buried deep down somewhere. Compared to the information that is needed to reference time to come, the problem with memories of events that happened before now is their invisibility and intangibility. No matter how much evidence of the past there is in observable forms, such as photographs or souvenirs, the past second has long gone and has been replaced by this present time.

[52] Lynne Kelly, *The Memory Code : Unlocking the Secrets of the Lives of the Ancients and the Power of the Human Mind*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2017), p.57.

[53] Jordyn Taylor, 'The Person With the World's Best Memory Is a Millennial From the US', in *Mic*, 2016 <https://www.mic.com/articles/138105/meet-the-millennial-with-the-world-s-best-memory. [accessed 6 April 2021]

[54] Alex Mullen in *World Memory Statistics* <http://www.world-memory-statistics.co.uk/competitor.php?id=2321> [accessed 6 April 2021]



Giulio Camillo
The Theatre of Memory
1519-1544

A Walk

When I was recollecting the floor plan of my childhood home, it reminded me of an artwork in dOCUMENTA(13) — *The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* (2012) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller. To experience the video, an audience is given a portable media player and a set of headphones. They would walk around the railway station Kulturbahnhof (Kassel, Germany) tracking the route presented on the screen: a previously filmed walking journey in the same location.

I picked up the device from the reception room in the railway station. Following Cardiff's voice, I was physically roaming the scenes that were shown in the video. On this walking tour, the artist observed passengers and objects in the train station. She shared her personal memories that the surrounding had reminded her of. Along with the view of the station presented on the screen there were arranged insertions of the artist's autobiographical narration, images, short clips of videos, staged performances, music and sounds. As the video proceeded, it built up a storyline composed of fictional narratives and historic references, recounting a memory about the train station during WWII.

A couple of minutes into this walk the video introduced the city's history of the Holocaust with Horst Hoheisel's installation work, *Denk-Stein-Sammlung* (*translated in English as *Memorial Stone Archive*) (1993). I stopped before a large transparent case, in which were boxes of stones wrapped with papers. Cardiff told that Hoheisel invited school children to write the stories about the Jewish citizens of Kassel, who were shipped from this station to the camp. Cardiff instructed to leave Hoheisel's work and to find platform 13, where the train took away the victims. Through the entrance next to the installation, I arrived at the outdoor departure area. After a couple of brief stops, the video continued to lead the way across the platforms to platform number 13.

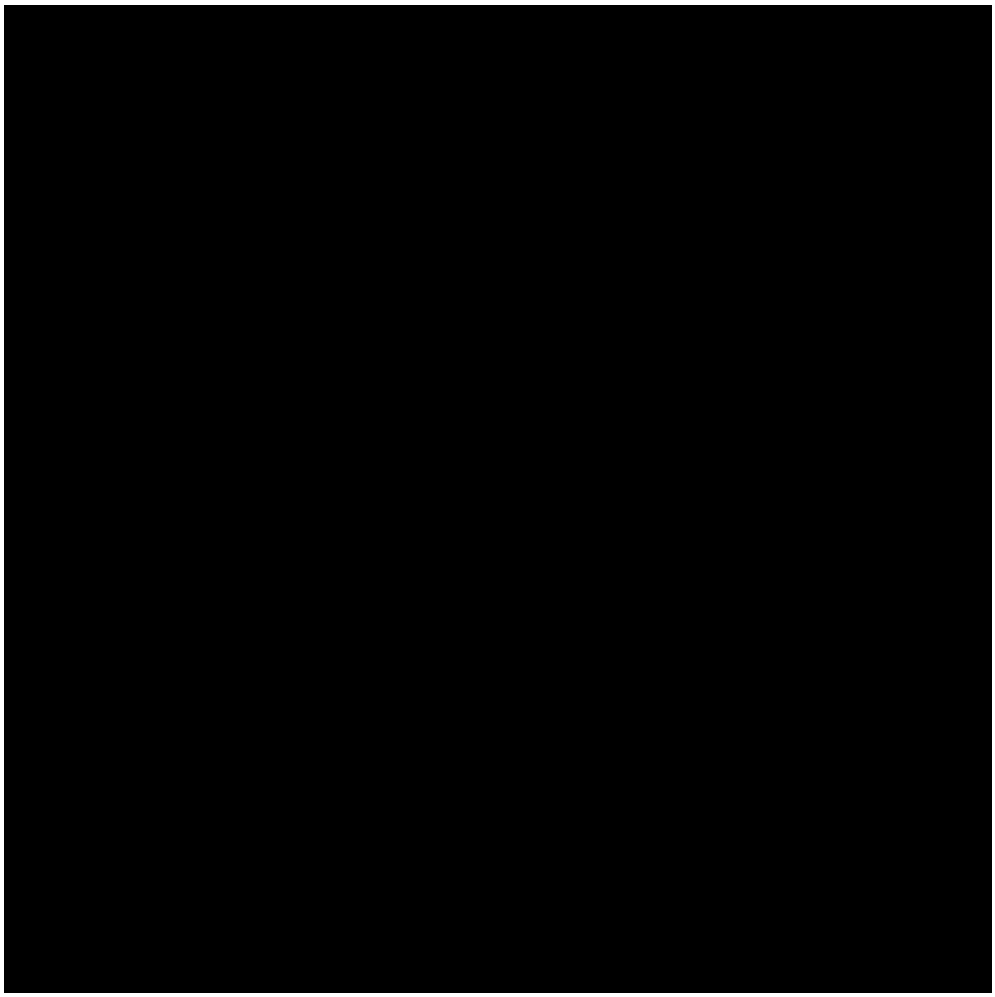
I kept walking listening to Cardiff's voice. I drew my focus back and forth between the screen and the scene in front of me. During this constant rotation of the two very similar images, I felt as though I was experiencing double vision. The image appeared and then was replaced by another after less than a second. This constant succession of snapshots confused my perception of reality and made me forget which image was the edited video and which one was not.

On this tour Cardiff talked about what memories were like to her. She compared them to a suitcase that was dragged behind each of us; she described unwanted memories as snowballs that could be thrown away; she also expressed that memories and dreams existed in the same world and they would become real in the future. The sounds of the surroundings, which were even more indistinguishable, sneaked past my headphones, blending into Cardiff's narrations.

Walking down the platforms, this feeling of being trapped between illusions and the real world was aggravated as I bumped into a couple hugging and kissing each other, both on the screen and in reality. I had seen other activities like passengers passing by pulling their luggage that simultaneously

happened in both views. Given the place I was in, which served the purpose of transportation, I didn't give much attention to those coincidences. But the encounter with the kissing couple, occurring concurrently in the two settings wasn't quite in my expectation.

Without showing my surprise, I walked past them within a few seconds. But that exact moment when my physical surroundings synced with the video had frozen in my mind. In that glimpse of time, the smells, the sounds, the lights of the space and the wind on my skin suddenly became so vivid to me. I felt I visited a parallel universe while my senses were firmly held by the environment I was in. I existed in two different dimensions at the same time.



Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller
Alter Bahnhof Video Walk
2012

Afternoons

The human hippocampus belongs to the limbic system and dominates the memory consolidation that is associated with the formation of memories, including short-term memory, long-term memory, and in spatial memory that enables navigation. In the study conducted by Aidan Horner (UCL Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience) in 2015, the neuroscientists provided evidence for a pattern completion process in the human hippocampus, which showed how the human mind recollects different aspects of an event when recalling a singular aspect of the memory via this small part in the human brain.[55] For example, when remembering a party we attended, we also remember the people we met, the music that was playing, the smells in the air, and the rooms we were in.

The experience of the event in our mind is a composition of distinct senses that are represented in different regions of the brain. The researchers showed that the hippocampus correlates different types of information with each other. Once a part of the memory is recalled, it also retrieves the other senses associated with the event and reveals a holistic picture that allows us to re-immerse ourselves in the experience.

When I recalled the walk in Kassel, especially that encounter on the platform, I had this image in my mind, that I slid past the lovers and their shadows disappeared from my left. I could feel the air brushing across my cheeks and the ground pushing against my soles as I took each step. But I also had other images of that day, like the room where I collected the device from a staff member, or when I returned from the platforms, I heard footsteps echoing in the station hall. I also had the images of my friend who was walking ahead of me. My walk in Kassel combined the reality I experienced physically, a partly-staged reality on the screen and an obscure picture between these two recollections. Although I couldn't remember every minute of this half hour walk, all the senses from both outside and inside the media player, perhaps even of the whole trip in Kassel, merged together and became a different picture that was neither the past moment nor the presented video.

When I visualised the floor plan of my childhood home in my mind, I imagined walking into different rooms and placing each piece of furniture back to where they used to be. I recalled my memories that were made in each corner of the place, to help the process. Eventually, with the furniture settling in, this room connects to the next, completing a home. Although there were discrete parts which I couldn't retrieve, such as the wall behind the TV stand. These parts blurred away the edge of their surroundings, like a hazy floating cloud.

The memory of this architectural space is not the recall of an event, rather, it's a compact collection of time. Some days I jumped around the sofas, some days I laid out my dolls on the floor, and some days I

[55] Aidan J. Horner, James A. Bisby, Daniel Bush, Wen-Jing Lin & Neil Burgess, "Evidence for holistic episodic recollection via hippocampal pattern completion", *Nature Communications*, 6, 7462 (2015) <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms8462> [accessed 6 April 2021]

waited for my family to find me when I hid underneath the dining table. In my mind, I saw daylight scattering in through the window and the front part of the lounge brightening. I felt the temperature and the humidity change between rooms. It wasn't a specific day, it was an overlap of many quiet afternoons. It was me alone and the monologue in my head.

I walked back to the porch, looking inside this fractional space. I accepted the bits I missed and segments that I exaggerated. Like that double vision in the Kassel walk, my childhood home was between factual and fictional, like a dream.

Dream / Memory / Film

In his essay *Don't worry, it's only a movie*, Walter Murch, the film editor of such films as *The Godfather Part III* (1990) and *The English Patient* (1996), analyses how the physical machinery of our body - blinking - works as cuts in a film.[56]

At the beginning of the essay he explains the reason why we can easily adapt and engage with films even though the frequent changes of scenes and angles between each cut is very different from real life, where our perspective remains linear and continuous. Murch points out that this seemingly unnatural view is very similar to our dreams. In dreams, we tend to ignore the illogical sequence of settings so the appreciation of a film is actually not far off from our everyday experience.

On top of this likeness between films and dreams, Murch shares his discovery of the connection between blinks and film editing that further facilitates our immersion in the cinematic world. When he worked on *The Conversation* (1974), Murch noticed that the actor Gene Hackman would blink very close to the point where Murch had decided to cut. Soon he found that even though the human body can move smoothly from one point to another, such as turning our heads from left to right to see the other side of a room, our eyes blink during this shift between two views.

The blink interrupts the visual continuity of our perceptions as our focus changes. Murch suggests that the blink indicates a movement in our stream of thought. It exhibits the flow and abruption of our thinking. He describes how our thoughts activate and alter the rate of blinking by giving opposite examples of two types of anger, which either make a person blink every second or not blink at all. Such a difference depends on how thoughts come in and are shifted by the emotions in a person's mind. If one's anger focuses on one single thought their gaze freezes while if one's battered by several thoughts and emotions they blink more frequently. Murch's theory unravels how and why this autopilot movement of our eyelids enables films to be experienced as if very close to our everyday experience.

After reading this essay, I found some film editing tutorials on YouTube experimenting with the theory. It feels absurd that I even point out such an obvious thing, but it was one of those occasions when I realised that most films were human-focused. Especially in this practice, film editors adjusted and modified their cuts by observing the blinks of the characters. I was so familiar with staring at my human-free images that I forgot it's actually rarer to have a film completely without human appearances or any other living creatures.

Cuts that resemble the machinery of blinks don't take place in my images. The continuity of my sequence of frames doesn't depend on the blinks of a human character to define the entering and exiting of an idea.

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[56] Walter Murch, 'Don't worry, it's only a movie' in *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing* (Los Angeles, California: Silman-James Press, 2001), pp. 57-63.

James Cutting calculates the average shot length in today's films using British film scholar Barry Salt's database.[57] Contrasting to Cutting's result of 2.5 seconds per shot in 2010's films, most of my videos are made of one single long take. Perhaps the blinks that identify streams of thought occur more in the process of erasure and in the audience who watch my works. The gaze to catch the minor differences between each frame. A suspensive focus enlarges the tensions presented through those quivering strokes of erasures, prolonging the perception of one minute.

[57] Greg Miller, 'Data From a Century of Cinema Reveals How Movies Have Evolved', in *Wired* <https://www.wired.com/2014/09/cinema-is-evolving/> [accessed 5 April 2021]

Inverted Birth

I visited Copenhagen Contemporary in a warm summer in 2017. Next to the art gallery was a busy food market and outdoor space crowded with people enjoying beers and sunbathing. A sudden tranquil and cool breeze arrived as I entered the gallery. This spacious building with a high ceiling echoed my footsteps as I walked through each exhibition room. I'm not sure if I remember it correctly. It might have been the second visit to the gallery in a month, just to catch Bill Viola's newly opened exhibition before leaving the city.

The only work shown in the exhibition was the artist's *Inverted Birth* (2014). This large scale installation is a more than five-metre high projection of a moving image work, showing a half-naked man in a pair of trousers, standing in the centre of the frame covered in fluid. In this slow and reverse motion film, the water rises from the ground to the roof. The man stands still and firm, making minor gestures such as moving his head and arms to adapt to the forces of currents. The colour of fluids changes from black, red, white, transparent and, eventually, turns into mist, symbolising the essence of human life: earth, blood, milk, water and air. According to the exhibition catalogue, these elements signify life, death, birth and rebirth.[58] In regards to this cycle presented through his video installation, Viola quotes from Zhuang Tsu (370-287 BC), "Birth is not a beginning, death is not an end."[59]

Through his moving image practice, Viola has examined time with each condensed frame amplifying the coming and passing of each moment. The time-based quality of the media has provided ways of exploring the experience of time.

Included in his book, in *Statement 1989* Bill Viola writes:

> I have come to realise that the most important place where my work exists is not in the museum gallery, or in the screening room, or on television, and not even on the video screen itself, but in the mind of the viewer who has seen it. In fact, it is only there that it can exist. [...] Yet, during its normal presentation, viewers can only physically experience video one frame at a time. One can never witness the whole at once; by necessity, it exists only as a function of individual memory. This paradox gives video its living dynamic nature as part of the stream of human consciousness.[60]

In Viola's notion, material encounters ultimately transform into an impalpable form in the conscious mind where experiences actually take place. The format of how it is stored and replayed is also not the same as when it's in the physical world.

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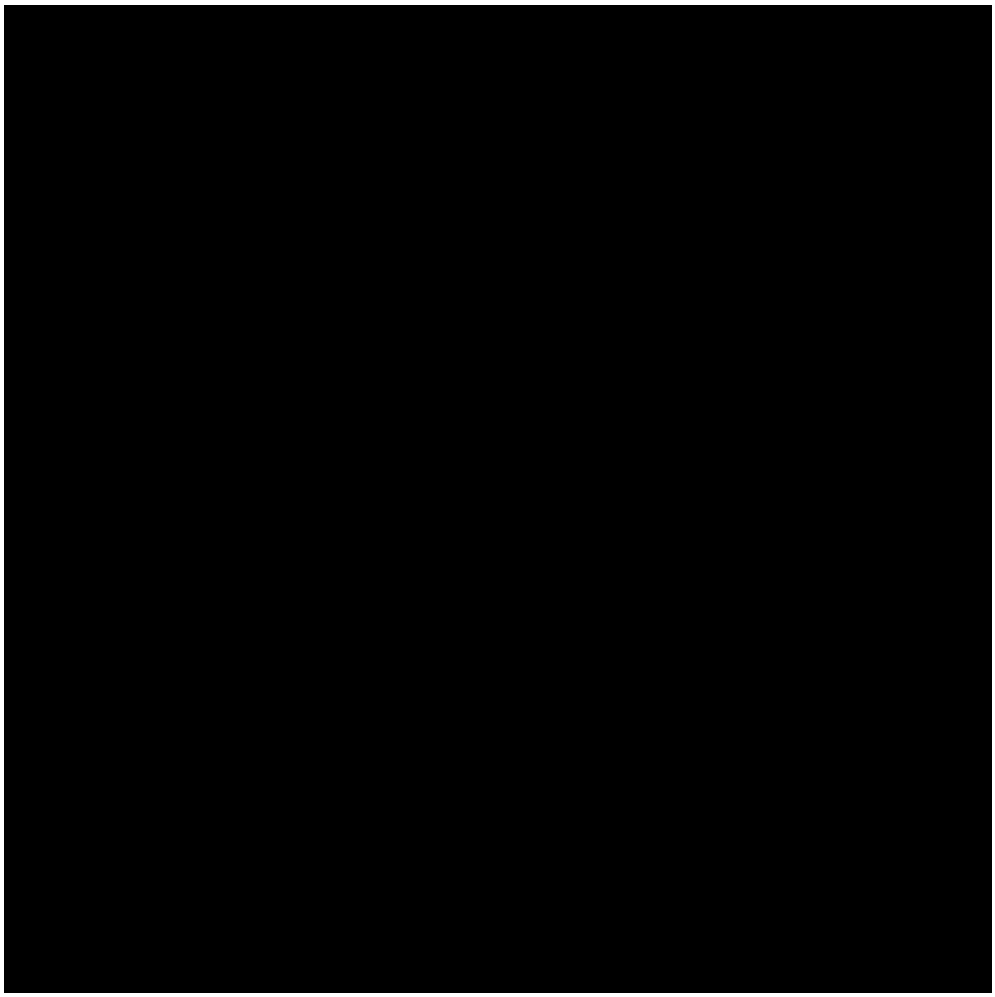
[58] 'Bill Viola: Inverted Birth' (exhibition catalogue) Copenhagen Contemporaries (Copenhagen: 2017).

[59] Ibid.

[60] Bill Viola, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House: Writings 1973-1994* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p.173.

His words caused me to rethink my previous understanding of memory as something linear. Because memories are made along the timeline, like recording on film, where the light peeks through the lens creating images frame by frame, memories must be constructed and recalled following similar chronological principles. It's a collection of senses and emotions as mentioned previously in Horner's research. That's why there can be different interpretations towards the same event. Memory is not a finely duplicated reality that exists in the mind but a compressed experience full of flaws, imaginations, judgements and certain hopes. It can be how one wants it to be.

I imagine moments experienced and memories that are being created at this very moment as if developed frame by frame like a film, but every sense is created separately. When one 'plays' a memory, these rolls of film run on top of each other simultaneously. Eventually, it looks like a single picture has been multiply exposed. These films stay in the mind but gradually they also fade away or got mixed up with other boxes of film. A memory can be retrieved again but inevitably with missing pieces. Every gap between those lost parts is a space for imagination.



Bill Viola
Inverted Birth
2014

A Void

At the beginning of my Master's study, I focused on habits that were formed by everyday interactions with things, discovering how a body learnt to adapt to an object even when it was made to serve the human. I discussed that through repetitive operations. The process of forming correct and appropriate techniques of using everyday utensils that were accepted by a society was also a form of complying with power. My interest in an ordinary object's ability to impact on human life has grown since. After my explorations on how people held chopsticks and pens, doors became the centre in my images.

Made during my studies, *Pull/Push* (2016) is a six minute moving image work, recording the journey from my flat to the Royal College of Art. With a GoPro attached to each door I walked through from the kitchen door to my room, to the main door of the flat, the gates in Battersea Park, the entrance of the sculpture building and then into the library. The views spin with the movements of the doors' axis, showing different perspectives on my daily life from the viewpoint of an everyday object. I replicated this way of filming during an artist's residency in Copenhagen in 2017. The second video of *Pull/Push* documents the accommodation where I stayed and the studio building I worked in, with the lens on each door.

When editing the videos I matched the order of scenes to the regular routes of how I moved between those spaces on a daily basis. The first video started with the view of a shimmering blue light in the dark and the sound of a boiling kettle. When the camera moves with the motion of the door the illuminations from other buildings can be seen in the dim early morning light through the kitchen window. Following this, the view from my room's door showing a display of my belongings on top of a chest of drawers, then my commute presented through doors in the flat complex and into Battersea Park, and eventually different scenes in the college. This video illustrates my morning routine back then, where I used to start a day with a cup of coffee and get ready for school.

The second work of *Pull/Push* follows this rule by arranging the footage in an orderly sequence of my daily routine. From the doors in my accommodation to the ones in the building of Fabrinkken for Kunst og Design, and finally the views in the night when I returned from the studio space.

This series reveals my living states through my surroundings and set within specific time-frames. The views from personal and public spaces to private institutions show changes in cultural environments, economic circumstances, and habits. Without any appearance of human figures, the moving image works are composed of combinations of different objects, nature, surrounding sounds and the most recognisable noises of doors moving and clashing on to the door frames.

Pull/Push presents a sense of emptiness but this void is not of the scarcity of things but the absence of human beings. In the anthropocentric world, objects and spaces are only recognised by their purposes. A lounge, a cinema, a dark room, or a walk-in closet contains human experiences formed of physical

and emotional interactions with various objects that were made to serve a certain duty. In this series, the compact traces of human activities are alluded to by artefacts, but the lack of interactions and the stillness of those everyday objects establishes a form of erasure that emphasises the missing participation of their users. This emptiness is easily described as ghostly, even with the abundance of objects in the scenes.

Known for her skillful and diligent documentation of public spaces, German artist Candida Höfer photographs magnificent palaces, theatres, libraries and museums that are associated with cultural and historical memory. Without human attendance, these spaces are deprived of their original services, turning into an enormous null object.

On the exclusion of people in her photographs, Höfer states:

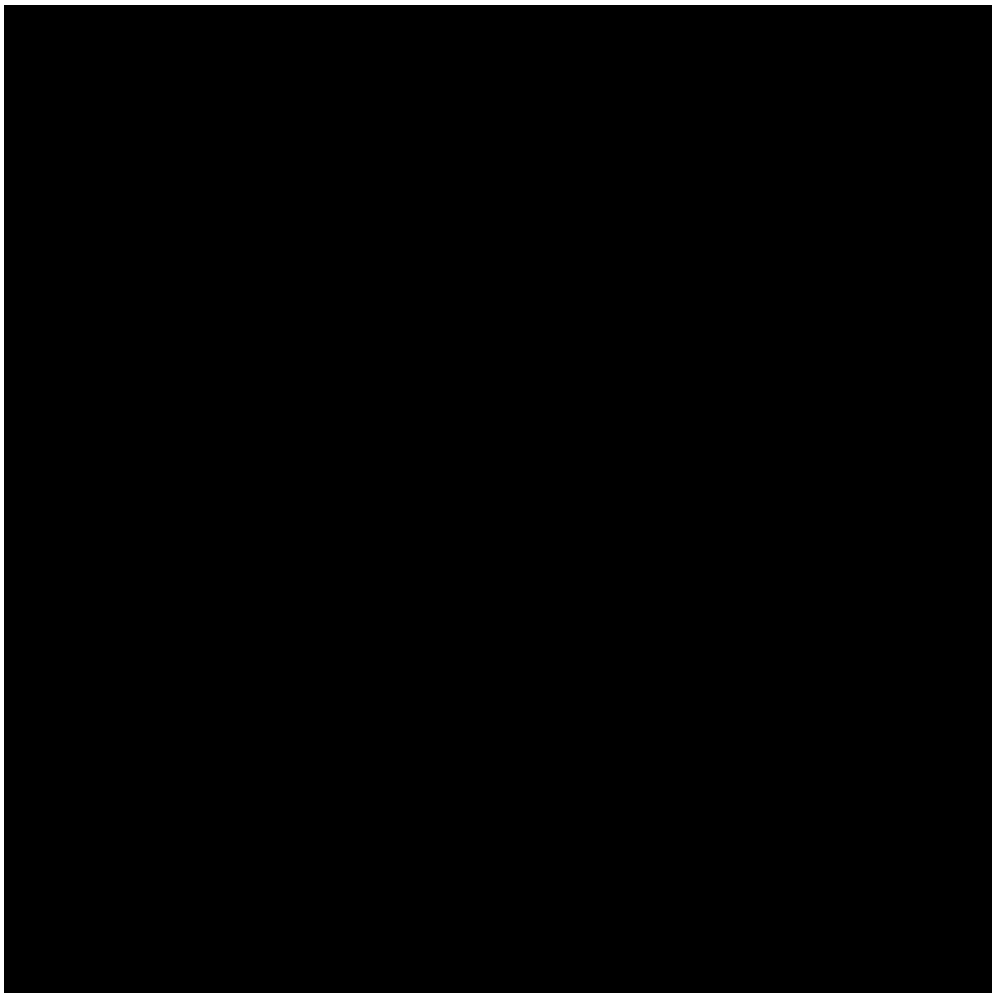
> After some time, it became apparent to me that what people do in these spaces – and what these spaces do to them – is clearer when no one is present, just as an absent guest is often the subject of a conversation.[61]

I continued to use everyday objects as the centre of my moving image work as a way to depict a living condition, but I started to erase their appearances in the videos after my father's passing.

[61] Sarah Phillips, 'Candida Höfer's best photograph – an 18th-century theatre in Mantua', *The Guardian*, 2 February 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/feb/06/candida-hofer-best-photograph> [accessed 23 Nov 2020]

Aki PaoChen Chiu
Pull/Push
2016

Aki PaoChen Chiu
Pull/Push CPH
2017



Candida Höfer
Trinity College Library Dublin
2004

Meanings

I arrived in London at the beginning of autumn before my very first term of Master's study began. That wasn't the first time I had come to the city, but still, it didn't mean I wasn't anything more than an alien. However, carrying a new role as a student gave me a different mindset. It wasn't a holiday. Everything I did had to somewhat contribute to my responsibility here, learning and becoming a professional. I believed by doing so that all the questions of how to become an artist would be answered naturally before I finished my study.

Those questions included the one from that drawing class, which had kept haunting me whenever I stood in a gallery space. I fell into the rumination about how we could articulate an artwork with language, about how language could speak for a picture. I would read every word on exhibition brochures and information cards, trying to find the artworks' meanings and reasons for their existence. But I got lost between lines and lost focus, questioning the true intentions of an artwork behind those words, whether they were written by the artists themselves or others.

I reviewed how I had explained my artworks from my university years until recently. I noticed my tendency to remove myself from the descriptions of them by analysing from an objective point of view. I believed that was the way an artwork could be understood universally, by breaking down images into smaller parts and defining each component to form a logical argument. But I still found it difficult to explain why I erased the shape of tall glasses in my moving image works.

Even as a creator, sometimes I felt I couldn't say if what I had written down was the artwork's intention at all. There was a sense of obscurity in the images. I would like it to flow, although I couldn't name what it was. I felt my words walked around that which was unknown and nothing could reach it.

I remember at the beginning of my Master's study, I asked my tutor whether I should continue to expand what I had done in my BA. For me, returning to an art school marked a milestone of coming back to the art world after several years working as a non-artist. I couldn't see myself as one outside of an art institution. This was for the obvious reason that I almost completely stopped creating during that period, but also because I needed an authority to grant me that title. I couldn't imagine beginning a new project without referring to my past works. I was afraid if I started to make something different, it would create a gap in my practice that would look very amateur in the future.

It sounds silly now but it was a genuine question. I still can't be certain if I could sustain this identity as an artist, whether I can look back after years of practicing my profession and say that what I had done at that point only constitutes a very small part of my career.

I struggled to define my practice somehow for the same awkward reason. I was afraid that once I gave it a name, it couldn't be anything else. What if I misinterpreted my own work and subsequently determined my whole practice in the future based on that error? Perhaps I wasn't sure what it was all

along. Perhaps I wasn't honest enough to admit that sometimes it's only an interest of certain visual forms, although sometimes it's more complex when different elements in life decided the direction of a work's development. How would I know?

It seemed like after the spiral of endless self-reflection, it all came back to that drawing class. The stubbornness of defining a visual, which couldn't be fully expressed with words in the first place. I continued to ask whether it was an arbitrary act, or my wishful thinking to claim that my works connect to my experience.

The responsibilities of an artist and an art research student have become more apparent in the past few years. A practice has a background and purpose. It can't stay ambiguous especially in the position I'm holding on to. Articulation is crucial as it determines my contribution to the field. The more I wrote the more I found myself digging into some fundamental questions, back to that spread of drawings, about how an image could be understood verbally.

Lonely death

Kodokushi (孤独死) means lonely death in Japanese. This term is used to describe the phenomenon in Japan of people dying alone and remaining undiscovered for a long period of time. There are 4,000 cases of lonely death every week in Japan.[62] Such a high number is attributed to collective factors, including changes in family structure, difficult economic situations and its fast-ageing population.

Between 1986 to 1991, due to the loose monetary policy and unrealistic optimism regarding the real estate and stock market, asset prices speedily accelerated and inflated in Japan. This economic bubble eventually burst in 1992. The market collapsed and the economy continued to slump for more than a decade. Since the early '90s Japanese white-collar workers have been forced into early retirement, resulting in social isolation from corporate and wider culture. In his *In Japan, Lonely Death in Society's Margins*, journalist Mark McDonald suggests that despite individuals' financial difficulties, the trait of uncomplaining endurance in Japanese culture, where pride discourages people in need from seeking help, contributes to the high number of lonely death cases.[63] The lonely-death clean-up industry grows and specific insurance responding to this situation has been designed for landlords. The insurance covers the cost of cleaning the apartment and compensates for the loss of rent. Some will even pay for a purifying ritual in the apartment once the work is done.

In the documentary *Undercover Asia: Lonely Deaths*, the camera followed the cleaners to their work, where the residents had been found dead in their apartments.[64] Their deaths hadn't been noticed until weeks, even months after. Later when the bodies started to rot, they attracted maggots and flies. In the interviews, the cleaners shared their own experiences of lonely death, which had happened to their relatives, parents or neighbours. A cleaner called Masuda told the camera that one would quit the job in the first couple of days if they didn't see the job as a gesture of helping others. He started the cleaning business fifteen years ago after finding an elderly neighbour, who had been very kind to him, dead in her apartment. The cleaners showed the filming crew the deceased's relics and tried to describe how the deceased's life looked in their imaginations composed of the objects left behind.

One's habits, personality and lifestyle can be deducted by skimming through a person's belongings. I remember growing up that it was very popular on Japanese TV programmes to look into celebrities' fridges, scrutinising what kind of equipment they used, the food they ate, and how they organised their fridges. This seemingly innocent behaviour appeared to be an efficient way to acquire private information about a person's life.

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[62] Norimitsu Onichi, 'A Generation in Japan Faces a Lonely Death', *The New York Times*, 30 Nov 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/world/asia/japan-lonely-deaths-the-end.html> [accessed 23 November 2020]

[63] Mark McDonald, 'In Japan, Lonely Death in Society's Margins', *The New York Times*, 3 Dec 2020 <https://dyinganddeathtalk.com/2017/11/30/in-japan-lonely-deaths-in-societys-margins/> [accessed 23 November 2020]

[64] 'Undercover Asia: Lonely Deaths', Channel News Asia International, 11 January 2017.

I think about how objects could be a medium for others to remember and understand their owner, as well as how inevitable it is to mingle subjective judgements and imagination in the process of such a deduction. In the same way, can I say my memory about an object from a distant experience is very different? How can I guarantee they are not my imagination, given I know sometimes when I was little I confused a dream with reality?

A brief memory

One of the big events I remember vividly though was in 1999, my first year in junior high school. A 7.6-7.7 Mw earthquake occurred at 1:47am on 21st September. The city we lived in was very close to the centre of the earthquake. I woke up to the sounds of furniture knocking against each other, stuff falling and crashing to the ground. It was so dark because the power was off, but the sky outside the window was eerily bright and in shades of flaming red and deep purple. I wasn't sure how to react to the scene in front of me until I heard Dad call my name. It was a very calm voice compared to the surrounding noise and the situation we were in. When I finally managed to leave my bed and shambled towards him I repeated "Dad" in an equally calm voice. My bed was right next to the door, but the shake took me so long to complete those few steps to reach him. In the darkness, he was a faceless shadow at my door, but it was him. According to the official record, the earthquake went on for 102.2 seconds.

Empty Spaces

> No house could be more comprehensively stocked with the detritus of the past than the empty house.
>
> *In the Dark Room*, Brian Dillon[65]

I think moving to a bigger flat was actually a good decision for Dad as he could have his own office even though he didn't like the idea of moving and at the beginning he and Mum fought even more. We moved into our second home when I was ten. Dad sometimes went back to the old flat for a nap during lunch break, as it was closer to where he worked. I am not sure how my parents arranged the place afterwards. I think we rented it out after Dad retired, but it was very inconsistent. Sometimes we drove by, or Mum went to pick something up, but I never entered the building again for more than a decade.

When I revisited my childhood home after that long period of time, the lane where the building was looked so narrow all of a sudden. I remember those afternoons in my childhood: I ran, or rode my bicycle with training wheels up and down the lane with my playmates. It was more than enough to stretch my body for hopscotch. On the contrary, the flat looked much more spacious than I could recall, with echoes vibrating in the empty rooms.

Some of the rooms had been replaced with new flooring when the flat was rented out, but the kitchen and bathrooms retained the tiles of the '80s. Windows and doors, as well, still had the old patterned glass installed. I imagined placing the furniture back into the space in my head, dividing each area and recalling our life here. The images were blurry but I tried to recollect the details: did we have a table cloth on the dining table? Where did we put our telly? Weren't there some stools in the kitchen as well?

I could point out the wall that had the clock which my sister and I danced in front of, the corner where our bookshelf of children's books was located and many other memories. It felt like I was introduced to the very little me through an empty flat that was filled with air.

An odd mixed sense of intimacy and alienness emanated from the memories in that empty space, reminding me of what Dillon describes as "another sort of ache for the past, which has nothing to do with the visible and tangible world and everything to do with the void that abuts it in the most complex ways."[66] The void, which Dillon illustrates, is the space where memories and imaginations reside. The flat was an empty but heavy container. An empty house full of memories maximises the shortest glimpse of a distant moment.

Rachel Whiteread materialises this void by casting rooms — the negativity — of the spaces, such as her installation sculptures, *House* (1993) and *Ghost* (1990). Whiteread granted the emptiness its volume by

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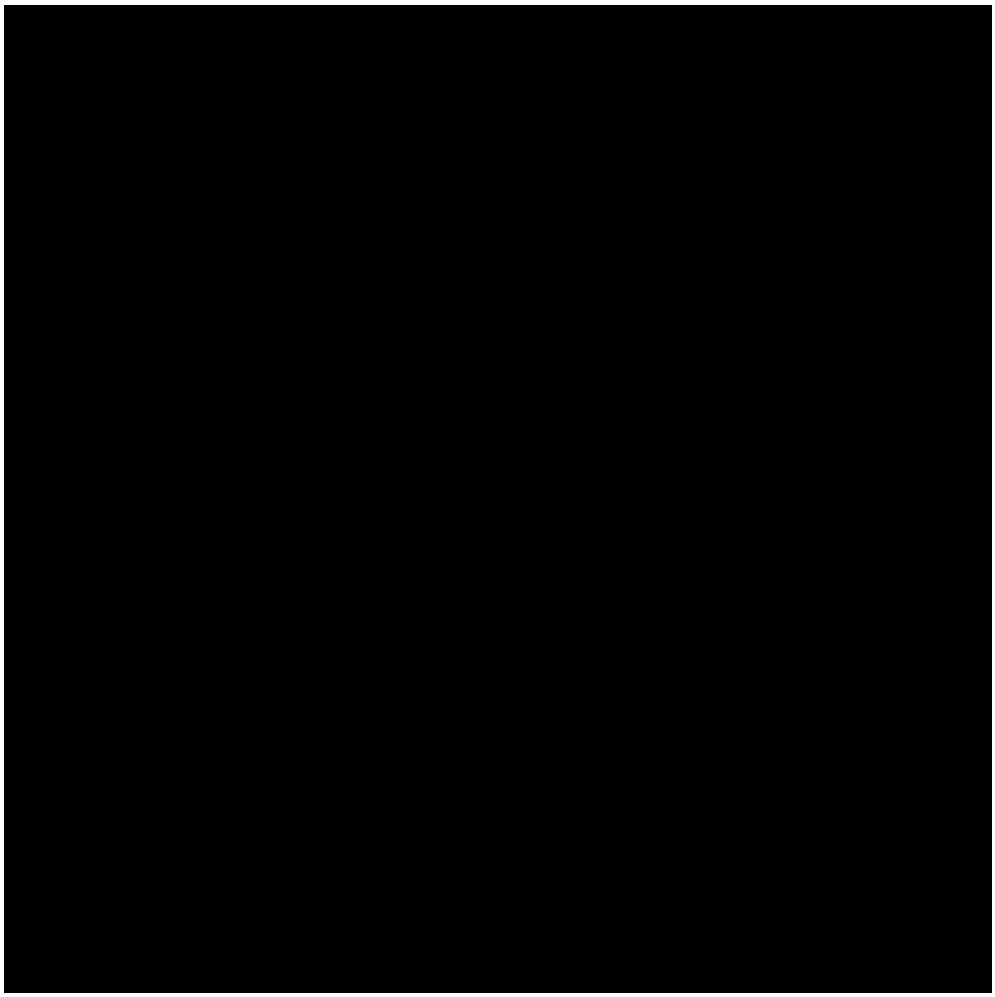
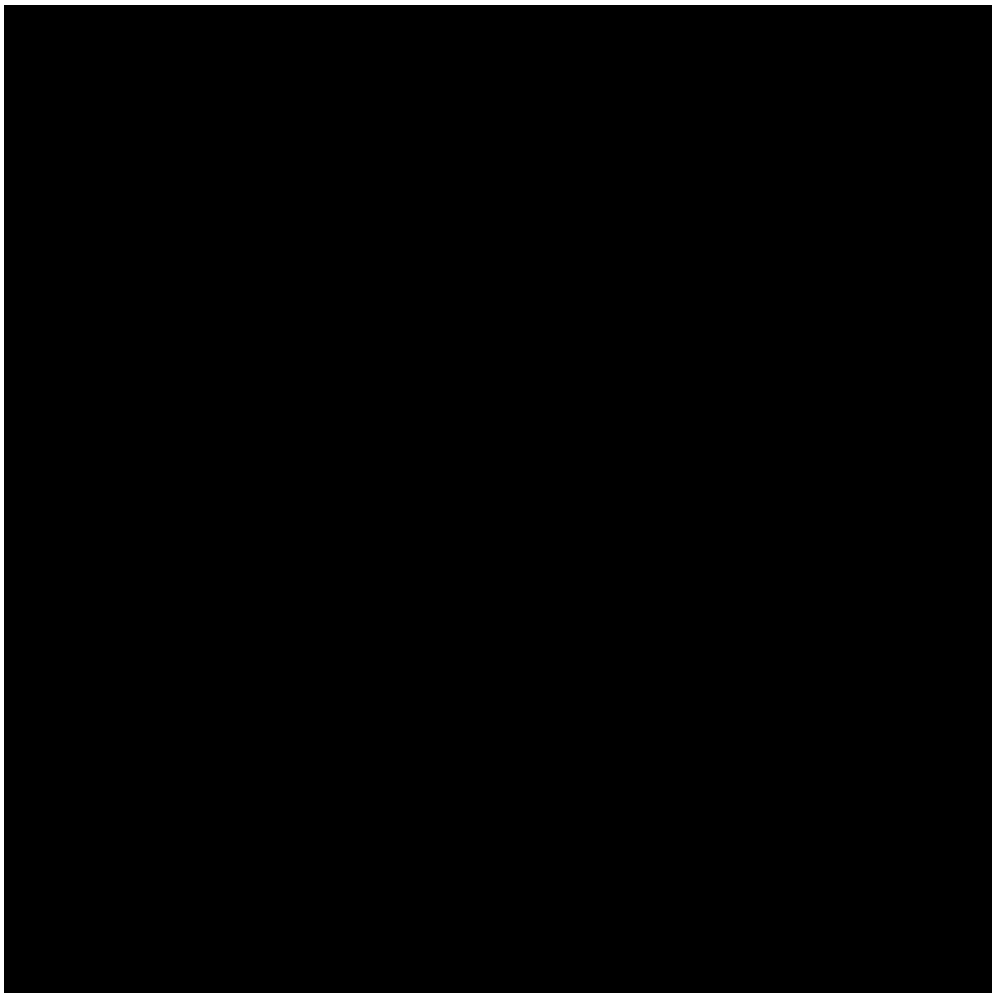
[65] Brian Dillon, *In the Dark Room* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2018), p.40.

[66] Ibid., p. 39.

filling it with heavy concrete or plaster. A space that had been carrying human emotions and memories finally has its weight, visible and tangible. It's not surprising why these inverted rooms are considered a ghost house. The architectural structure, the walls, beams and windows are no longer here, while what has been preserved are the imaginations of a compressed time, where memories and ongoing moments locate and intertwine with each other.



Rachel Whiteread
House
1993



Rachel Whiteread
Ghost
1990

Stuff

I didn't keep many of Dad's belongings. His books have been donated to the medical laboratory he used to have a research collaboration with. I can't think of anything that is more important than his books, including his collections and his own works. Mum gave me his ID card before I came back to London after the funeral. I don't know why, but I found it appropriate and perfect for me. It feels like I own the 'official' version of him, even though I know this piece of plastic represents nothing about him as a person, with his own character, who was devoted to his profession. At least the picture of him is how I want to remember him, rather than the look of his last years.

I keep a tiny drawing of a rabbit by Dad. It looks like an oval-shaped potato with two long ears stuck at one end. It was from when I visited him in the nursing home; he drew a rabbit because I was born in the year of the rabbit. I don't particularly like rabbits really. I said I liked them only because Dad liked them and he referred to me as a bunny. That was when he could still hold pens.

I also have one of his cameras. It is a Nikon FM. I borrowed that camera over ten years ago, when his condition was not too bad and he still lived at home. I don't think I inherited his vintage camera automatically after he passed away. It's not mine. I borrowed it from my dad.

An ID card, a drawing and a camera. I think it's enough.

Botanist

I forgot that I also brought some of Dad's slides of plants back to London after the funeral. I spent a day in the Photography Department scanning each slide and saving it into a digital format. I had tried to use them in my works a couple of times but I wasn't happy with the results.

I opened those digital files and started to work on the images as I developed this research. In the moving image work, the flowers swing with the flickering illuminations outside my window in London.

For *Where I'm Coming From* (WICF), an exhibition concerning the languages spoken by different migrant communities in London, I decided to ask Mum to voiceover my artwork in Taiwanese Hokkien.[67] Although it was clear to me to make a Taiwanese Hokkien version for WICF, I guess at first I was a little reluctant when discussing it with the curators.

I had different feelings for each language I spoke and they had their own characteristics and sentimental values. Taiwanese Hokkien in a way represented family related memories, and its notion here included Taiwanese friends and communities I cherish. These memories reserved a very special place since they had been very distant from me, in terms of space and time.

The passing of a loved one was never a subject in conversations with my friends and family, but I was able to digest these emotions through my practice. I guess I didn't actually anticipate how the works would be perceived by the people I was close with when I developed them.

I assumed that by voicing the work in Taiwanese Hokkien, these private emotions would become even more public and unreserved to a Taiwanese audience. This closeness did reflect some of the feedback I received from them. For this reason, the condition and mindset in the process of making the series for WICF were very different from anytime before. Delivering these sentiments in Taiwanese Hokkien was a form of confession.

Writing on the memories of my father, family and the life events that happened in the two places I consider home, Taiwan and the UK, is a way I can organise the relationship between my thoughts and the images I've created. English not only represents the current environment I live in, writing in a second language has also forced me to write in a very raw and direct voice.

Translating these unrefined texts into Taiwanese local language is a process of rewinding and replaying these memories repeatedly. Moreover, having my mother read these stories was possibly the most direct way I could express myself to her, something which I had previously found greatly challenging.

[67] 'Where I'm Coming From' (exhibition), Guest Project, London: 3 - 29 August 2020.

Voicing in Taiwanese Hokkien certainly deepened the level of intimacy with the stories for me, especially with my mother's narration. It's hard to describe such a feeling, but I was aware that it was a struggle to distance myself when listening to the recordings during the making of the series.

Working with my mother, however, was surprisingly smooth. I was grateful that we intentionally placed our focus solely on technical discussions during the production. There wasn't much going on other than revising the syntax of the sentences and quality of the sounds. It might appear odd, but I think not bringing up the elephant in the room was the way my mother showed her support, and I'm glad she could be part of my memories of my father through this project.

Please click here to see the *Botanist* series.

Aki Pao-Chen Chiu
Botanist
2021

d r e a m s

Ceremonies

In 2016, I started a project in which I engraved grids, five by five millimetres in size, with a sewing needle on a fifty centimetres wide and twenty-five metres long brown wrapping paper roll. In each grid, I drew a small white circle with my non-dominant hand. To make the circles more visible on the brown surface, I tried to press the pencil tip harder than I normally would with my dominant hand. I haven't finished the roll. I'm not sure whether the engraving or the drawing takes more time than the other. If I return to the project again, it will be very similar to a silent retreat. Days spent on engraving lines and drawing circles without talking or even thinking as it would potentially disrupt the work.

The same year I started to erase the outlines of glasses within my moving image works frame by frame. Both projects required patience and time. There was nothing fun in the process. They brought me peace, but at the same time, if I felt distracted thinking about something else, I wouldn't be able to do them either. A certain mindset had to be aligned with them. I sought for other techniques to shorten the time spent on erasing the glasses. I didn't find one. Perhaps I didn't want one because I needed the time meditating on countless images, thinking about nothing.

During my junior high school years, my paternal grandmother passed away. I can't recall the details of the process, but it seemed like there was a long period of preparation before the funeral. Most of the relatives from my father's family were there. We spent days making paper lotuses by folding joss papers. Those sheets of paper were made from bamboo or rice, printed with patterns and adhered with golden or silver foil. In Taoism and Chinese folk religions, they are considered to be the currency of the afterlife. As part of the religious customs, they are burnt to worship gods and ancestors. One night in a field, we walked around the pile of paper lotuses in a circle and charred them into ashes.

Dad's was different. It was a Buddhist ceremony. Mum kept it simple. I flew back from London soon after receiving the news of his death. I didn't know how long it would take when I booked the return tickets, but ten days turned out to be the right length of time. I was with Mum throughout the whole preparation. Although Mum wanted it to be a simple ceremony, we were still busy. I figured that might be the function of those major and trivial tasks: keeping minds occupied and bodies active to ease the pain of the bereavement.

In the same year, I started piling up those white circles and erasing the glasses.

White Paintings

Before erasing the drawing by Willem de Kooning in 1953, Robert Rauschenberg had been erasing his own works. Rauschenberg figured that he could make drawings by erasing the images instead of accumulating lines and colours and, in his own words ,"to bring drawing into the all whites."[68]

The artist's earlier attempt to reverse the production process of art can be seen in his 1951 series *White Paintings*. Visually very different from the artist's later series of paintings and found objects, the collection of uniform panels in the *White Paintings* is reduced to the pure white paint on the modular canvases.

Rauschenberg minimised the marks of paint rollers and brushes on the canvases, making them as pristine as possible, as if without any human interferences in their production. However the idea and effort weren't treated favourably when the *White Paintings* were first shown at the Stable Gallery in 1953, with art critics noting the lack of the artist's presence.[69] As a matter of fact, Rauschenberg didn't consider his involvement as necessary. Apart from the artist himself, the series was collectively executed by his friends, such as Cy Twombly and Pontus Hultén, or studio assistants, including Brice Marden and Darryl Pottorf.

In response to the misjudgement from the art reviews, Rauschenberg's friend, composer John Cage, wrote a statement for the *White Paintings*:

> To Whom / No subject / No image / No taste / No object / No beauty / No message / No talent / No technique (no why) / No idea / No intention / No art / No object / No feeling / No black / No white (no and) / After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing in these paintings that could not be changed, that they can be seen in any light and are not destroyed by the action of shadows. / Hallelujah! the blind can see again; the water's fine.[70]

For Cage, the *White Paintings* trace lights and shadows. They are never as pure and white as we think they are, but always reflect the changes of their surroundings with time. In an interview with the artist in 1999, Rauschenberg calls the *White Paintings* 'clocks', claiming that "if one were sensitive enough that you could read it, that you would know how many people were in the room, what time it was, and what the weather was like outside."[71]

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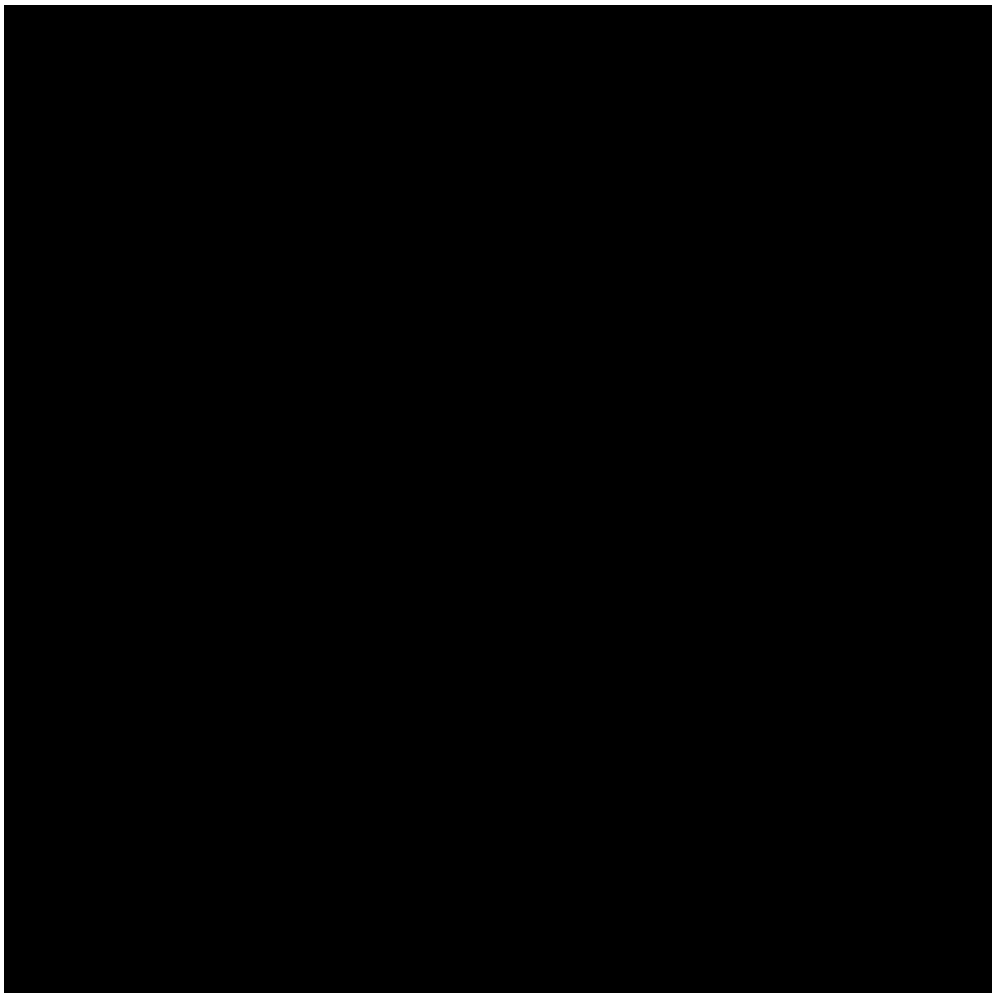
[68] *Robert Rauschenberg - Erased De Kooning,* online video recording, YouTube, 15 May 2007 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpCWh3IFtDQ> [accessed 3 June 2020]

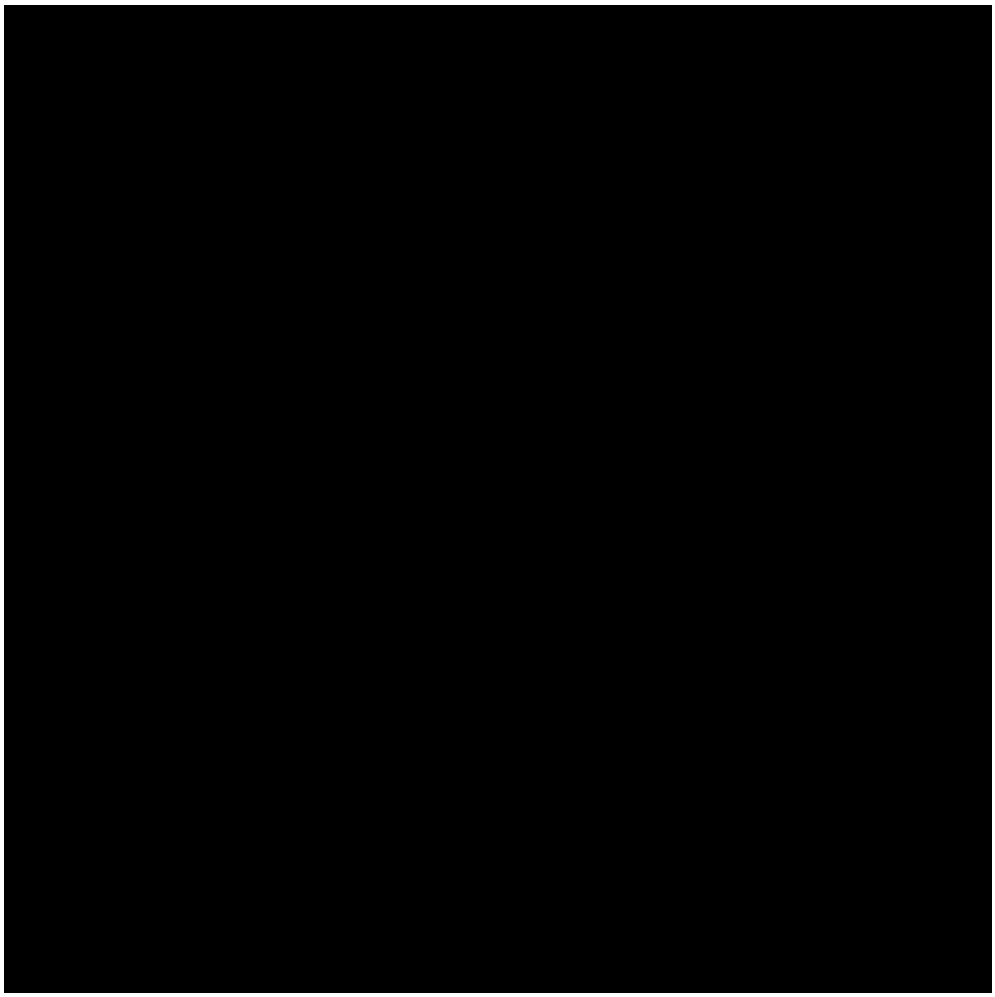
[69] Sarah Robert, 'White Painting [three panel]', *Rauschenberg Research Project*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (July 2013) <https://www.sfmoma.org/essay/white-painting-three-panel/> [accessed 3 June 2020]

[70] Ibid.

[71] 'Robert Rauschenberg discusses *White Painting* [three panel] at SFMOMA, 6 May 1999', *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art* (1999) <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/98.308.A-C/research-materials/document/WHIT_98.308_005/> [accessed 3 June 2020].



Robert Rauschenberg
Erased de Kooning Drawing
1953



Robert Rauschenberg
White Painting [three panel]
1951

Theaters

The whites that absorb time also dwell in the Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Theaters* series. This forty-year project of monochrome photographs since 1976, documents movie theatres across the world, from classic opera houses in Europe to drive-in cinemas in the US.

Sugimoto sets up a single long exposure to capture the whole length of a film screening in the theatres. Frames of a two-hour moving image layered up into a single shot of pure white illumination in the centre of the photograph. In each image of this collection, whether the entertainment space still retains its glamour or has been abandoned, the pure white beaming movie screen, like a blank cut out from the picture, illuminates the surroundings, revealing the outlines of empty seats and the building structure.

Considering photography as the device that reconstructs reality into the form of an afterimage, for Sugimoto, a film that is composed of 170,000 photographic afterimages can bring the dead reality back to life with its lively motions within flowing time.[72]

In his essay *My Inner Theater*, the artist notes the impulse behind the *Theaters* series:

> I wanted to photograph a movie, with all its appearance of life and motion, in order to stop it again. What I felt was a sense of vocation: I must use photography as a means to shut away the ghosts resurrected by the excess of photographic afterimages.[73]

This accumulation of the passing moments results in a form of absence. No one would know which film was on, the artist doesn't remember either. What was present for a couple of hours in the past has faded and been forgotten. It has converted into something else, something irrelevant to what it once was.

Sugimoto writes in his book 苔のむすまで (*Translated in English as *Time Exposed*), stating that after a movie is projected on the screen the images then move into a space of void.[74] For the artist, in his words "art is the technique that can materialise this invisible spiritual world."[75] The resurrection in Sugimoto's notion perhaps is our collective consciousness emerging from the recovery of memories.

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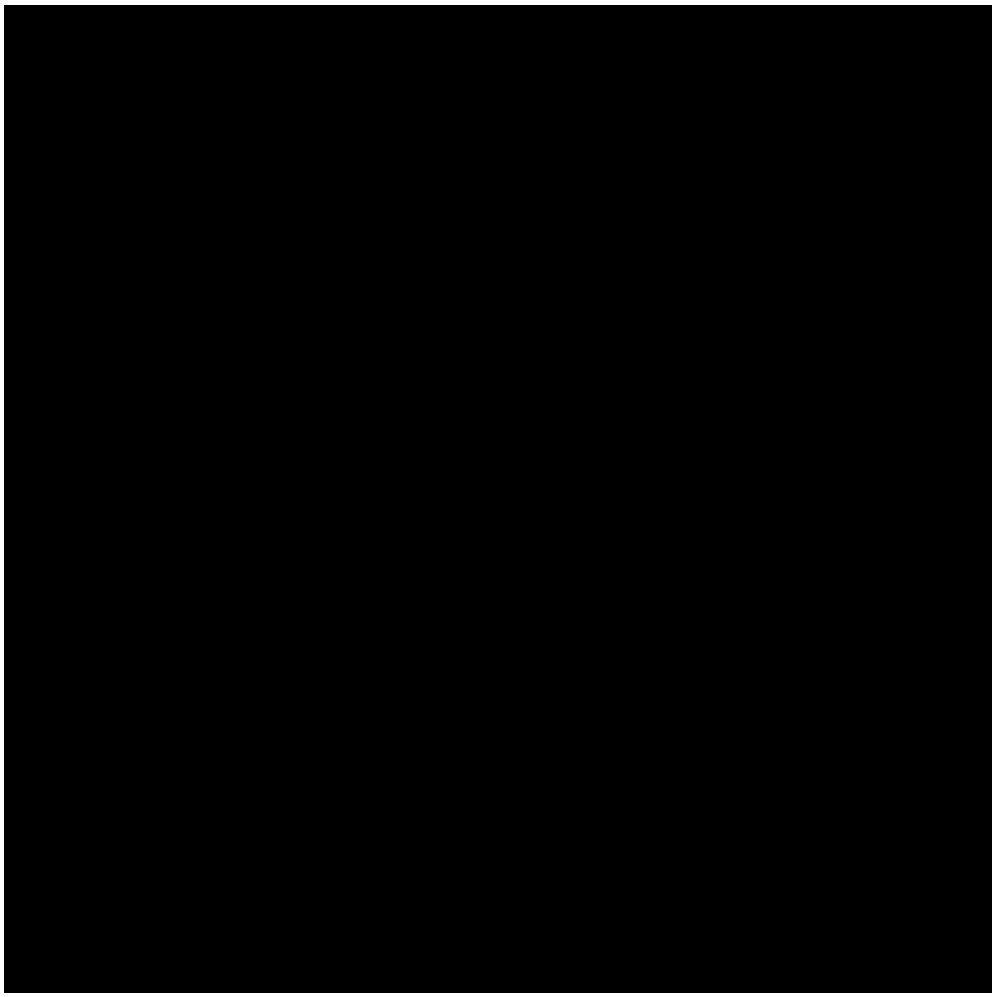
[72] 'Hiroshi Sugimoto: how I photographed an entire movie in a single frame', *Financial Times*, 3 January 2020 <https://www.ft.com/content/baedab88-2792-11ea-9a4f-963f0ec7e134> [accessed 3 June 2020]

[73] Hiroshi Sugimoto, Takaaki Matsumoto & Giles Murray, *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Theaters*, trans. by Giles Murry (New York: Damiani Matsumoto Editions, 2016), p.7.

[74] Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Time Exposed* 苔のむすまで, trans. by Ya-Chi Huang 黃亞紀 (Taipei: Common Master Press 大家出版, 2013), p.120.

[75] Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Origins of Art* アートの起源, (Tokyo: Shichosha 新潮社, 2012), p.9.



Hiroshi Sugimoto
Theaters
2015

Shadows

In 1979, the Dutch photojournalist Koen Wessing documented the events after a farmer's murder by the National Guard under the dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle's regime. He followed a group of farmers carrying the body back to the victim's house and captured the moment the man's two daughters reacted to the news of their father's death. In Wessing's photograph, the woman on the left seems to hardly carry her body, moving forth with her knees slightly bent and arms reaching forward, her face distorted with shock and despair, while the woman on the right appears to faint, facing the sky with her eyes closed and mouth gently opened.

In Alfredo Jaar's installation work *Shadows* (2014), the background of Wessing's photograph fades into black while the two women at the front grow brighter and brighter until the whole projection turns into a completely white light, then everything goes black again. A brief moment during this one-minute transformation, the women figures become a silhouette cut out from black paper. The white light glare on what is in front of them, like the empty seats in Sugimoto's theatres. But this time, when witnessing Jaar's work, the audience is showered in its gleam.

The light collects and seals the moments, and then transfer it to the present, to the future. It becomes a portal to a different dimension. The glaring lights in Sugimoto and Jaar's works seem to also open a doorway to a space that does not belong to this world we live in. Rauschenberg describes the *White Paintings*: "they are large white (1 white as 1 GOD)", considering they embody divine messages from the higher spirit.[76]

After experimenting on his own drawings, Rauschenberg determined that in order to make erasure into art itself, instead of simply the process, "It had to begin as art", as stated in one of the artist's interviews - and art that was universally recognised.[77] Rauschenberg decided the image to be erased, then, had to be by a widely celebrated artist of his time: Willem de Kooning, in this instance, who secured his place in New York's art scene with his first solo show in 1948. Later in 1951 de Kooning was acclaimed with prizes such as the Logan Medal and Purchase Prize, leading the movement of American abstract expressionism in the '50s. With his respect and admiration, Rauschenberg obtained de Kooning's consent and spent two months completing the erasure of the drawing selected by de Kooning. Through erasure, which reduced the de Kooning's drawing into a blank surface with traces of

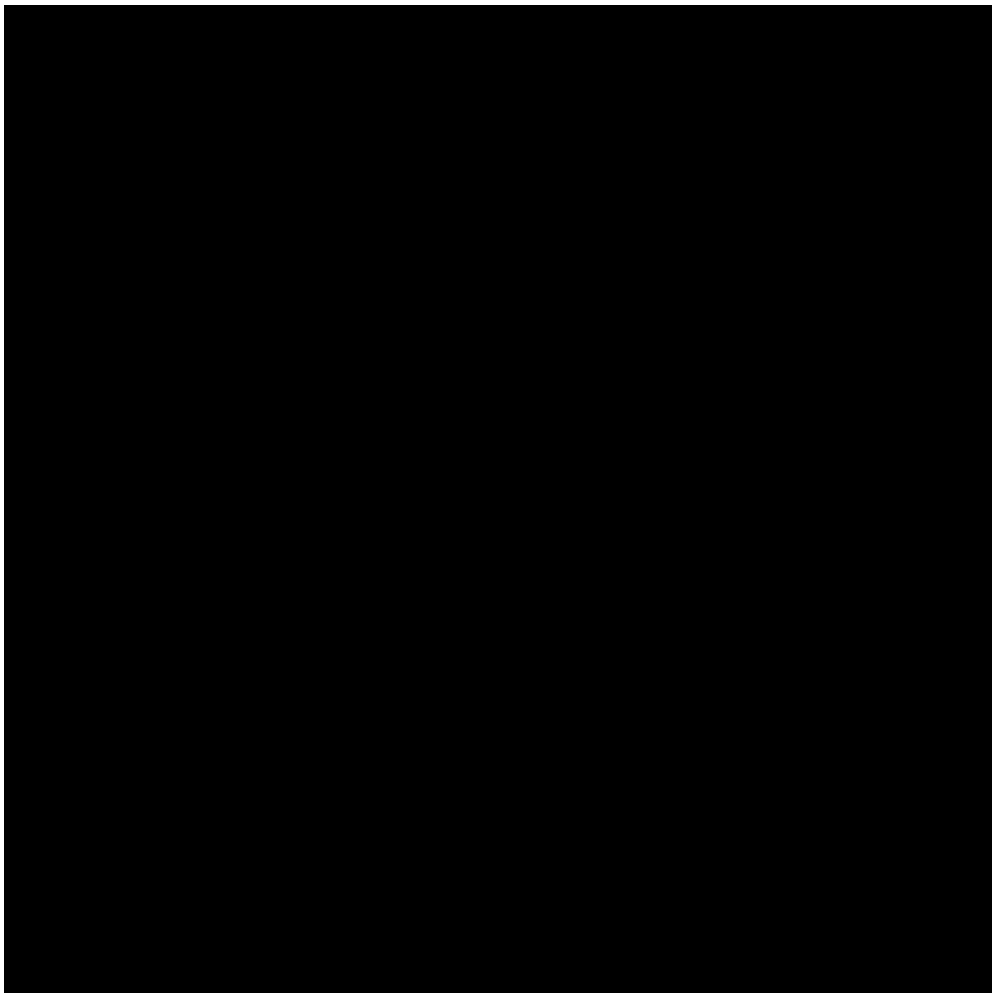
[76] Sarah Robert, 'White Painting [three panel]', *Rauschenberg Research Project*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (July 2013) <https://www.sfmoma.org/essay/white-painting-three-panel/> [accessed 3 June 2020]

[77] *Robert Rauschenberg - Erased De Kooning,* online video recording, YouTube, 15 May 2007 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpCWh3IFtDQ> [accessed 3 June 2020]

its predecessor, Rauschenberg enquires about the definition of art. Although this action of erasure has been seen as destruction, protest or iconoclasm, Rauschenberg once described it as poetry.[78] [79]

[78] Vincent Katz, 'A Genteel Iconoclasm', *Tate Etc.* (Issue 8: Autumn 2006) <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/genteel-iconoclasm> [accessed 3 June 2020]

[79] See note 29.



Alfredo Jaar
Shadows
2014

Sous Rature

In a letter titled *Zur Seinsfrage* (*Translated in English as *The Question of Being*) to Ernst Jünger in 1956, Martin Heidegger put 'Sein' (German for 'being') under the crossing mark (X) as a means to define the meaning of nihilism.[80] In his message, Heidegger also questioned the inadequate expression of the concepts of being through the word 'being'.

Heidegger's technique, Sous Rature, usually translated as "under erasure", was further developed by Jaques Derrida. In his *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explores the essence of signs since these are the foundation of our understanding of the world. As he expresses "[w]e think only in signs."[81]

Writing under erasure pertains to the meaning of a word while also referring to its inadequacy to comprehensively embodying what it intends to signify. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts in the preface of *Of Grammatology*, "[s]ince the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible."[82]

The erasure reveals the absent and present notions of a word. Through this gesture, Derrida challenges the limits and liability of language. In his notion, all language is written 'under erasure'.[83]

[80] Jaques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. xiv.

[81] Ibid., p. 50.

[82] Ibid., p. xiv.

[83] Ibid., p.280.

Poems to the Sea

In 1959, Cy Twombly and his wife Tatiana Franchetti spent the summer in Sperlonga, a beach town in Italy, where Twombly made *Poems to the Sea* (1959) during their stay. In this twenty-four-part drawing, the horizon lines are sharply drawn across the top of the papers. Sails emerge as scrawled triangles in between waves formed by the artist's rapid swing of the graphite. They repeatedly rise from the surface, and are then crossed off by another score. Parts of these scribbles are covered with layers of white paint.

Even though working closely with each other, Twombly's erasure is different from his Black Mountain College colleague Rauschenberg. His erasure doesn't intend to demolish what's been done to be almost invisible, but for it to be seen more as a form of 'crossing-out' or 'deletion'.

Twombly often left the quoted words from the poems or ancient myths damaged or disrupted with the movement and the flow of his strokes. In *Poems to the Sea*, words are inscribed, crossed out, enclosed with pencil marks and paint. Only numbers and two words, 'time' and 'Sappho' remain legible in this group of drawings.

In her book, Mary Jacobus looks into the artist's home library in Italy, exploring the relationship between Twombly's practice and the artist's devotion to poetry.[84] Jacobus takes the readers through the artist's rich collection of literature, from ancient Greek and Roman myths to the works of English poets in 16th - 17th century and modern poetry in the early 20th century.

A few pages of Twombly's poetry collection are shown in Jacobus's introduction titled 'Twombly's Books'. The papers are covered with paint and the artist's scribble marks. Lines of Greek poet George Seferis' *Three Secret Poems* included in M. Bryan Raizis' *Greek Poetry Translations* are partly scratched by Twombly's scores.[85] The artist's deleted version of the translated Seferis' poems can also be seen in his painting *Quattro Stagioni's Inverno* (1993–94), the large-scale work *Say Goodbye, Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor* (1993–94) and the memorial work for Lucio Amelio, *Untitled* (1993).

Jacobus enumerates the artist's different approaches to quotation in his visual practice. In the case of Seferis' poems, the author reckons the uncertainty that comes along with translated literature, which embraces the risks of reduced accuracy and fidelity after the converting, allows the artist to be relatively ruthless when deleting the poems. This liberation embodies the remaining fractional passages, presenting a new possibility that's different from the original text.

[84] Mary Jacobus, *Reading Cy Twombly* (Princeton University Press, 2016)

[85] Ibid., p. 7.

Jacobus' emphasis on the attitude towards a translated literature reminds me of Walter Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator*, which contrasts to the suggested carelessness in handling a translated work because of its lack of originality.[86] In the essay, Benjamin proposes translation as a form of art, stating:

> As translation is a mode of its own, the task of the translator, too, may be regarded as distinct and clearly differentiated from the task of the poet.
>
> The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original.[87]

From Benjamin's view, a translator doesn't simply deliver what's been written, moreover, the unique task of shuffling languages, recreating messages among the translatables and untranslatables, entitles them as art makers. They are as much an artist as the creator who produced the original texts.

As Jacobus proposes, Twombly may have considered that a translated work didn't need the equal attention that's given to an original literature. Or perhaps for the artist, his erasure is more akin to Sous Rature. The Greek poet's work, through its translator and under Twombly's squiggles, became more true and genuine for the artist. Only after the deletion, the real meanings of the words could be revealed.

On Twombly's scribble calligraphic painting, Roland Barthes puts "The essence of an object has some relation with its destruction: not necessarily what remains after it has been used up, but what is thrown away as being of no use."[88]

Glenn Ligon erased the text from a documentary photograph of the Million Man March, leaving an empty banner flying surrounded by the shadow of the crowd. The event took place in Washington DC in 1995 promoting the solidarity and responsibility of African Americans in the US, yet women were not allowed to take part in the march and were instead asked to take a day off in support. The controversy concerning the exclusion within a movement to improve human rights raised questions about the fundamental values of the march.

Ligon didn't attend the march or make further comments on the event. But as a response, the words originally on the banner became the title of the artist's work. On his *We're Black and Strong I* (1996), Ligon expresses "Imagine making a Xerox one hundred times. Eventually, it gets darker and more indistinct, and that's what happened to these images of the march. They became more mysterious, and

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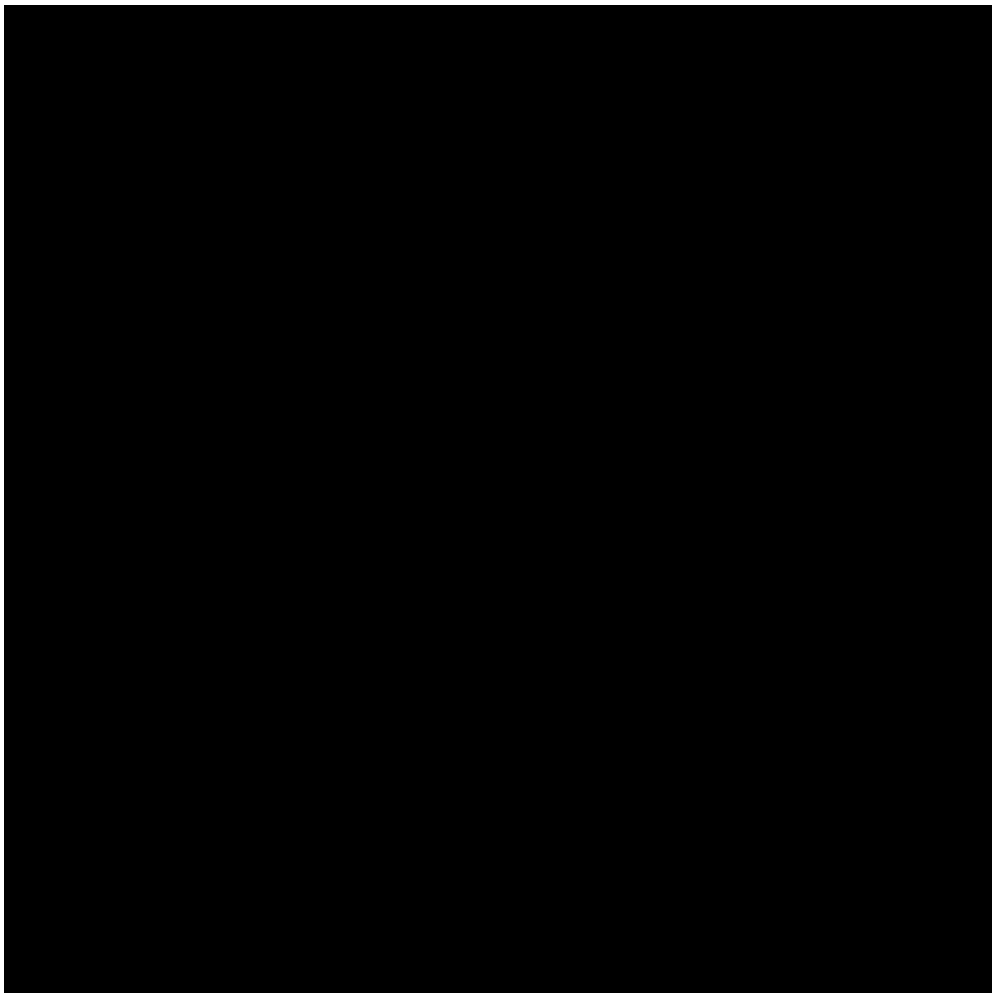
[86] Walter Benjamin,'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations,* ed. and intro. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 69-82.

[87] Ibid., pp. 76.

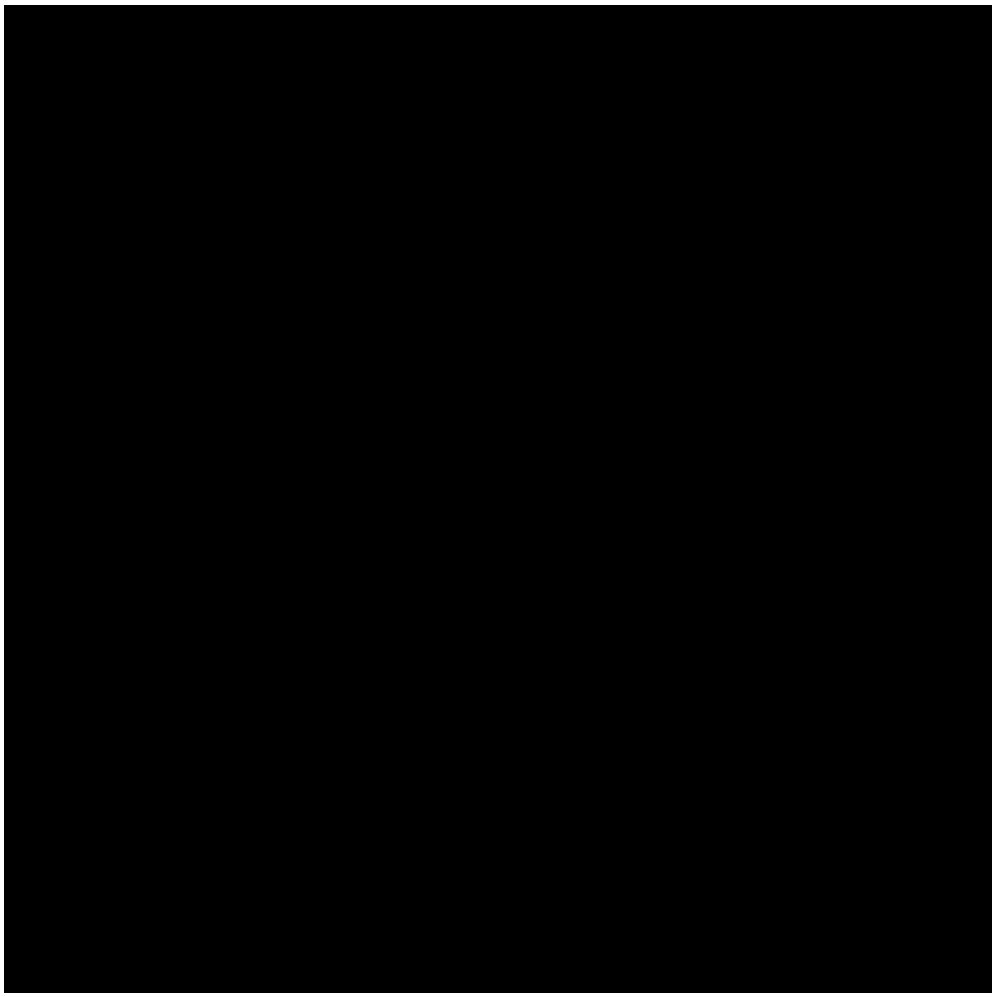
[88] Roland Barthes, 'Cy Twombly: Works on Paper', in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 158.

in some ways, by becoming more mysterious, they became more accurate... more able to portray the feelings that I had about the march."[89]

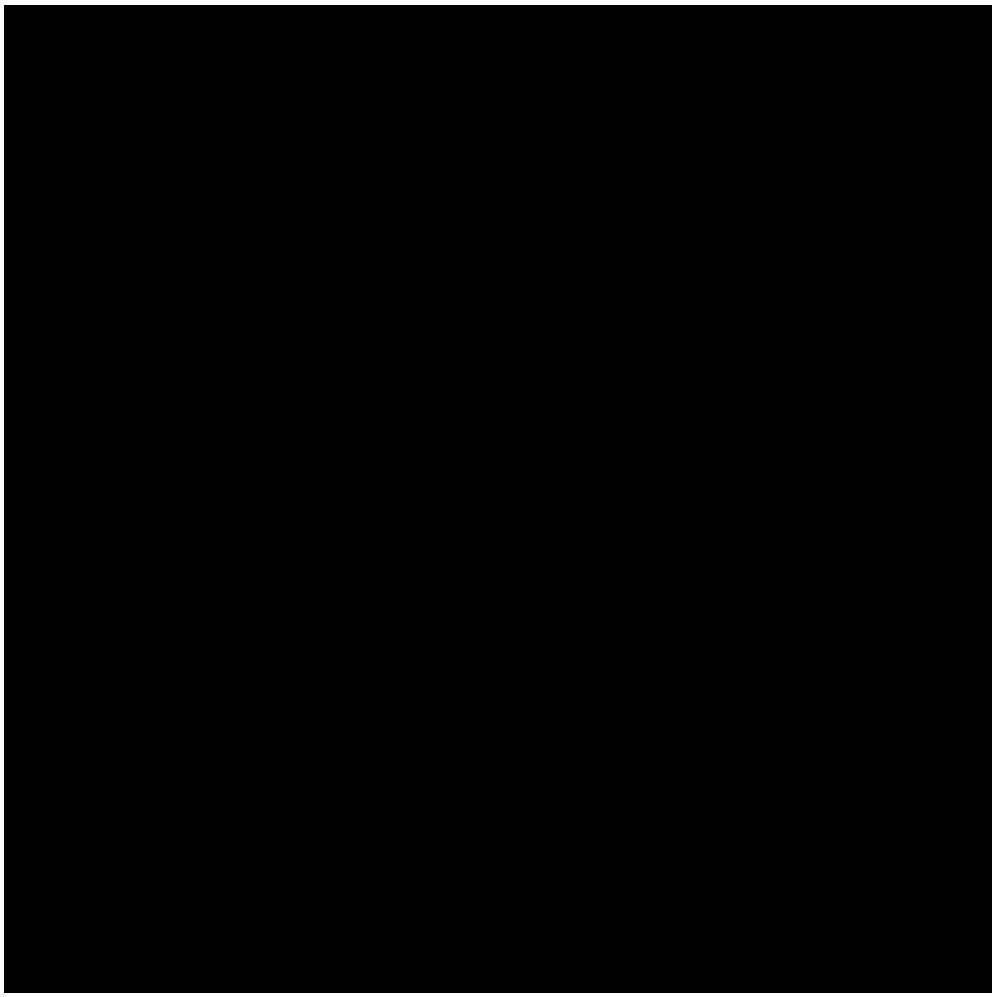
[89] 'Glenn Ligon, We're Black and We're Strong, 1996', *Whitney Museum of American Art* <https://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/726> [accessed 3 June, 2020]



Cy Twombly
Poems to the Sea
(detail)
1959



Cy Twombly
Untitled (Say Goodbye, Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor)
(detail)
1994



Glenn Ligon
We're Black and Strong I
1996

萬 (Ten Thousand)

There's a saying, and I can't remember where I heard it from. It proposes that the degree of familiarity to a language is demonstrated through one's ability to count in it. Despite the fluency in a language a person has achieved, they're inclined to use their native language when counting things. The more comfortable you are when numbering in a language shows how deeply the language ingrains the way you think. This saying reflects on my everyday life. The calculations in my mind are in Mandarin even when conversations are in other languages. I haven't got used to name numbers between ten thousand to a million in English because in Mandarin, there is a unit for ten thousand called Wàn (萬). Besides that, sometimes even writing down others' phone numbers feels a little lagging.

During the years of living in the UK, I figured there is also a loose measurement for emotional engagement to a language. When holding a strong feeling of admiration, appreciation or regret towards someone or something, how comfortable one is to express those emotions verbally can also tell the level of connection to the language. Saying 'thank you', 'sorry' and 'I love you' always sounds light-hearted when it's in a foreign language. But if the connection is strong and one believes the language can truthfully speak their mind, they might stutter and blush. This uneasiness gradually grew in me after I came to London, although very slowly. I still choose Mandarin to count the money in my wallet but 'thank you', 'sorry' and 'I love you' are not so light-hearted anymore.

English has since become an awkward language for me. I feel we are close enough while maintaining a distance. That distance sometimes manifests in the childlike and unrefined voice I have when expressing myself; sometimes it's in that delay when converting from a hundred thousand to ten wàn. In the process of developing this research in my second language, I've been reflecting on those struggles in speaking different languages on a day-to-day basis.

In *Beckett's French*, author Michael Edwards notes that a foreign language "lacks two things, history and memory."[90] The switch from English to French is the multilingual writer Samuel Beckett's disengagement from memory. This movement signifies Beckett's detachment from familiarity and, through this exile, writing in a foreign language exposes Beckett to the arbitrariness of language. The employment of language became less instinctive but more of a stream of conscious decisions - of grammar, vocabulary, syntax. Deprived of the writing habits that developed in his mother tongue, a foreign language enables Beckett to write "without style."[91] Edwards comments that to find one's own voice they have to remove themselves from the familiarity and customs of writing in their primary language. He further addresses that when one struggles to express themselves in a foreign language, it also means this obstacle compels them to be a more genuine self, with the use of simple expressions.

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[90] Michael Edwards, 'Beckett's French', *Translation and Literature*, 1 (1992), p. 72.

[91] Ibid., p.74.

Perhaps as Edwards expresses, the loss of the ability to communicate intuitively without constantly referring to linguistic rules evidences the loss of myself that performs in my native language. The departure from that self began during my Master's degree, when I tended to write in Mandarin then translate to English. The main reason being that I worried my thinking process and articulation would be restricted by my limited English vocabulary.

Before I was aware that the general advice on writing was to write directly in the language which the main audience spoke, I had noticed the frictions that occurred when translating between these two very distinct languages. The first year studying abroad (and even until now) was a time consisting of constant questions about English words, expressions, writing styles and methods. In one of those discussions, a peer of mine, who was also a non-native English speaker like myself, suggested that I should start writing in English from my first drafts. Writing in English is an acceptance of using a smaller range of words, thinking in a stricter tense and with different expressions. Each component of a sentence is a careful choice but without the ingrained certainty.

Beckett comments that writing in English is easy for him, on the contrary, "[t]he French language offered greater clarity and forced him to think more fundamentally, to write with greater economy."[92] In his thesis on how Beckett's French writing influences the writer's later English works, Julien Carriere proposes this is because English has a larger vocabulary and more synonyms than French. However, the bare language of French is more ideal for Beckett's project of depicting the rawest state of being.[93]

[92] Herbert Mitgang, 'Book Ends; BECKETT IN PARIS; PARIS', *The New York Times*, 25 January 1981 <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/01/25/books/book-ends-beckett-in-paris-paris.html> [accessed 27 May 2020]

[93] Julien F. Carriere, 'Samuel Beckett and bilingualism: how the return to English influences the later writing style and gender roles of All that Fall and Happy Days' (published PhD thesis, Louisiana State University, 2005), p. 39.

Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette

The Australian artist Christian Capurro's *Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette* (1999 - 2014) took 250 volunteers five years to complete the erasure of 246 pages of Vogue Hommes. Each page is written with a description by the participant who erased the content noting the time they spent on the job and their hourly rates.

The title of the artwork referred to the 18th-century French Finance Minister Étienne de Silhouette, who was well known for his ruthless manner on budget-cutting during the Seven Years' War. During the time of his service, a form of portrait grew in popularity. The featureless shadow profile cut from black paper was the cheap alternative to other expensive forms of portraits such as sculpture or painting. This art form, therefore, was called Silhouette, after the French minister due to his frugal approach.

While Capurro didn't reject the interpretation that an erased Vogue magazine represented a critique of the fashion industry, the artist emphasises more on the inexhaustible labour behind the erasure in this project to propose the question regarding the agreement of how things are valued with time and physical labour. In his words "[...] it was informed by the exchanges we make in our lives of material and non-material things – the looks we give and take, the objects that pass between us, the trading of our time and our energy, the values that accrue and the losses we incur in the process."[94]

Capurro's other project of erasure *A Vacant Bazaar* (1999-2010), which began in the same year as *Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette*, took the artist himself a decade to complete the removal of pages in nine lifestyle and fashion magazines including Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and Marie Claire. Capurro left most covers and page numbers intact and kept the same but largely erased cross-page advertisement in each magazine, leaving the shapes of pupil-less eyes and eyebrows on the crumpled papers. Alongside the magazines are piles of rubber residue stained with the ink that has been removed from the pages.

Capurro's erasure on the commercial publication also takes place in his series *Gorgonia*, a collection of work-on-paper made between 1997-2011. The correction fluid flooded across the erased magazine pages. The liquid gathered or spread with the bumps and dents on the surface produced by the erasure. Another series by the artist *Compress* (2001-) used two magazine pages facing each other, with the pressures of erasure on the top paper, the other with a clean white surface imprinted with the ink of the reverse side of the erased one, recording the traces of the artist's physical movement. Later the marks on the bottom paper are covered by the white paint of the correction fluid.

Time can be perceived in both Rauschenberg's and Capurro's erasure, through the crumpled papers and numerous dents left by scrawls. A viewer's imagination of the hours consumed to delete the images,

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[94] 'Christian Capurro, Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette, 1999-2014', *Museum of Contemporary Art Australia* <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/works/2013.59A-J/> [accessed 3 June, 2020]

the persistent friction between papers and rubbers, the incessant movement of the human arms, this sense of knowing, seems to be the crucial components to complete the artworks.

Curator and writer Bridget Crone recalls the artist's account on the erasure in *Compress* as "fastidious labouring of the body against the image."[95] In her view, Capurro's work is regarded as the embodiment of the tension between the body and the machine, one that is able to express itself as an individual and the other as a collective body that assembles the consciousness of a larger group we belong to. It's hard to neglect the artist's pop culture reference in his practice. The 'un-doing' of Capurro extracts the language from a shared and widely dominant system, into the artist's own voice.

To make a work of erasure means making an artwork out of something that has already existed. The word 'ghost' has been frequently used to depict the phenomenon of erasure, and unsurprisingly this term also popped into the introductions, in the exhibition brochure, of Capurro's *Compress*.[96] [97] This word suggests the return of the previous habitants. Their presence is never completely wiped away.

Erasure owns an energy: that which is erased, even though it has lost its appearance, still lingers in between the debris and the negative spaces. In his essay, Brian Dillon argued that the remains highlight the original presence, stating "[w]hether rubbed away, crossed out or re-inscribed, the rejected entity has a habit of returning, ghostlike: if only in the marks that usurp its place and attest to its passing."[98] Erasure has the ability to make what/who is present disappear by shifting focus onto the missing parts. It disintegrates our broken expectation into an emotional reaction to fill the emptiness.

Jean-Paul Sartre describes a phantom-like atmosphere when his friend Pierre's expected presence at their appointment was not fulfilled.[99] Pierre's nothingness - absence - is a kind of being, a kind that's able to draw attention, to dissolve the world around us.

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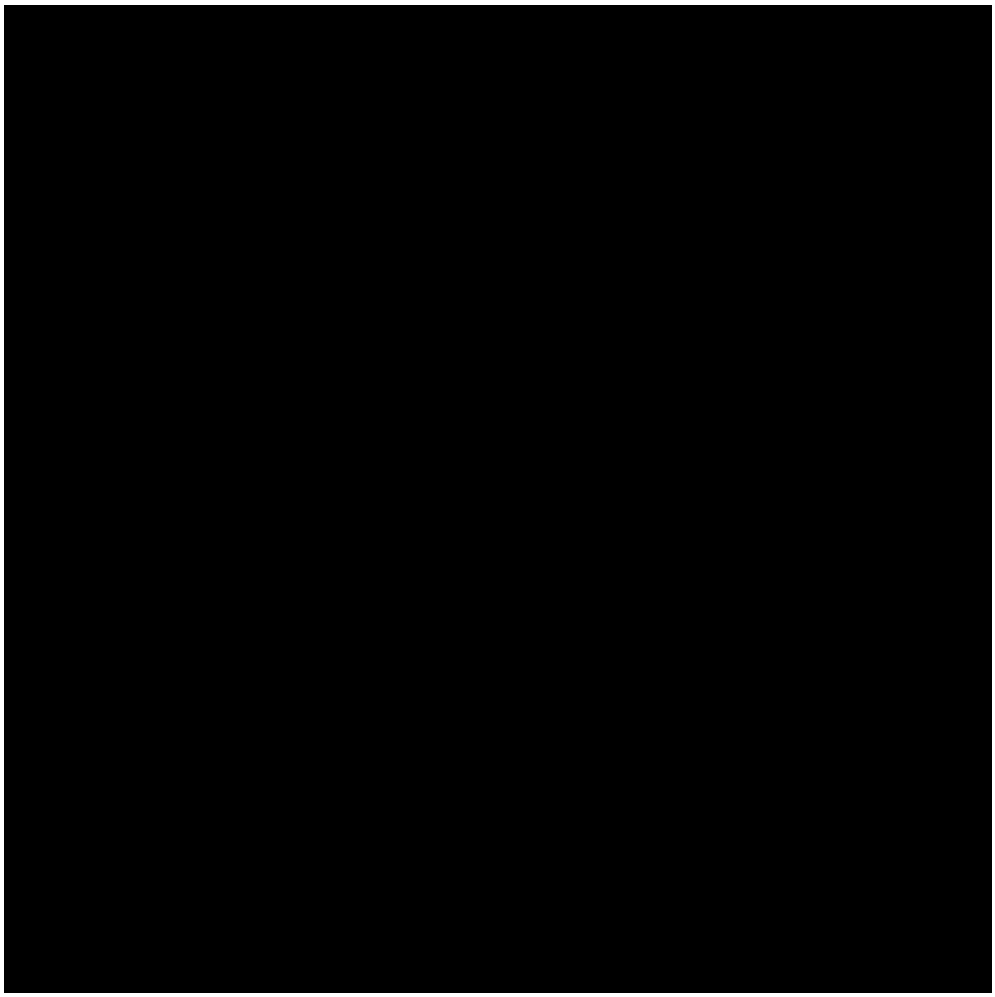
[95] Bridge Crone, 'The body. The ruin.' (exhibition catalogue), Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne (Melbourne Australia: 2005).

[96] Dillon, Brian, 'The Relation of Erasure', *Tate Etc.* (Issue 8: Autumn 2006) <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/revelation-erasure> [accessed 3 June, 2020]

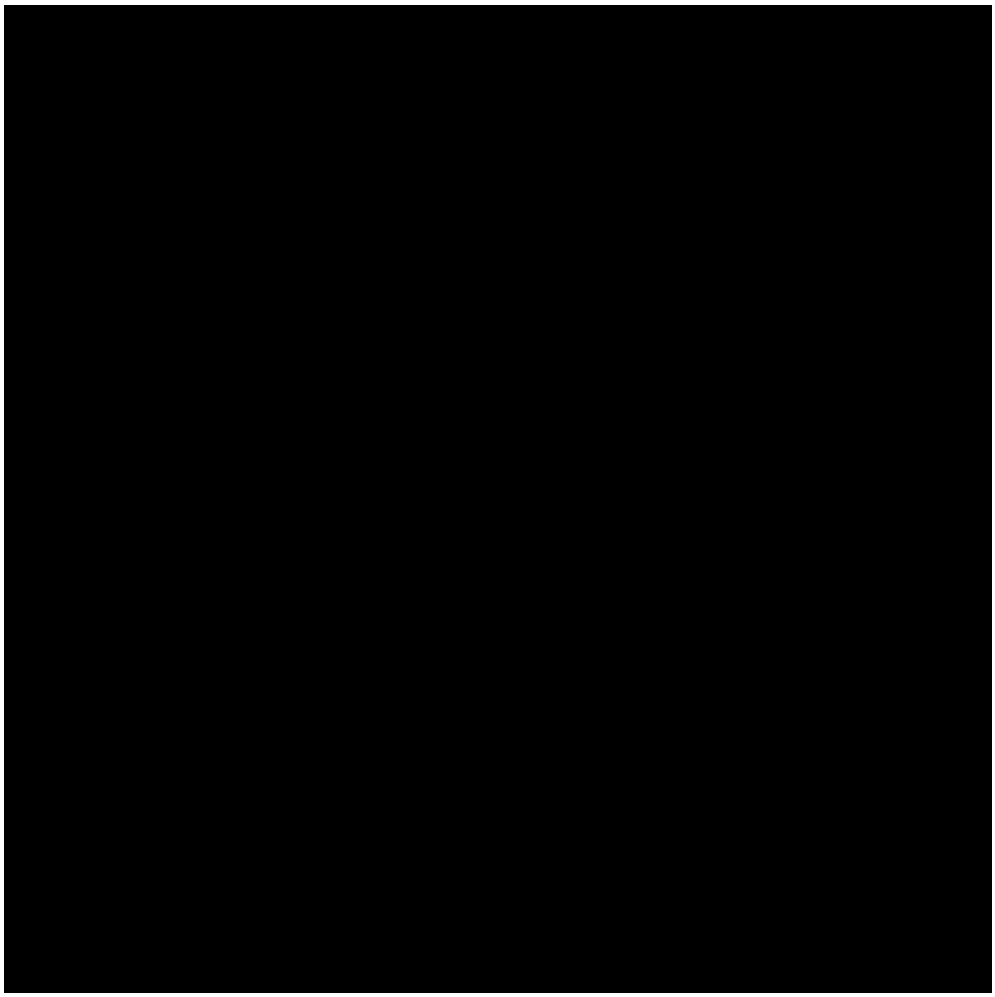
[97] 'InVisible: Art at the Edge of Perception' (exhibition catalogue), MASS MoCA (North Adams USA: 2010).

[98] See note 50.

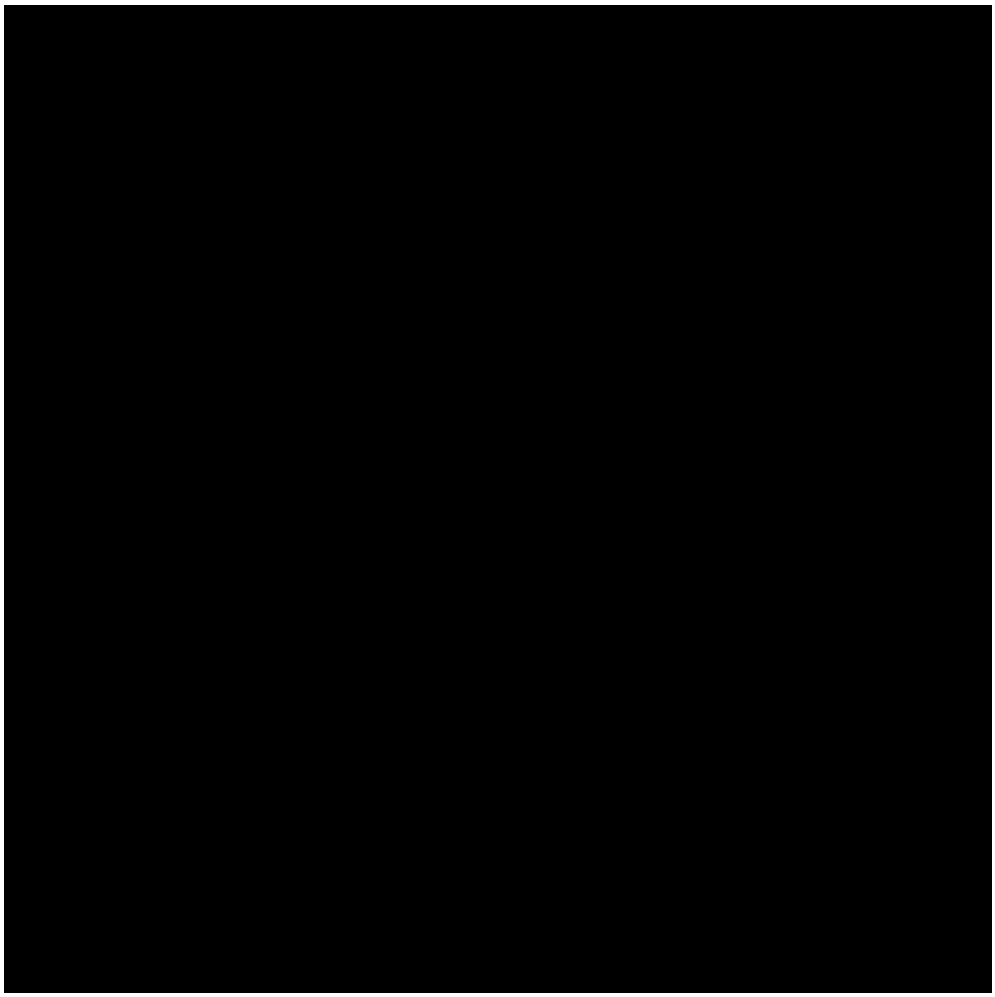
[99] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 34.



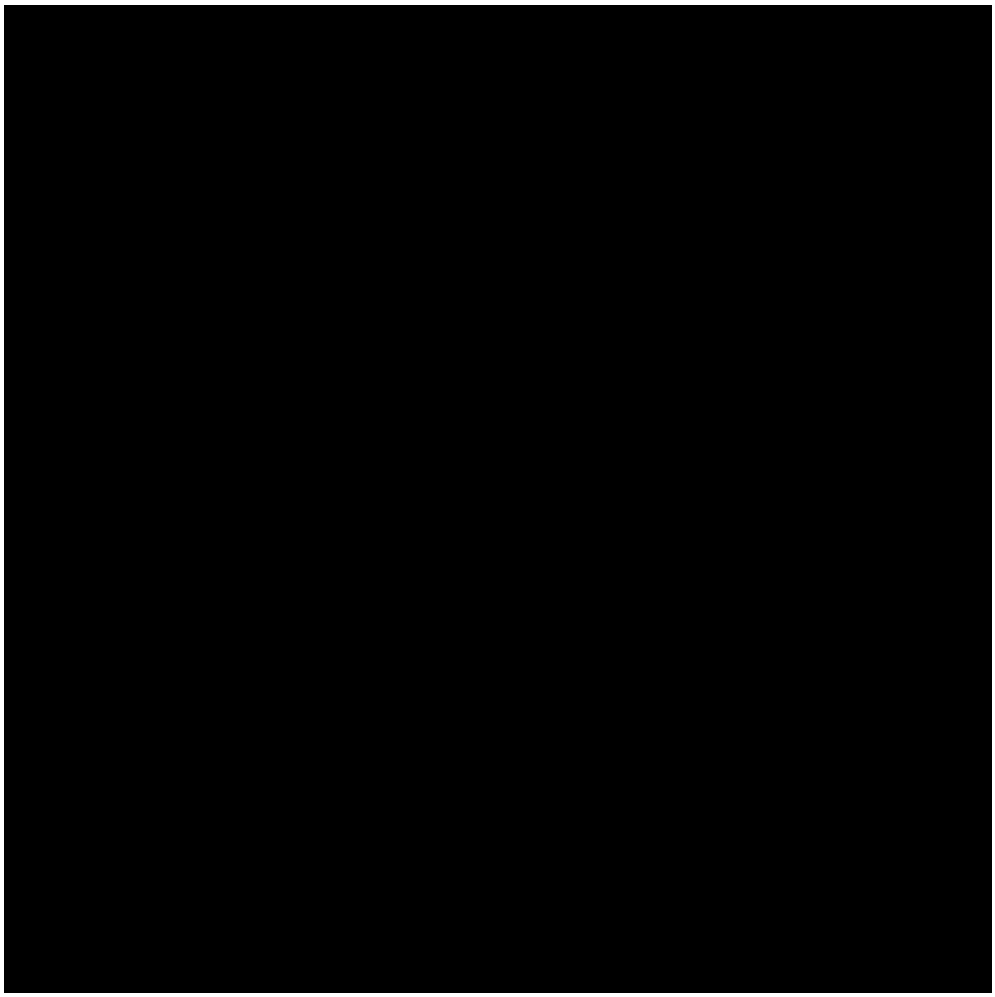
Christian Capurro
Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette
1999-2014



Christian Capurro
A Vacant Bazaar (provisional legend)
1999-2010



Christian Capurro
Gorgonia
2000-2010



Christian Capurro
Compress
2006-7

我 (I)

Coming to the UK and immersing myself in this environment is a process of undoing and relearning a language. I constantly think about the differences between my native and second languages, and how their structures present me as a person.

Sometimes, when encountering problems related to language, I ask myself whether I would have the same reaction if it was in a Mandarin language scenario. Upon boarding a busy train to London from Glasgow, I asked a passenger who sat on my seat to return it to me. Her friend refused my request aggressively. I was going to find a staff member to deal with it since I didn't know what the policy was in that situation. Before I did so, a guy who sat in front of me demanded she give up the seat. They started to exchange furious comments back and forth. Eventually, they finished their fight and the seat was given back to me.

I wasn't sure if I had to thank the guy because, in the end, it sounded more like their own debate on whether one could sit wherever they wanted, regardless of types of carriages and the availability, if their train got cancelled. My struggle took too long, and it was too late to say anything.

I later recalled that hesitation and asked myself whether I would have remained quiet if it had been an argument in Mandarin. Yes, I guessed, because it's about my tendency to avoid conflicts instead of how confident I was speaking aggressively in English. I didn't want to accuse others wrongly and my mind always delayed responding with unpleasant manners when it needed more time to digest what had just happened.

I developed this habit of asking myself if I would have done things differently in different languages. I asked, along the way, about my choices of word and whether I would write this straightforward and simple if this thesis was in Mandarin. Perhaps, I guessed. But I can't deny I would more skillfully escape from the word '我' ('I' in English) and be better at decorating my words. I started to understand when Samuel Beckett said he couldn't help writing poetry in his mother tongue.

佚失 (Yí Shi)

I am no way comparing my English to Beckett's French, nor my Mandarin to his English. Apart from the casual messages I sent to my friends and family, I haven't properly written in Mandarin for many years. I tried a couple of times to compose a diary log in Mandarin but it didn't get into that 'flow' to continue after two sentences. I feel more familiar with this voice not because I am more eloquent in English, but simply because I'm living in it - it's ninety per cent of my time, even in my dreams. My Mandarin is getting rusty but my second language is far from perfect.

The rustiness, I suppose, stems from the disposal of the other self while a new one is being formed. The process of acquiring a new language is also a way to connect a part of the self to a larger cultural system and collective consciousness. I noticed the dissimilarities in pitch when I speak different languages and nuances between expressing the same emotions.

When describing someone is angry, in Mandarin or Japanese, it's more common that such emotion is delivered as a verb, like a transition from the previous mental state to anger. Although sharing the same meaning, 'I am sorry', '申し訳ありません' and '對不起' are not exactly equal to one another. Even a slight change in accent in Mandarin reflects the environment I am in. A new language creates a new personality. Or at least, it highlights a certain trait of a person that isn't as noticeable in other languages.

In response to those awkward encounters with languages, I guess the question I asked myself - whether I would have done differently in different languages - is another way of querying if I can duplicate the self that speaks her native language into other languages if I spoke them comparably well.

New identities grow as the new languages expand but undoubtably, it lost what the 'original' self possesses. Because even between verbal languages, symbols can't always find their equivalent comparatives as cultures and histories differ. The word Yí Shi (佚失) in Mandarin is usually to describe the loss of an historical item. Perhaps I could consider the use of my additional languages as a form of Yí Shi. The erasure of the self is demonstrated in that deficiency of personal and cultural memories. In a way, this research talks about erasure with another erasure, consoling each other.

New Home

To my surprise, I felt a bit lonely the week before the first term of my Master's degree started. I usually felt quite comfortable on my own, even when travelling abroad by myself. I guess this time was different. There wasn't a near date marked 'going home', instead, my new home should be here, at least until I finished my study.

The landlady decided to give up renting the flat out after three months of disastrous attempts to finish its refurbishment. During that time, my friend and I (back then we were only acquaintances, who had found each other on Facebook before coming to the UK and decided to look for accommodation together) jumped from one Air b'n'b to another, having no clue when the flat would be ready. In the end, we came back to the market searching for a new flat all over again in November. Although making a home here was quite a challenge at the beginning, the whole adapting to the new environment thing was fine. I liked the college and the city a lot. Everything felt so new and exciting.

The real pressure was from my family. Mum was more anxious and angry than I was when we were kind of homeless. It felt like the situation was more stressful for her than for me, and she didn't appreciate my very chilled attitude at all. I was more worried about Dad, constantly. His condition wasn't stable so I got nervous whenever Mum rang or sent texts asking me to call her. There was another reality that dwelled in my phone that was different from the physical world I lived in. That was when everything wasn't all new and exciting.

But things were fine.

I can't describe how I feel most of the time. Through early 2020 I calmed down a little, releasing myself somewhat from constant worry. Up until I had a bit of relaxation, I thought it was just normal. I guess feelings can only be noticed once they change, then they can stay around, and become default. If that's the case, it seems to explain why I couldn't pinpoint what was going on with my works and how they were shaped, due to what I was thinking about and how I was feeling. Nothing seemed relevant. That's why I could only pick up something on the surface, mistaking a piece of news I read two hours ago for what I truly cared about.

菜單 (Menu)

In everyday life in Taiwan, the amount of words in front of you is overwhelming. It's not about the signboards that already crowded the streets, but words invading in every possible blank space. It feels like even the smallest, unimportant thing can be written down so you would know what others think you should know without telling you, without you asking. Once it's been written as legible information, it's no longer dismissible.

Signs are everywhere on the streets, from business to public spaces of any scales. Like those posters, small or big, at every corner of an eatery, guiding customers about every part of their service. With those signs, you would know where to find the sauce station and what kinds of sauce they have, with each container labelled with its name. Sometimes they tell you what would be the best combination and proportion if you want to make a mixed sauce. You can find the toilet without asking the staff. You know which bottle is hand soap by its label even though there's only one bottle that looks like a hand soap bottle by the sink. Sometimes you see a little warning like "Don't take more tissues than you actually need" by the toilet. They would tell you what you are allowed to throw into the general waste bin and recycling bin in this particular store and teach you how to separate your food waste into a different bin. You know they also have a delivery service because phone numbers are shown next to the menu. You know if you ever need it you'll call before 11 am, order over £5 amount of food and they don't do it on Thursdays. Apart from the menu over your head listing all the food they sell in large font size, you are also offered the whole menu to read on a thin, small piece of paper, on which you can tick the items you want and hand it to the server. There is another sign telling you whether you pay when you place the order or after you finish your food. You sit down and are ready to have your food. You watch the news on TV with the headline of current news at the bottom, other news of the day running on one side of the screen, the weather is shown on the other side, and time is at the corner. Most of the TV programmes always have subtitles on even when it's not in a foreign language.

People have this habit of constant reading. I don't know if it's cultivated by this visual culture or it's the tendency to read that creates the culture. I used to read, unconsciously, everything near me. I read it word by word, I consumed it all, whether I needed it or not. I read it faster and faster, I repeated it in my mind. I walked past the same advertising sign on my way to work and I read it every single time. I would notice when it was taken down, and I would read its successor. I'm not sure if it's the reading that made me anxious or if I had a compulsive mind that forced me to read. Strangers' conversations aggravated this discomfort. Even if I wasn't listening, words found a way to sneak into my ears. My liking for living in a big city contradicts my need for calming my uneasy mind. Many times I told myself I would move to somewhere else where information couldn’t reach me without my consent.

I still do, sometimes, read every poster I walk past in a tube station or on the streets of London. But perhaps my familiarity with English is not as sharp as with Mandarin. Most of the time, I'm able to be

selective in what I read and treat others more like abstract symbols. In this multicultural city, strangers' conversations become background noises that I'm capable to ignore, although it also makes a Mandarin conversation more noticeable.

Dream

A few nights before the year 2020, I was in one of those moments when you can tell that you're in a dream. I was alone standing in the middle of a two laned motorway underneath a railroad. The walls of the structure were covered with yellow square tiles. There were white lights installed inside the subway and some daylight cast in from its two ends. It was bright. I looked around appreciating what my mind had created. The slightly rusty texture and the details of other objects: metal fences painted in light grey, a concrete pathway or little windows with textured glass near the ceiling. I thought they were very well arranged. But at the same time, I wanted to wake up to escape from some wild creatures from my previous dream. I knew once I started to imagine them bursting into this tiny space, they would rush in. I wasn't sure how pleasant it would be. I needed to get back to my bedroom.

It was a struggle to wake myself up. I thought I would be soon awake if I visualised my bedroom. But I mistook which bedroom I should have returned to. I thought it was the one at my grandparents' where I lived during my years at the university. A Japanese style room with wood floor and closets built inside the wall with sliding doors. That was fifteen years ago in Taiwan. I woke up in a bedroom several time zones away in the north of England, where we were spending the Christmas holiday.

Dad was in my dreams sometimes, especially since I realised my practice was about him. There was one of me waiting for the lift in a hospital. A man stood next to me saying that I couldn't go upstairs to see Dad because he was in a critical condition. That was the only dream about Dad that I didn't get to see him. Mum said he wouldn't be in my dream again anymore. She thought it was some kind of an end. She was wrong. Dreams only got more real with vivid colours, details of the surroundings, sounds, sometimes odours. They were so real that I forgot he had gone.

In a dream, Dad was a few feet away purchasing something from a street vendor. The way he interacted with the business owner reminded me a lot of him. Especially the way he talked, his voice and accent. His sentences were in a mixture of Mandarin and Taiwanese. Mum talked like that when she talked to him as well, while she and Dad usually only speak Mandarin to my sister and me. It would be nice to hear his voice again. That would be helpful to bring back my memories of him. I later realised the reason why I wasn't standing next to him in that dream. It was because I was sitting on the back seat of his scooter waiting for him, like when I was little.

There was a time when I was around the age of ten, when we came to pick up a take-away on the way back home after school. Dad stood by the food stand waiting for our food. Like usual, I waited on the scooter. That afternoon, I decided to slide down to the front seat to feel what it was like to be a scooter driver. I held the throttles and rolled them. Dad didn't switch off the engine when he left the scooter. The wheels spun while the scooter was on its centre stand. The sudden engine sound towards the food stand frightened me and the people around it. Dad apologised to the food stand owner and the customers. He walked back to the scooter and switched off its engine. "It's very dangerous," he said,

"don't play with the scooter." I can't recall if he said anything else. He was upset about my misbehaviour, but normally he wouldn't be angry at me.

Towards the end of a dream about Dad, I was up in the sky alone overlooking fields covered with snow. I thought to myself, this quiet moment was the only time I could reconnect with those old faded memories. Only dreams could carry me back to the time and places that no longer belonged to the world I woke up to.

I woke up with an ache in my chest. My mind still wandered between the dream and reality. But the hardest part was always when I was fully awake and realised that it was all a dream. No matter how real it felt to me, Dad no longer existed in this world I woke up to.

Please click here to see the *Dream* series.

Aki Pao-Chen Chiu
Snow Field
2021

p a s s i n g

The Last Time

Since I moved to the UK, I would send video messages for Dad. It was requested by Mum at first. She frequently reminded me that, even though Dad's memory and his thinking were heavily affected by his treatments, he still missed me and constantly asked after me.

I asked Mum if he mentioned my name in the last few days of his life, not because I wanted to confirm how special I was to him, but to measure how much guilt I should carry. After all, I can't change the fact that I wasn't there for him. I didn't tell anyone the purpose of such a question. I hoped he didn't care that I escaped.

Before they closed the coffin, the funeral conductor invited us into the room. "To see him the very last time" as she phrased it. That was the first time for a decade and the last time I saw him not in pain. But I remember a year before that Mum said the same thing to me, when we visited the nursing home on the day she sent me to the airport. She said that might be the last time I saw Dad. I needed to say goodbye.

Mum gave me the impression that she was very superstitious, especially when it came to the idea of death. She would avoid anything that symbolised this concept. We were once very close to adopting a puppy, but she bailed out eventually because it had dark hair with white patterns near its paws. She said they looked like those white socks people wore in a Taoism funeral. She also threw away one of my sister's tops since its design looked like it was turned inside out, which resembled the kind of clothes worn in a traditional Chinese funeral. She also had an irrational fear of the sea. My sister and I weren't allowed to go into the water like other children, even with an instructor.

I guess I inherited her fear. When I was little, I struggled to not sleep in a particular position, as I wanted to avoid looking like the buried bodies during the Bronze Age that I saw in my history textbook. Everything was dangerous and disasters seemed to be just around the corner. But my biggest fear had always been losing my dad. Dad was eighteen years older than Mum, they had me when he was in his fifties. As a child, for nights, I had counted down how many years I still had with Dad.

Surprisingly, when I was in high school, Mum decided to pursue a Master's Degree in Life-Death Study, an extended field of Thanatology. Mum later lectured on the origin of Taiwanese funeral culture in the university. Instead of dodging the idea of demise, she seemed to choose the extreme opposite action, turning directly into its face. To this day, I still don't know what had changed the way she thought.

My sister was pregnant with their second child and still worked and lived in a different city. It was mostly Mum and me before the funeral. We were acting very calm and sensible during that time. We talked to each other normally like nothing major had really happened. Even when Mum received condolences from their friends, Dad's students and ex-colleagues, there was no sudden sobbing or

tears. Apart from the preparations that needed to be taken care of, things carried on as usual. The only significantly different thing was that dense, inescapable atmosphere in the room.

Dad was lying on yellow silk and satins. We walked around the coffin and left the room in order. If that was the last time I saw him in my life, I don't think I had the quality time with him I would have liked. People were waiting for the funeral to proceed.

He didn't really look like him, not even like when he was asleep. I probably thought to myself, he wasn't really there anyway. I don't know whether it was because his 'spirit' or ‘soul’ had left his physical body or because of other reasons which I couldn't grasp. Strangely, my eyes were instantly full of tears. That reasonable mindset that managed the preparation of the funeral suddenly disappeared.

Not long ago, Mum sent my sister and me some photos of Dad, the ones of him teaching in college. He didn't really resemble how I remembered him. Many times, I've thought it would make a difference if there was a video of him. I think I would start recognising him if I heard his voice or saw him move. Perhaps his 'soul' can be recalled in the form of moving image.

Deathbed

Considering her actions more like a game at the beginning of her art journey, Sophie Calle examines human behaviours by being a stalker, or sometimes a detective. She exposes people's lives in a playful yet not necessarily innocent way, given a certain degree of privacy has been invaded. Through Calle's work, we peek at others' most intimate parts of life.

Calle's *Suite Vénitienne* took place in 1979 and was published in 1983 in book form as a diary and photographs. It documents the journey of Calle stalking an acquaintance whom she met once at a party, travelling from Paris to Venice for thirteen days. The journey terminated as the subject recognised her. During the production of *The Hotel* (1981), Calle worked as a chambermaid in a Venetian hotel for three weeks. When she performed her duties during this period of time, she carefully logged the guests' belongings with photographs alongside journals recording her observations of the guests during their stay. In *The Address Book* (1983), the artist interviews the people in an address book she found on the street, asking them to describe what they know about the owner.

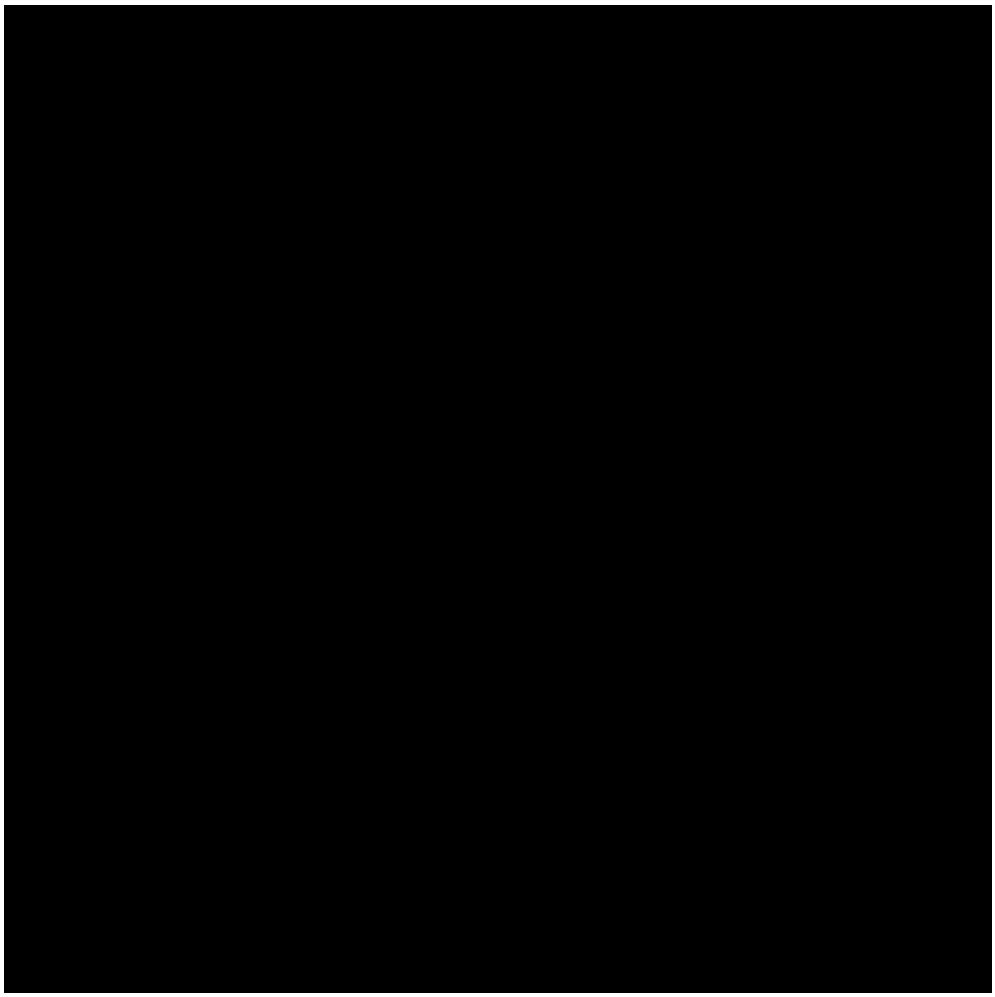
Calle's interpretation of the strangers in her writing, assigns them roles in her fiction. We will never know the people she investigated, perhaps neither will the artist, but we will happily imagine what they're like based on the information we are provided. We flip through those profiles that Calle has collected, like carefully assembled clues for a riddle, but we never feel the pressure to make an accurate assumption about the person we're looking at, and we don't feel guilty in creating someone else. It's just a game we play. A little bit of fact, a lot more of our imagination and our own desires. When reading Calle's words, we walk on the pathway Calle laid before us and we follow the thoughts she weaved. We might be contemplating the artist herself more than gazing at her subjects. Nevertheless, this double investigation ultimately reflects on our own behaviours — behaviours of being human. We thought we were tracing others, but aren't we just chasing our shadows?

Compared to the projects mentioned above, works such as *No Sex Last Night* (1996) and *Take Care of Yourself* (2007) reveal more of Calle's personal life. The former is a film documenting the road trip in the US taken by the artist and her then-boyfriend, which ends with the couple getting married in Las Vegas. The latter is in the form of a collection of videos and photographs by 107 women from different backgrounds and professions, who are invited by Calle to interpret a breakup letter from her ex-lover. Individually, each participant 'reads' the letter in her unique way, with dance, singing, instruments, with props like blow-up dolls or dressing up as a clown in their living or working spaces. For Calle, by asking these women to help her understand and answer this letter, is a way to respond what was written at the end of the letter - take care of yourself. In this project, roles seem to be swapped between the artist and her guests. Calle's emotion and personal experience now is the subject to be scrutinised.

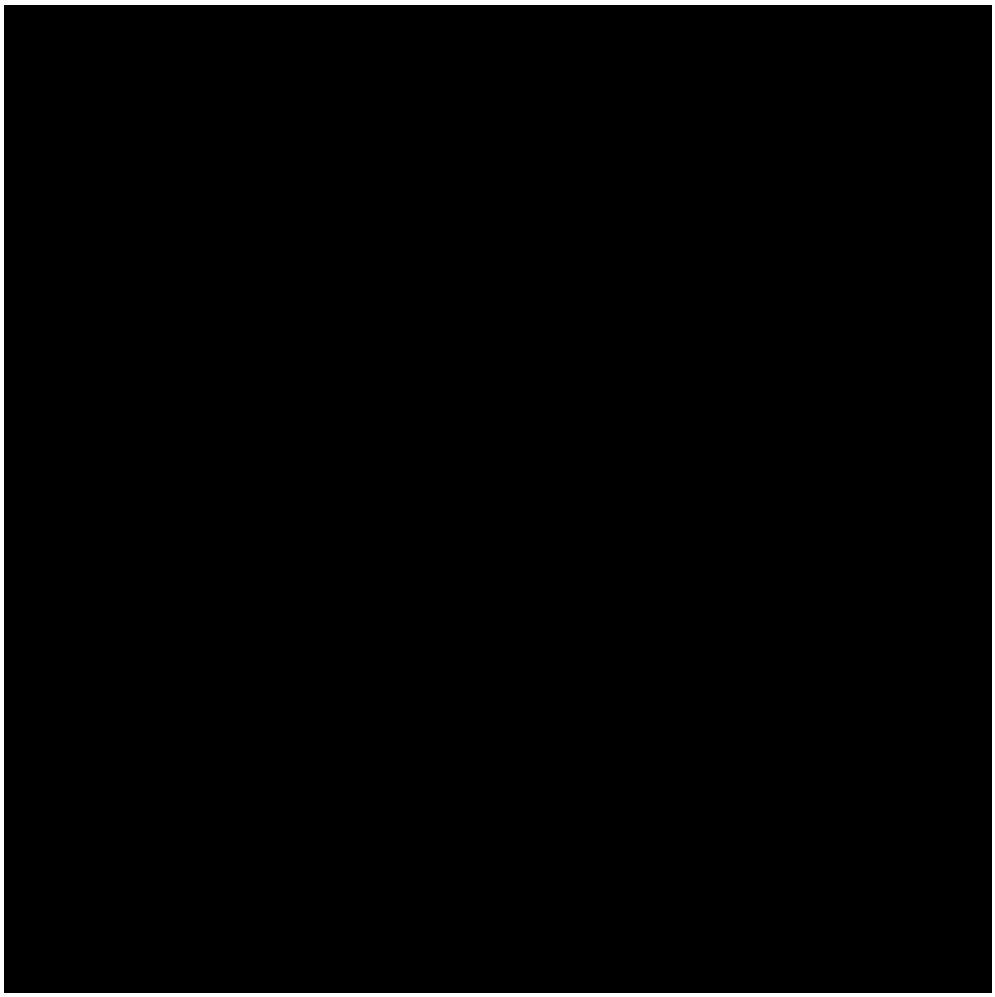
Calle's rawest depiction of human vulnerability is perhaps displayed in *Pas Pu Saisir La Mort* (*Translated into English as *Impossible to Catch Death*) (2007), an 11-minute video documenting the last moment of

her mother's life. The news of being invited to show in the Venice Biennale and of her mother dying in one month landed upon Calle at the same time. The curator of the Biennale tried to persuade Calle to show her ongoing films of her mother's deathbed. The artist sensed her mother's fears of not being able to see her exhibition in Venice so she decided to dedicate the new work to her mother, even though she wasn't mentally ready to show the private video. Similar to her mother's desire to participate in her daughter's important moment in life, Calle was also terrified of missing the last word and the last minute with her mother. Confessing it was an obsession to catch her mother's last breath, Calle set up a camera in the room and changed the tape every hour.[100] Towards the end of the video, the nurse comes in to check if the artist's mother is still alive.

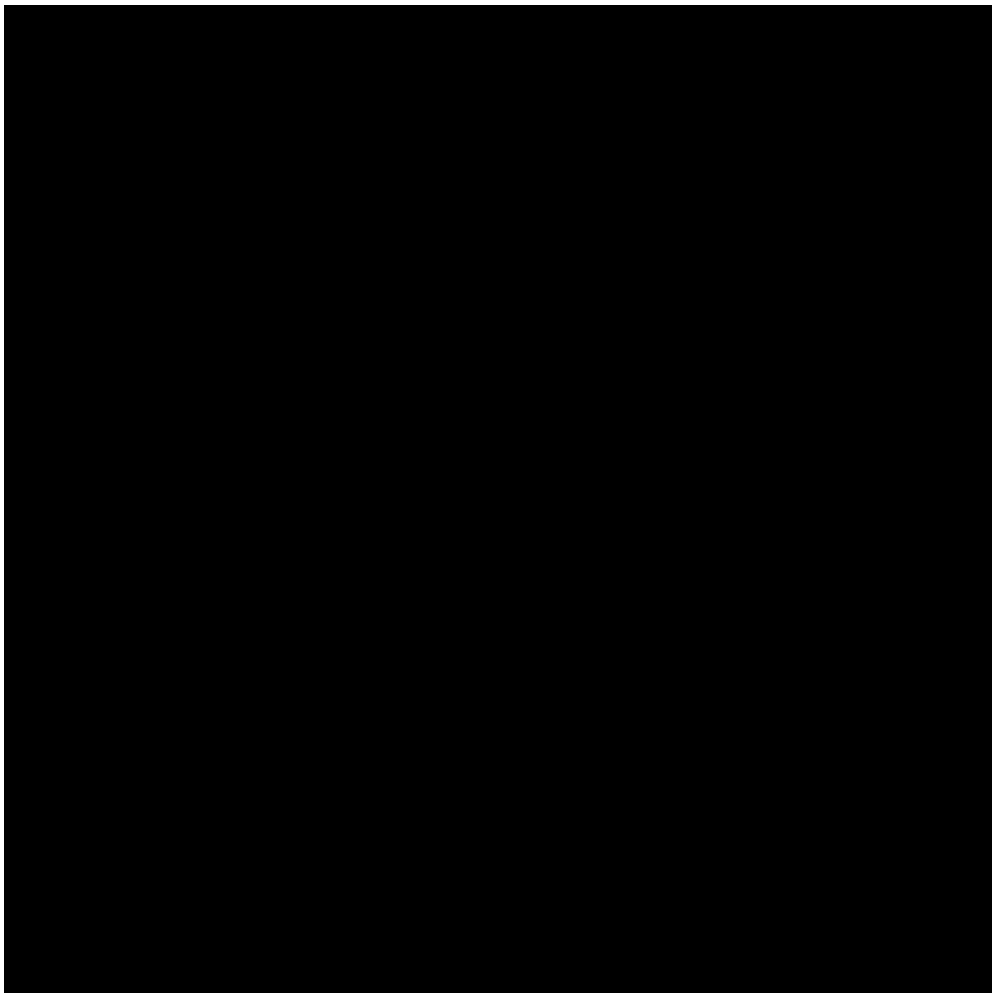
[100] Angelique Chrisafis, 'He loves me not', *The Guardian*, 16 Jun 2007 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/16/artnews.art> [accessed 29 March 2020]



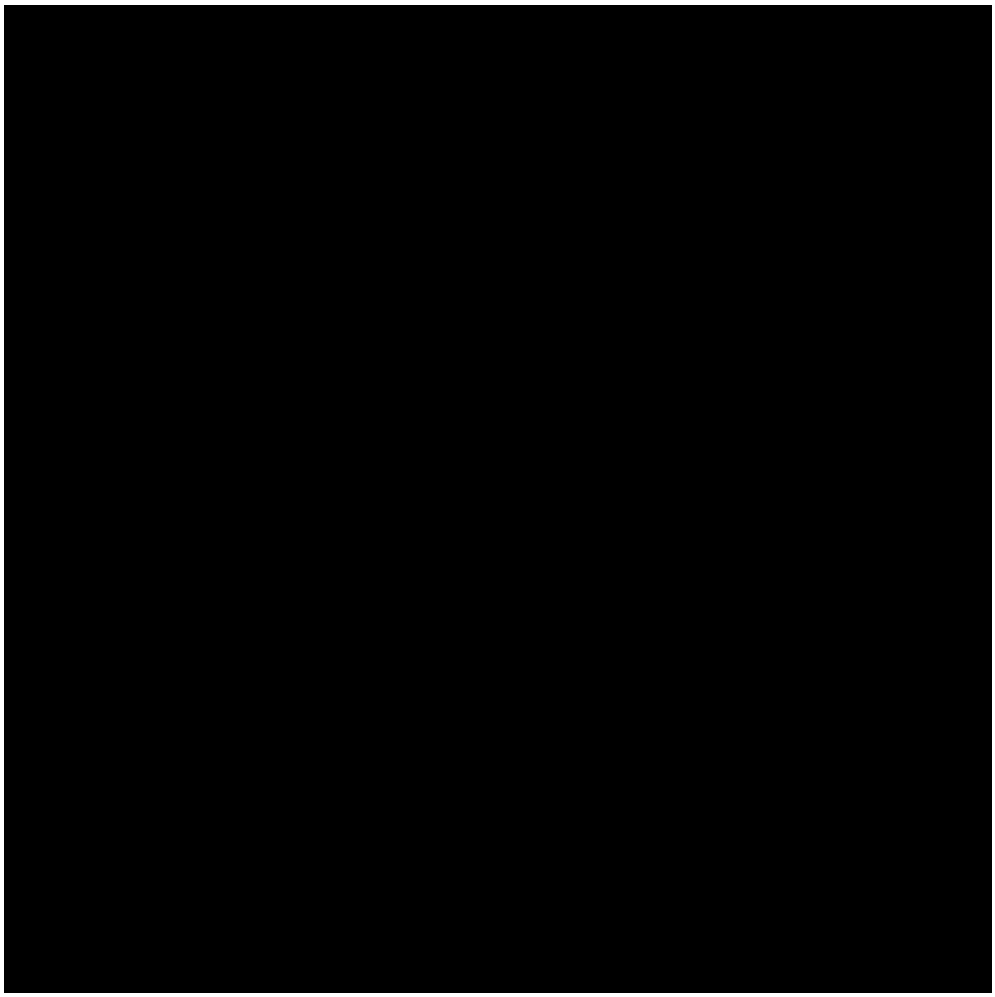
'Suite Vénitienne (1980-96)'
White Cube
1997



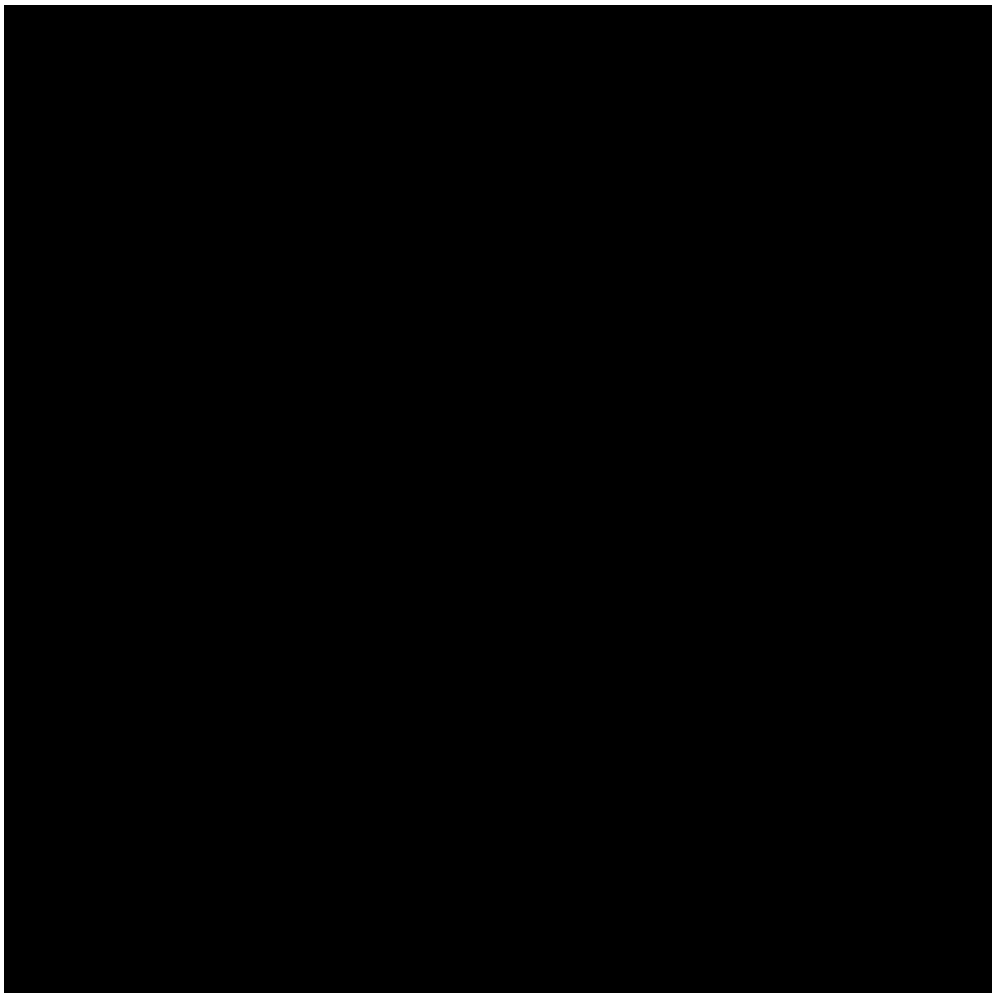
A spread of *Suite Vénitienne* re-published by Siglio Press in 2015.



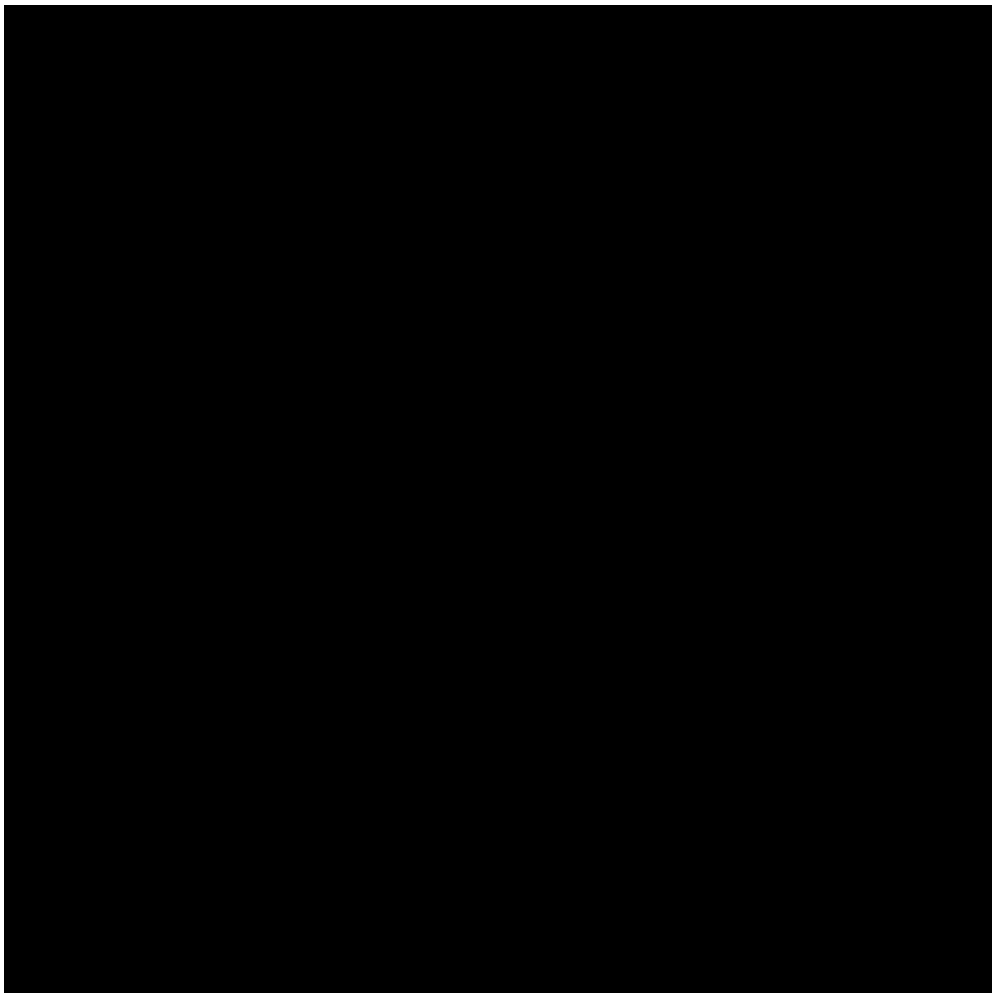
Sophie Calle
The Hotel, Room 28
1981



A spread of *The Address Book* re-published by Siglio Press in 2012.



'Take Care of Yourself'
Paula Cooper Gallery
2009



Sophie Calle
Pas Pu Saisir La Mort
(Impossible to Catch Death)
2007

家 (Home)

In order to cover some of my expenses in this city, I started working part-time at a Japanese restaurant in Mayfair a couple years ago. It was rough at the beginning because of the high standard of service the restaurant required. The number of details a waitress needed to take care of from the prep. room to the table was tremendous. I still feel pressured, especially sometimes when it gets extremely busy during auction and art fair season. The high pressure is challenging. It's not surprising to see waiting staff leave after their very first shifts.

Being able to speak Japanese and knowing basic Japanese etiquette helped me during the training and made building relationships with colleagues easier. My Japanese is not as fluent as my English, but at a level where I can communicate with my colleagues and sometimes chit-chat away.

Since then, my life in London has split into more distinguishable parts. Despite the obvious physical environmental differences between school, home and workplace, the division also manifests through thinking in different languages, cultures and roles. I appreciate the diversity a lot, although juggling different responsibilities can get a little confusing sometimes.

We also had other Mandarin speakers at work but we tended to speak English to reduce the friction caused by constant switching from one language to another. It was a practical reason but also because part of me felt the need to separate my worlds with languages.

During the year living with two Taiwanese flatmates, Mandarin slowly became a language that represents home. Something I didn't really notice until then was that the accent of Taiwanese Mandarin possessed a sense of familiarity. Our flat, because of the connection with the language, had a very strong image of home.

But it's a nostalgic one. It connected to my memories of living with my family, talking to my sister after school, and which ended after I moved out for university. Despite having a home together for a year, I know this feeling won't apply for my flatmates. We have different definitions of home and different impressions toward languages.

Nantes Triptych

In 1991, Bill Viola documented his mother's deathbed. As Calle, Viola didn't initially intend to use this personal footage in his work. Moreover, he had the tendency of completely separating his work and family videos. However, in an interview in 2013, Viola revealed that after a period of time doing nothing and questioning his role as an artist following his mother's death, he found his answers to what an 'artist' entails and what his mission is, he then started to incorporate his family videos into his studio works.[101]

In a form of a triptych, Viola's *Nantes Triptych* (1992) spreads a timeline of the beginning to the end of life; from the video on the left showing a woman in labour, which the artist filmed in a natural childbirth clinic, to the middle, a human body floating in the water, and finally the footage of his mother's end on the right.

Different from the images that document real-life events on either side, the central penal of *Nantes Triptych* is directed and filmed in a swimming pool by the artist. It exhibits a man submerged in water. His body floats limply, arms raised by the buoyancy, his hair and shirt drift slowly in the waves. If this image represents the journey between birth and death, it seems to move within reach of demise. Yet, it's unknown how close life is to its end.

Almost drowning in a lake when he was six years old, Viola's childhood near-death experience seems to have led him unceasingly to work with water. Not as a way to depict the trauma, but instead to reveal a different view that the artist holds for this life event. It turns out to be something closer to peace and to the contentment that belongs to the last step of a life journey.

Viola described the bottom of the water as the most beautiful world he's ever seen. He takes a similar tone in an interview with the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in 2011, where he discusses the experience of being with his mother when she drew her last breath.[102] He states "(it was) the most extraordinary thing I've ever seen in my life at any moment ever [...] It was just profoundly beautiful, profoundly sad, and mysterious beyond belief."

Compared to the newborn baby's crying upon its arrival, his mother's respirator produces a calm and stable rhythm, echoing in the quiet room. It gives death a sound, which dominates the room with a sense of certainty and confidence that dwells in the prospect of an approaching end.

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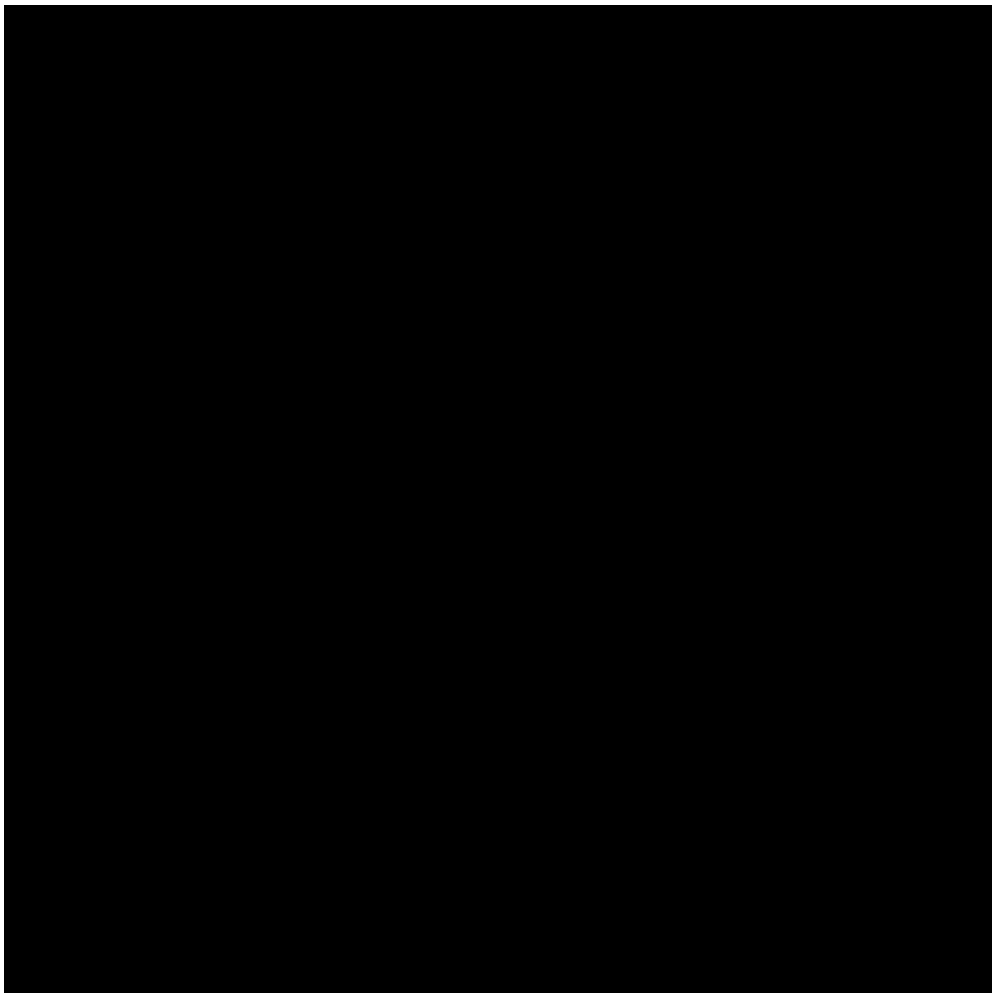
[101] Nicholas Wroe, 'Bill Viola: People thought I was an idiot and that video would never last', *The Guardian*, 23 May 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/23/bill-viola-video-artist-interview-tate-modern-st-pauls-cathedral> [accessed 29 March 2020]

[102] Christian Lund, *Bill Viola Interview: Cameras are Keepers of the Souls*, online video recording, Vimeo, 18 April 2013, <https://vimeo.com/64302189> [accessed 29 March 2020]



Bill Viola
Nantes Triptych
1992

Erasure

In 2014, a group of male students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College traveled to Mexico City to participate in a protest. On their way, the students clashed with the police force, resulting in severe casualties. It was believed the students were kidnapped and killed following the collision.

After this incident was revealed on Facebook, the social media users started to change their profile pictures into a completely black image. Ana Teresa Fernández acknowledged the gesture and decided to transform herself into one of those black squares physically through performance.

In her hour-long performance, documented and edited in video form, Fernàndez covers herself thoroughly with gallons of black acrylic paint. As the colour brushed on her body, the artist bit by bit sinks into the dark wall behind her. Later she made several large oil paintings with reference to the extracted still images from the video. These hyper-realistic paintings individually capture Fernandez's eyes, mouth, hands, arms, shoulders and the back of her head that submerge into the applied paint.

Titled *Erasure* (2016), the work commemorates the victims of violence and corruption that are gradually expunged with time. Fernàndez triggers her audience's curiosity towards the absence she creates to evoke the memory of the tragedy. In an interview, the artist expressed that this absence raised questions about who those disappeared individuals were; what happened in the world; and ultimately, what's life's value.[103]

Fernández's practice focuses on conveying intricate stories under social and political conflicts. She employs different media such as paintings, sculptures and videos to challenge ignorance and prejudices against gender, race and the underprivileged.

Moving to the US with her family when she was eleven, Fernández looks at the world with a more inclusive attitude and empathetic understandings for both sides of the fence that divides Mexico and the US. *Erasure* isn't the first project in which the artist brought attention to the issues in the two countries that had sculpted her identity.

In *Erasing the Border* (2011) the emphasis is on feminine strength, with Fernández in high-heels and a black cocktail dress, standing on a ladder, holding a spray gun and painting the border wall that sat between Playas de Tijuana of Mexico and San Diego's Border Field State Park with light blue paint. Coloured in the shade of the sky upon the beach, the wall seemed to be absorbed into the air.

The border in this context, signifies the economic and political tensions between the north and the south and the conflicted expectations towards females, while also representing opportunities on the

[103] Denver Art Museum, *Artist Ana Teresa Fernández Discusses "Erasure"*, online video recording, YouTube, 22 February 2017 <https://youtu.be/qI4GN5G6m2E> [accessed 29 March 2020]

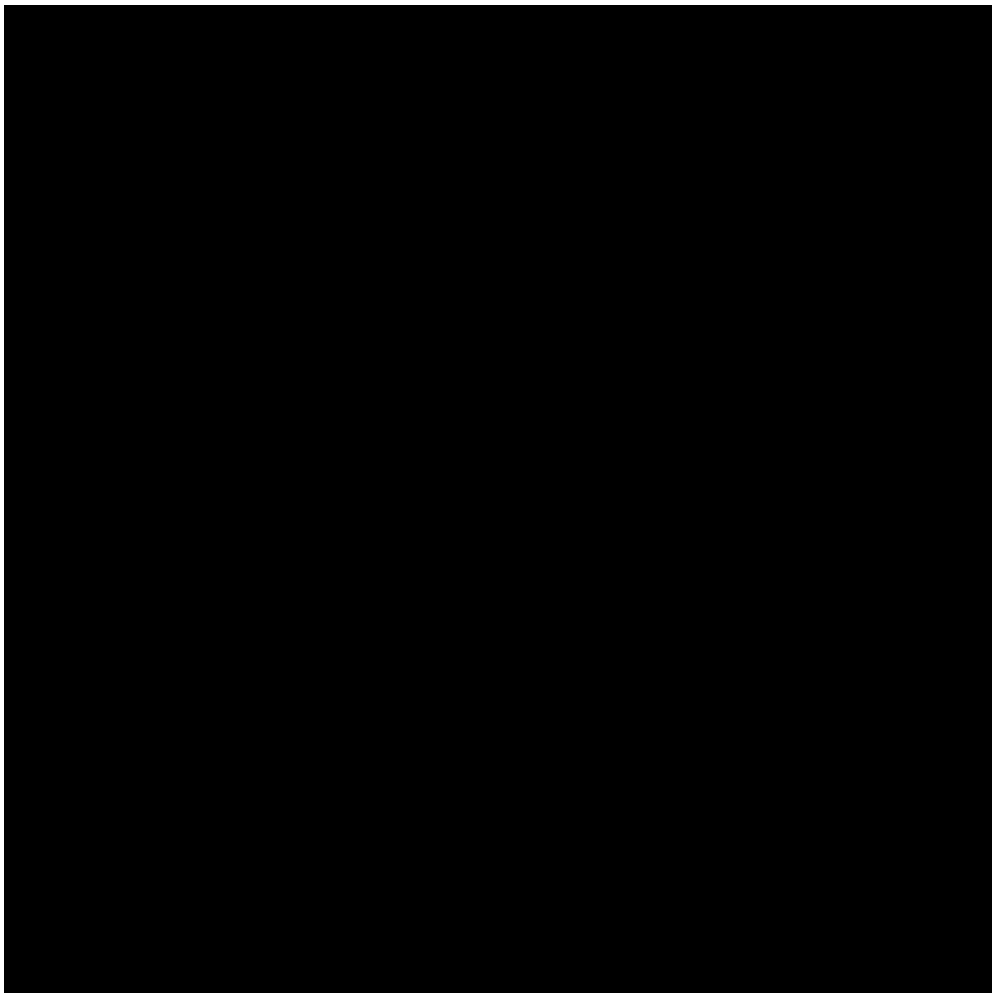
other side. As an immigrant from Mexico herself, crossing the tall wall promises a prospective better life, but at the same time, its existence also cruelly separates countless families.

In 2015, Fernández was invited by Arizona State University to again erase the two nations' border, but this time in Nogales, Mexico. With volunteers from Arizona and local Mexican residents on the other side of the border joining this project, the group spent six hours, covering fifty foot of the fence with clear sky-blue paint. The artist's erasure offers the dream of demolishing the boundaries raised by power and fear.

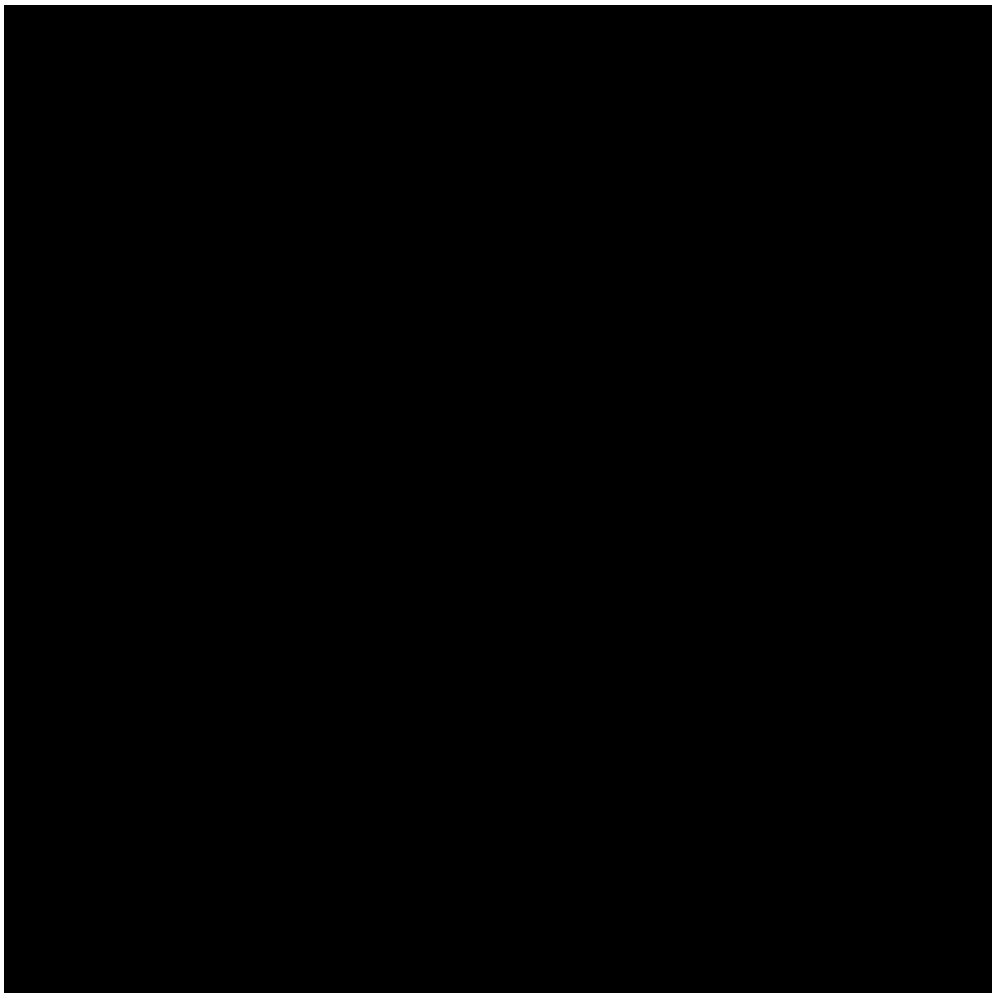
Different from subtraction, erasure in Fernández's practice is a form of adding: creating a new layer of paint to disguise an object into an imaginary state of existence. Both in *Erasure* and in *Erasing the Border*, the artist immerses her body and the border fence into the background. This adding is a way of creating illusions of something being erased, while physically the deleted retains its tangibility.

While glancing at the hole at the centre of the fence, it seems to give hope or certain vision of what an ideal world would be, yet it also reminds the viewers of, or even emphasises in a way, the harsh reality in opposition to the dream. The labour put into the making of this illusion, as shown in the documentation of Fernandez's erasure, presents a sense of absurdity that co-exists with the idea of utopia.

In her *Erasure*, Fernández's technique of addition is to wipe off her identity, which metaphorically is different from the erasure of the borders. However, what's consistent is that the absence it creates arouses the curiosity regarding what previously asserted its presence. This quality of erasure invests equal attention to what's perceivable and what's not, and neither is meaningful without the other.



Ana Teresa Fernández
Erasure (performance documentation)
2016



Ana Teresa Fernández
Erasing the Border (performance documentation)
2012

The Refusal of Time

The first time I encountered William Kentridge's work was *The Refusal of Time* at the dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012, a year people couldn't stop talking about the end of the world. This atmosphere was aggravated when we arrived in Kassel. We'd just visited Art Basel and spent some days in Paris. Distinct from those beautifully preserved historical buildings and glamorous ceiling-high windows in the exposition venues in our previous destinations, the architecture outside the train station Kassel Hauptbahnhof seemed to be stuck in the '60s. The weather in those few days in June was mostly gloomy and cold. I felt the heaviness of the artworks that carried serious issues through history to the recent past. It seemed to follow me the whole journey, hauntingly. The only time I felt slightly lifted was when we sat down having ice cream, sharing the lawn with a protest camp in front of Fridericianum, one of the main exhibition venues. Apart from the main popular exhibition locations, the town was eerily quiet.

Located in one of the train workshop structures in Kassel Hauptbahnhof, Kentridge's collaboration with composer Philip Miller, filmmaker Catherine Meyburgh and scientist Peter Galison, *The Refusal of Time* was one of the works that attracted the largest footfall in the dOCUMENTA exhibition. Combined with live-action, charcoal drawn animation, film, sculpture, dance and music, the moving image installation surrounded the audience with five connected projections on three walls. For some parts, the images are played separately as individual stages, for others, the projections are connected together forming a horizontal long canvas. In the centre of the room sat a couple of megaphones and the 'elephant' - a breathing Leonardesque machine, inspired by Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, where the author depicts the piston of a steam-engine worked up and down "as the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness."[104] In an interview, Kentridge compares the human body to a form of a clock by giving an example of how Galileo measured time with his own pulse when observing pendulums.[105] With the wide range of materials shown in the work, Kentridge discusses the notion and the control of time with Harvard physicist and historian Peter Galison, referencing Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, history of the 19th century Industrial Age and colonialism.

The artist had been interested in the history of cinema for its capability to manipulate time with a set of new terms and techniques that didn't exist before its evolvement. Ten years after the invention of cinema, the theory of relativity liberated the world from the universal clock time. Comparing these two significant developments in human history, Kentridge grew his curiosity about the perception of time before and after the revolutionary theory.

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[104] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times: For These Times* (New York: Signet Classic, 1997), p.22.

[105] Christian Lund, *William Kentridge On 'The Refusal of Time',* online video recording, Vimeo, 12 April 2017 <https://vimeo.com/212907506> [accessed 29 March 2020]

In his thirty minute moving image installation, Kentridge uses references to photography and cinema from 1905, signifying the period of time when Einstein's theory of relativity was developed. The artist explains the incoherent elements used in the work — the black and white film, dance of Dada Masilo and techniques such as a zoetrope, a pre-film device that is employed to perform repetitive body movements — as a way he collates the history of cinema and the changing understanding of time.

The compact metaphors within Kentridge's installation are inspired by historic events that have defined the notions of time and its rulers. The work covers a plethora of topics, ranging from Newton's precise time, to the International Meridian Conference of 1884 (the meeting which determined the universal adoption of Greenwich Mean Time), to the bombing of the Royal Observatory in 1894 (a symbolic event demonstrating anarchist activity against the British domination of the world), to the presentation of a death march (symbolising shadows in the cave as described in Plato's *Republic*).

The Refusal of Time explores the relative time experienced with our body and mind and the absolute time ordered by authorities as a means to investigate the relationship between the docile body and the body of sovereignty, and to give hope of potential changes from a mundane, mechanical life under a certain mandate and ideology.

Kentridge was born into a Jewish family, and raised during and post-apartheid (1948-1990s) in South Africa. His parents both actively fought for equality for Black natives as lawyers. With the context and history of Jewish oppression, which saw Jewish people escaping and settling in South Africa, Kentridge's practice has been largely focused on issues of colonialism, power, injustice, redemption and faith.[106]

Kentridge's long-term project, a ten-part animated film series *Drawings for Projection* (1989-2011) illustrates two distinctive characters representing two ideas during and post-apartheid era: Soho Eckstein, a cruel and greedy mine owner, whose focus is only placed on the expansion of his empire, disregarding the welfare of his native Black workers, and by contrast, Felix Teitlebaum, an innocent artist who struggles between his fantasy and his awareness of the occurrences, which in this series, refers to the political events in South Africa including the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the oppression and abuses during the apartheid era, and the release of Nelson Mandela after twenty-seven years of imprisonment in 1990. Kentridge's two opposite roles reflect the conversation between the artist's conflicting identities incubating in a complex sequence of social and political movements.

Kentridge's signature charcoal animation is created through constant drawing, erasure and redrawing on the same piece of paper to compose each frame. After redrawing on the partially implemented and incomplete erasure, each frame shows the debris left from its previous images, marking the flowing movement of Kentridge's making and undoing.

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[106] Michael Rothberg, 'William Kentridge: An Implicated Subject', *AJS Perspectives* <http://perspectives.ajsnet.org/culture/william-kentridge-an-implicated-subject/> [accessed 15 November 2021]

In an interview with curator Dan Cameron, Kentridge tries to explain how erasure captured time. [107] He takes his walk around the table in his studio as an example, asking Cameron to imagine this movement being captured by the artist's animation technique of repetitive drawing and erasing. Kentridge's partial deletion and redrawing on the same surface would reveal his trace of movement. On the contrary, photography or traditional animation would only document different stages of his position onto individual frames.

The artist explains that the imperfect erasure within his work emphasises the passing time, which he considers to be "the heart of the drawing or piece of the film."[108] Through erasure and drawing, what's temporal became visible, what's been released from a fixed state holds the truth that shows the moment of processing. Kentridge states:

> Temperamentally, it fits in with what I experienced as a profound uncertainty, a very deep-rooted uncertainty regarding the way in which it's possible to depict or to draw different transitions. An object becoming another object, a state of mind becoming a different state of mind, an exterior view of the body becoming an interior X-ray. They allude at the most to the fact that things change and that they are contradictory [...] the ongoing position I'm trying to pin down in the drawings and in the films — is that of the persistence and robustness of contradiction.[109]

Instead of considering it as a metaphoric gesture, the erasure in Kentridge's moving image literally makes the past moment visible and tangible.

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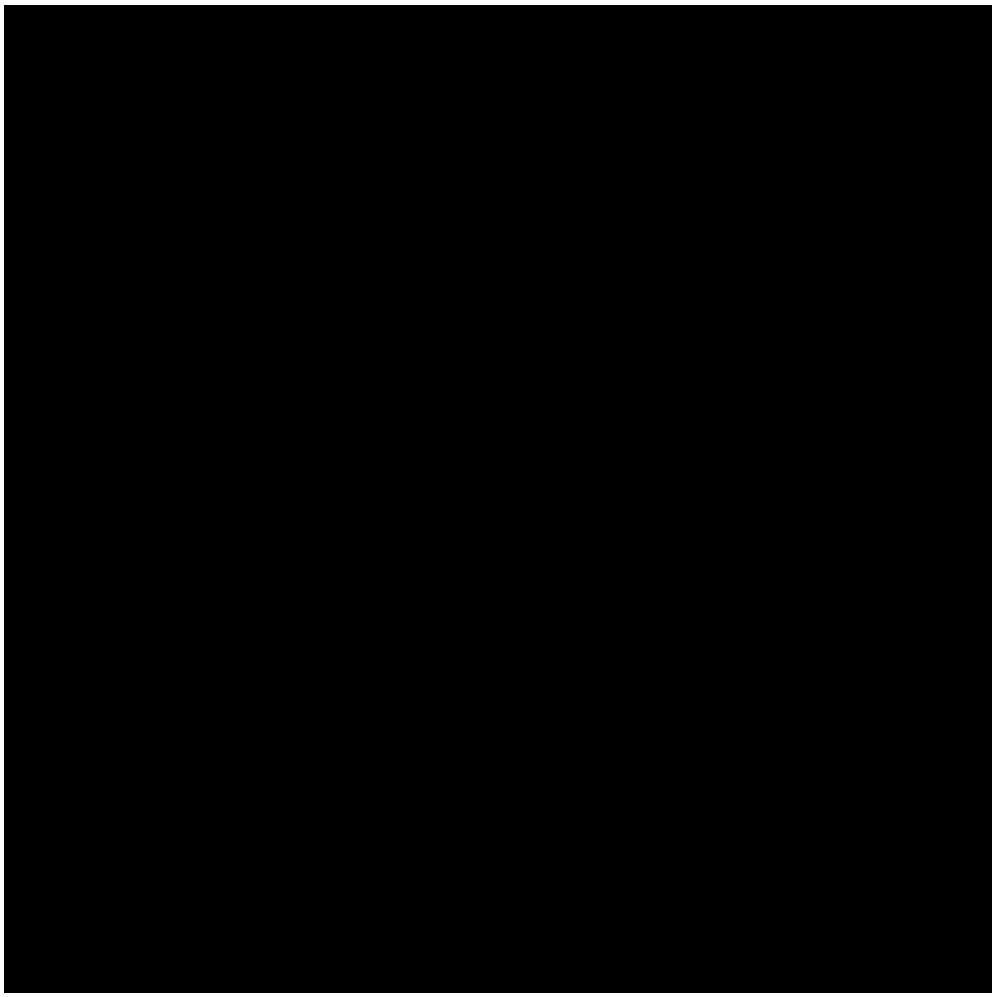
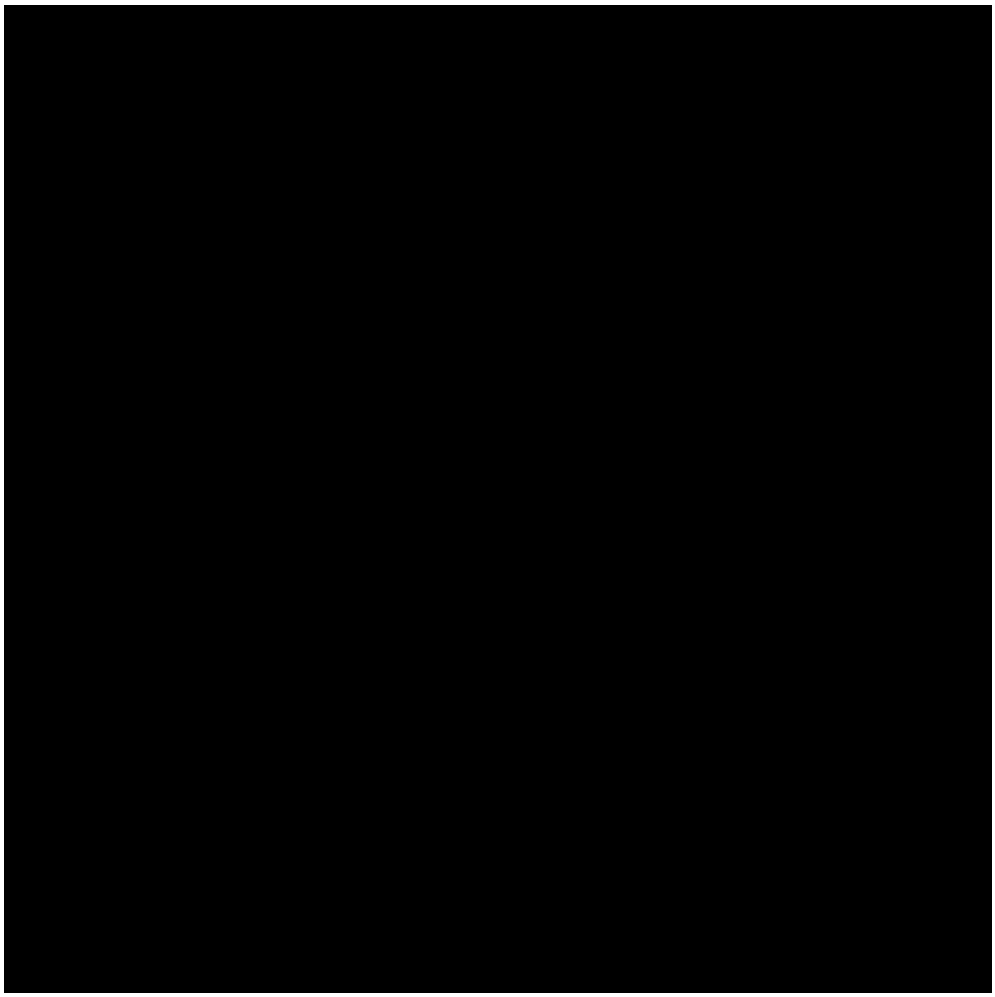
[107] Dan Cameron, 'An Interview with Willian Kentridge' in William Kentridge, ed. by Michael Sittenfield (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001), pp. 67-74.

[108] Ibid., pp.67.

[109] Ibid., pp.68.



William Kentridge
The Refusal of Time
2012



William Kentridge
Drawings for Projection
1989 - 2011

Tomorrow

I used to write down short sentences to describe what bothered me and how I felt when I was younger. I drew those events, also things I liked and things that upset me. It was stressful at school and home wasn't any better. But I still managed to create some funny cartoons and heartwarming stories. I remember my sister liked the one I wrote when I was in primary school, about when a polar bear sent his paw print on the snow to his beloved friends.

I still wrote and drew something every now and then after I graduated from university. But when Dad reached a certain point, and I stopped believing he would come back healthy and with a clear mind again, I gradually shut those expressions down. After all, compared to what he was suffering from, I knew nothing about pain. I was drowned in things that had become countless distractions. I worked from eight in the morning until midnight. I was content living in the tiniest room in a shared flat, having takeaway dinner in front of the computer every night.

I visited my home city, two and a half hours away from the capital (where I was living) and stayed for a weekend once a month. I would go to the nursing home and see Dad when I was there. I felt guilt whenever I saw or thought of him. I felt guilt whenever I felt happy.

There was a time my mum and sister went on holiday together. They asked if I could visit Dad and join his dinner on the weekend when they were away. Not long after I left the nursing home after visiting on the first evening, I realised that I had forgotten to bring the house key with me, which would have allowed me to stay overnight in my old bedroom. I took the bus back to the capital hours away and returned to the nursing home the next day.

When Mum asked me why I returned the next day, I told her it was because I had promised Dad I would visit him ‘tomorrow’, so I did. This is the only thing that would give me comfort when thinking about myself in the memory of Dad's later years. The fact that I am mentioning it here is nothing more than an attempt to forgive myself for running away from him.

Please click here to see the *Tomorrow* series.

Aki Pao-Chen Chiu
Tomorrow
2021

Reading Dreams

I saw some missed calls from Mum the other night. It was around three in the morning at her end. I called back in case it was something urgent. Mum said I was in her dream, wearing a strange hat. She couldn't sense if it was "a good message or not", how she usually described a dream, so decided to call to check if I was okay.

It seems like I appear in Mum's dreams very frequently, which I can understand, she just naturally worries because of the physical distance between us. While I think dreams are pure reflections of what's in one's mind during the day, Mum takes it seriously. Quite often, in the middle of our conversations, Mum would mention something she dreamt to support her opinions. Those images in her mind are as valid as a rational analysis for her.

Mum believes a dream is prophetic, so did Dad. He even edited a book about the meanings of symbols in dreams according to *The Duke of Zhou*, an ancient dream interpretation book.[110] The symbolic system is important in dream interpretation. In the book items or situations that could appear in a dream have individual meanings, which also change between different interactions with the objects. For example, when one dreams about a snake, the colour and movement of the snake would decide whether the dream foresees a fortunate encounter or the opposite.

I understand some of those symbols in *The Duke of Zhou*, animals like a horse, peacock or eagle usually represents good luck. But even though I can understand it culturally, it doesn't mean much to me personally. I could have a particular relationship with the things I dream about and I suppose that would also change the narratives.

I guess that's why Mum 'feels' dreams, instead of simply reading the symbols. In a way, she's probably more skillful at reading a whole picture than I am when it comes to understanding images. Although it still annoys me sometimes when a dream scene is brought up during an argument, isn't that similar to the challenge I'm encountering, validating an image?

[110] *The Duke of Zhou* 周公夢解全書, ed. by Nian-Yong Chiu & Zhi-Cheng Li 邱年永&李志誠編輯, (Taichung City: Ke-Yi 克一出版, 2001).

conclusion

Personal Stories

Beginning from the floor map of my childhood home, this written thesis travels through Twombly's Mediterranean island to Kentridge's video installation in Kassel. Joining these destinations are visits to the memories about my father and contemplations on language occurring between scenes in Taiwan and the UK.

My wanderings meet with artists' drawings of memories, such as the walk with Cardiff and Whitread's inverted architects. I see artists' uses of erasure showing rich possibilities of this form of absence to depict time, labour, poems, protests, despair and hope. Through mechanical overexposure, Sugimoto compresses hours into a glaring shot. Jaar's beaming light box and Fernández's covering of her body illustrate the silenced victims. The blank on the banner in Ligon's work recognises the unheard voice of African American Women. Kentridge materialises the passing moment in the vestige of erasure left on his animation.

These encounters illustrate memories as an energy that not only lives in our mind but also in physical spaces. They are also pictured as something that's deeply connected to our body, which has tactile textures, has movements and breathings. Memories allude to a past time where reality and dreams can co-exist. They are ghosts that are difficult to capture yet linger in a persistent period. These encounters help us to understand the nature of memories and how they can be portrayed in art, and their relation to artists' chosen medium. I consider the role of moving image in illustrating memories: What does the time-based quality of moving image play in this? How can an erasure portray grief? In between these speculations, I returned to my personal memories, where I observe old versions of myself that I carry to the present. This part of me embodies the fear, sorrow and remorse before and after my father's passing.

As these mixed emotions and recollections come across more analytical thinking, such as when I compare memories to dreams through reading Murch's theory and Viola's installation work; or when I place my erasure aside to Rauschenberg and Capurro's uses of the artistic technique, I look at my grief from a new intellectual angle. As conversations develop, I absorb theories in an intimate way by reflecting on my stories. Contrariwise, through the lens of the referred materials, I can observe how artists connect their life happenings to their artworks, and I can also recognise the role of my own experience in cultivating my way of thinking and feeling, and how this is presented in my work.

This finding made me realise what's private is still perceivable and potentially valuable to others. The personal aspect in makings of art, which I had long interpreted as art being too self-centred hence irrelevant to others, seems to become less fatal or isolated.

In the final chapter, I recall the last scene at my father's funeral followed by the writings on the documentations of deathbeds by Calle and Viola. Although as inimitable as these individual

experiences are, this familiar tension within the quietness of dying permeates through the images, echoing with my vignette of the event. There is a sense of consolation that I didn't know it was needed until I see my mourning being recognised. I now can finally visualise how the work I share can also give others comfort and even help one to gain insights of their own.

These interwoven dialects showcases how knowledge can be comprehended emotionally and how sentiments can be examined intellectually. The auto-theoretical approach is able to reflect and respond to the different facets of a practice. It treats them as equally important inputs to the body of work.

Previous Education

In the first chapter, I addressed the fear of defining my practice as I was afraid that a given meaning would misinterpret what I did and give false direction to my future work. I later figured that this fear was generated by how I was educated in my early life, when I spent the majority of my time staring at the examination sheet, finding the only one correct answer to the question. Whatever was written down was either right or wrong. This way of identifying knowledge then impacted the way I see language. In my mind, language always held a position to represent that structural system.

The choice of pursuing advanced education in art showcased the need to be validated and qualified so I could become a 'real artist', who wasn't self-claimed but formally equipped with knowledge in art history and refined skills. It also indicated going back to the same environment where, in my mind, knowledge was always in a binary form. Within such a system I thought that art should be evaluated the same way. Since my undergraduate studies, I had always found this concept contradictory but, in a way, it seemed to promise a manual that would lead me to accomplish my goal if I followed the instruction step by step. I thought that made things easier.

Through the flowing conversations between subjective perceptions and investigative readings, I discovered a connection between my bereavement and erasure. This realisation didn't come from my old stubbornness, which tended to assign direct meanings to individual colours or shapes or forms in an image. Instead, it is a circuitous route in which meanings are mediated through a range of overlapping subjects. In a way, like presenting a picture, the job of mediation is to join the links between various interconnected components that compose the whole.

This intertwinement offered me an opportunity to re-examine my relationship with language. I considered this rational and rigid structure that used to accompany me in the classrooms was the only way to effectively communicate through art, despite how fluid and intuitive art could be. My previous attempts to find a linguistic equivalence for a visual symbol and to fix it into a verbal structure were driven by this trust. This specific way of reasoning was my old image of academia. Its pragmatism and meticulousness represent a certain superiority that was able to recognise the value of my work.

It reminds me of my Master's study where I talked about the pursuit of being correct with a proper manner, education, family background and being recognised as good by others, especially by authorities. My obedience to a certain hierarchical power didn't perish when I handed in my dissertation. Instead, it continued to influence the way I thought and how I understood creativity.

The way I look at my fear of defining my practice has shifted. I recognised that it originated from my belief that an absolute definition existed. Everything was unequivocal, without other possibilities, like answers to questions on the examination sheet. Only one true statement could explain my practice.

During my Master's study, the meaning assigned to the ceaseless labour of producing an artwork marked my curiosity about the relationship between external expectations and bodily internalisations. During that time, I made a work documenting the training of my non-dominant hand. My repeated circle drawing was a response to the life-long hand practice of my aunt, who lived with cerebral palsy yet lived up to others' expectations.

But this repetitive task that also appeared in the erasure of *A Glass of Wate*r also illustrates a sense of healing and destruction answering the loss. The divergence between the interpretations, however, doesn't mean one of them is mistaken. Similar to Fernández's use of erasure, which also has different meanings in each work. This physical gesture can embody multiple intentions at the same time depending on its contexts. The mediation of meanings is never straightforward or simply right or wrong.

Grief

At the beginning of this research, I assigned different focuses to each chapter. The intention was for these chapters to explore, firstly, the topic of memories in relation to objects and spaces, followed by studies of how erasure can be used as an artistic expression, and then, finally, a discussion on how such an expression can be presented in moving image works. I thought through this arrangement, I could step by step establish an argument that validates the use of erasure in my moving image works as a visual representation of fading memories.

In the chapter 'Memories' I planned to argue that the everyday objects that I frequently use in my work, were a material embodiment of memories and sentiments. Referring to Horner's scientific findings on the formation of memories, which illustrated memories as compressed collections of senses, I was going to use this emphasis to support my argument. I would propose that the senses involved in our interactions with everyday objects compose our memories, hence, we projected sentimental value to certain objects.

However, following Viola's discussion on the human consciousness in special relation to time-based media diverted me from my original intention. Viola expresses that in the physical world, time-based works can only be experienced in a linear fashion and they're unable to be seen as an entirety at once. On the contrary, in the mind of an audience, who watched the video, the work is appreciated as a complete experience of the presentation. A moving image work is no longer restricted to its material condition which can only show it as an orderly sequence of frames. Viola suggests only our consciousness can release a video from a fixed direction of time and, in that condition, our mind is the only place the work exists.

I reflect on Horner's discovery of a memory as a compact experience of the event. Like my visit to Viola's *Inverted Birth*, the memory also embodies that warm summer in Copenhagen. As I recall that stored perception of his work, in my mind it is a condensed stream of overlapping senses and information. It's non-linear but multi-dimensional. My reading through neuroscience and the artistic examination at that point reveals an important finding that I didn't realise until later on in this writing up process.

Through exploring the relationship between art and language, I noticed that even though a word, such as 'grief', can be known from the dictionary, the grief I write about can't be understood fully with its definition. No one's grief has ever been.

As with my new understanding of the shaping of memories, my grief is also a complex appreciation of reality. This written thesis articulates grief by addressing the recollection of my lives and travels between Taiwan and the UK. It tells of my hope to develop a sustainable creative career established upon mainstream international education. Yet the decision to leave my family seems to me as my

failing to be an ideal daughter. I write about my limited capacity to express such struggles in a second language. As words accumulate, this writing also illustrates the tensions between my self-doubt, guilt, homesickness, family bonding, desires and conflicted identities between cultural scenes and responsibilities. My grief stretches across the time long before the death and extends to the future. These internal combats transform into my moving image work, telling of interwoven timelines and rumination in a form of erasure, portraying an uneasy tranquillity of emptiness.

By looking at other artists' uses of erasure as a technique within artworks that encompass personal relationships with race, politics, culture and materiality, this new understanding of grief further discovers and confronts my relation to the environment I dwell in. I re-examine my roles as an individual also as a part of bigger contexts, whether physically as to locations I occupy or conceptually where social aspects are concerned. My grief is still the grief I experienced, but through making writings and images, this intense sorrow is apprehended more profoundly as a serial inspection of agencies that form my understandings of the self and the world around me.

A Second Language

Among the methodology, writing style, format and content, I noticed that the role of a second language emerged and became a crucial component to draw the picture of this research.

Writing in a second language means being deprived of the ability to speak more intuitively. Sometimes a very simple sentence makes me go back and forth between different dictionaries, Google searching examples of similar expressions, and making sure of I'm using the correct grammar. Even with a tremendous amount of time invested in this process, lines can still look unnatural and awkward, words are still limited in a range of vocabularies.

This imperfection in handling the language resulted in an involuntary candidness and exposure of my rawest thoughts without pretty decorations. It performs against my goal to write like a 'proper academic'. At the same time, these fiddling nuances challenge what I thought was 'proper', and my intention to deny and pretend.

The personal anecdotes that are woven into this writing present a form of confession. As the increased intimacy little by little revealed realisations about my practice, I began to accept the clumsiness in my writing. I expect this undisguised voice lead me to invaluable lessons through genuineness like those stories have done. This unintentional defect perhaps portrays my struggles to recognise myself in-between diverse social contexts in a most effective way.

The intimacy of this auto-theoretical practice has been compounded by writing within an alien language and the vulnerability this creates in me. In this research, language not merely serves as a communication tool but also as an epitome of my milieu and identities that together sculpt my practice. While auto-theory provides the opportunity to express the emotional aspects of knowledge, a second language, like a unique fingerprint which differs from individual to individual, showcases the detailed and indescribable subtleties of living in a complex environment. Cultivated through the things I read and see since my arrival in London, from articles to TV programmes to everyday conversations and all the other trivial bits, my English depicts the experience of a specific combination of circumstances, time and locations.

It is only through this methodological approach that such qualities of a second language can be recognised and acknowledged as a device to depict the abstract yet significant influences on my practice.

Mothers

At the end of each main chapter I place a link to a webpage that shows a group of my moving image works. The stories narrated in these works are the personal memories about my father that are included in the corresponding chapters. Scrolling down vertically, these pages present a linear order of the stories and images, like blog posts documenting daily memories with texts, pictures and videos. However the contents are of scattered disconnected recollections combined with dream scenes and images, presenting a bizarre reality.

The first collection *Botanist* opens with the text, which is also from the opening main subchapter of this written thesis, about my attempt to depict the floor map of my childhood home to recall the memories about my father. Placed next to the words there is water running into a white ceramic dish. Its shape turns from semi-transparent to more solid as the liquid fills up the tableware. This round china reminds of the round dining table in my childhood memory under which I played hide and seek. A light shines across the page following this introduction text that leads the audience into this dream-like memory. The silent video shows photo slides being placed beyond a lit candle, one after another. The shivering light reveals the images of Taiwanese plants as the photos move above the flame. In the next video these plants become alive with their stalks waving in the faint glow. Again a candle light brings up their shapes and colours. As a female voice narrates the memory about my father looking into his photo slides it presents an illusion that a viewer is also in this memory observing those oddly swinging plants. The memory around the dining table that concludes the opening subchapter is also mentioned at the closing of this video. A short looped moving image comes after the dancing flowers and leaves, showing a crimson tulip flower being cast into a body of water. Rotated into a horizontal position the flower drops from the right side of the page into the water, like the flower is lying down, instead of in a standing position. At the end there is a video showing water pouring into invisible glasses in an indoor and an outdoor space. The same female voice as in the previous video tells the memories about three objects that belonged to my father. This recollection marks the end of the first main chapter. The background of the section where the video locates is my father's drawing of a rabbit that’s mentioned in the narration.

This collection presents constant misplacements of time and space, reality and imaginations, take place in the juxtapositions between the actual photo slides and the animated ones, the drawing of the rabbit and the erased glasswares. They are accompanied by noises and illuminations of London's nighttime cityscape, my mother's voice that speaks Taiwan's local language and chirps of the island's birds and insects. This collection emphasises the event of my father's death, at the start of this research project. The continuous appearance of candle light symbolises a gesture of remembrance. The image of the single flower is perfectly framed like a portrait but purposely rotated like a coffin lying across the page. These images from the round white dish at the beginning to the tulip flower imply an angle of view from above, an angle looking at the dirt. Yet the memory recalled alongside the waving

plants tells my father's movement of holding photos up towards the ceiling light, overlapping an imaginary angle that is also a position when we search for heaven. In the last work of this collection, *Belongings*, the slow motion prolongs the moment of water falling, presenting the vivid details of the flow. The suspensions before the first drop of water and the last that slides into the liquid aggravate the restrained emotion expressed in the narration. It tells the memories about three objects I collected from Taiwan while the backgrounds show my room in London and a communal area outside an art studio in Copenhagen — mundane moments that are distant from the memories and the venues where they happened.

The second collection *Dream* presents images and stories that blend dream scenes with memories. It opens with a text describing a falsely recognised closure that leads to more detailed recollections about my father. In the background illuminations of cityscapes layer up into a string of bright lights. These lights, recorded in London and other places in the UK and Europe, eventually disappear into darkness as a candle flame was quenched. The following video shows a stall illuminating on the side of a road. Viewing from across the traffic the audience can see cars running in front of the little store, yet these cars are without their physical bodies, only the headlights indicate what they are. My mother's voiceover this time in Taiwanese Mandarin, telling of a dream about me as a child waiting on my father's scooter for his return from a street vendor. The narrated story echoes the scene in the image yet the store and the background noises again suggest a different time and space from the memory. Within a moment the waving plant that is seen in the previous work surfaces on the street wall and soon disappears with a passing car light. Approaching the end of the video, the light from the stall goes out abruptly as the narration stops, leaving the image pitch black, only the sounds of people talking and laughing still perceivable but slowly they also fade away. A text describing a similar childhood memory about waiting for my father on the scooter comes afterwards. Between the English text and Mandarin translation is a looped video showing water constantly waving from one side to the other inside an invisible glass. This glass resembles the one that's in the next moving image work *Snow Field*, where the camera captures it from above as a male voice in English tells of a dream scene where he (or I) flies and overlooks a snowy land. The shape of water gradually appears from the dark as the light that shines on it becomes brighter. It flickers and unsettles like a candle light. It also mimics the waving water shown above as the gleams swing rapidly. At the end of this video the light reaches its brightest and like other works exhibited in this collection, it disappears suddenly turning the image into a complete black canvas.

This collection continues to play around the assumed and perceived dimensions. The presented images have the elements resonating with the spoken words yet always exhibit disjointed parts. *Dream* illustrates dream-like memories and memories that resurface in dreams. They are between a swinging state of uncertainty as this collection blends in similar stories from a dream scene and also from a

recollection. They exist in the mind but have a time limit until awakening like the sudden withdrawal of lights in the videos.

The last collection *Tomorrow* consists of two parts. The first presents a text describing how I expressed myself as a child, extracted from the opening of subchapter 'Tomorrow'. In the background is a video showing traffic running through a crossroad in a rainy night. Looking from an upper level, through the dripping rain on the window glass, a splash of golden light appears from behind a building. As it moves forward and stops at the traffic light we can only see the shadow of a car. Without the physical body its blurry outline quivers in the pouring rain. The next video continues the rain scene, showing a view from inside a bus looking out at the shapeless but illuminating cityscape passing by. In English, a male voice through the PA, tells the story of me (or him) traveling to visit my (or his) father living in a nursing home. The dazzling light outside the window seems like the night scene shown at the beginning of *Dream* but this time we travel within it. The firework rises again like the one that accompanies the waving plants in *Botanist*. The word "明天" ("tomorrow" in Mandarin) is written on the fogged up glass as we drive by a neon light which reads "HEAVEN". The noise in the background indicates a bus ride in London while the location outside the window is unrecognisable and the narration talks about the memory in Taiwan.

This collection recalls the previous chapters through recurring scenes and symbols such as overlapping night lights, fireworks and erased objects. It also fantasises a tomorrow in the past time when the loved one was still alive yet the tomorrow in the reality continues the grief, contemplating the absence. These three collections of moving image works carry the emotions, memories and conflicts through the process of erasure, misplacement of images and sounds, as well as the uses of voices and languages. The recurring scenes and symbols produce a fragile world. Its absurdity is easily spotted even with fractions of reality that is as real as the actual drawing by my father and his photo slides. However, with the juxtapositions and the way they are displayed, these objects seem to be integrated into this obscure dimension between fantasy and reality.

Some of the stories are narrated in Taiwanese Hokkien, a language that heavily constituted my childhood memories. Unable to speak it fluently myself, my mother is the voice of these stories. She also narrates one in Taiwanese Mandarin, a language that I'm most familiar with, where the story talks about a dream which resembles my early memory about my father. Some are in English by male strangers with different accents. This arrangement produces an absurd and disjointed profile of the protagonist, portraying my confusion of identities generated by the constant change in scenery, responsibilities and cultures. The English male voice also represents a system I comply with. This is a system that I considered as a symbol of advancement, and I longed for its recognition and acceptance. When this voice narrates my intimate memories, it produces an odd relationship with me that it crumbles from that authoritative figure I used to know.

Composing through these shifting characters I ask how the voices and languages orchestrate with the performance of erasure to illustrate the complexity of personal grief which transmutes from the mourning for a loved one to further enquiries on the lost self under a greater scale of social and political phenomena? Before continuing the analysis of my videos, I would like to talk about other artists' practices which I think would allow me to further address my choices of voices and languages.

Through her work Fiona Tan's search for the self within globalisation is presented in a poetic, fictional and aesthetic way. Within the components of her visual expression what particularly stands out for me is her use of the point of view from a mother, which I consider as a crucial role that connects to the birth of an identity and the departure from it. One of the examples is her *The Changeling* (2006). In this installation two screens are placed on the wall. One shows a photograph of a Japanese girl in a school uniform, the other runs a stream of hundreds of similar images of female students, all with the same bob hairstyle, facing front, wearing a white shirt under the school blazer. Along with these pre-WWII high school yearbook photos found by the artist in a flea market, is a woman's voice narrating as a daughter, a mother and a grandmother, looking at the pictures.[111] The grandmother identifies her full face and appreciates her youth. The character of the mother sees her daughter in the album expressing her worries that she is not good enough to be a parent. The school-girl says, in the third person, that her favourite animal is the chameleon, for its elegance and deftness. She wants the photographer to catch her essence as "a woman warrior" who is resilient and courageous, "crusading to unknown lands".[112] There is also a voice of the artist, who conveys her intentions to transform the found images into self-reflective stories. She calls it "a mirror's mirror".[113]

The Changeling was exhibited in different cities. In each city the voice speaks the local language by a native actress. The work is voiced in eight languages including English, Dutch, Swedish and Japanese. Each version is translated from its previously exhibited language. The absurdity not only presents in the Western voice which performs as one of the Asian girls but also in the script such as when the voice of the grandmother recalls the stories of her friends Daphne and Niobe, one turned into a tree the other incarnated in a stone, which is a clear reference to Greek mythology.

Tan's displacement of time, perspective and language, as seen in *The Changeling*, creates a fluid memory that is unsettled and always changeable. Quite often, critics open up their writings on Tan's work with a brief description of the artist's background - having a Chinese father, an Australian-Scottish mother, born in Indonesia, raised in Australia and developed as an artist in the Netherlands -

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[111] Matthew Guy Nichols, 'Fiona Tan: Willing Subjects, Resistant Souls', *Art in America*, 7 September 2010 <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/fiona-tan-62854/> [accessed 8 November 2021]

[112] 'The Changeling - voice-over for an installation', *Fiona Tan* (personal website) <https://fionatan.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Changeling_vo_Eng.pdf> [accessed 8 November 2021]

[113] Ibid.

to posit Tan's approach and attitude towards the enquiries of identity.[114] [115] Tan's earlier documentary film *May You Live in Interesting Times* (1997), in which the artist sets out a journey "in search of mirror" by meeting her relatives who settled in different parts of the world, is also frequently referred to in order to draw a picture of Tan's diverse cultural upbringing. This journey reveals how global migration is accelerated by political power, in the case of Tan's Chinese family, they fled from the discrimination and violence against the Chinese in 1960's Indonesia. Some of them stayed through that turbulent period, some of them left. Tan travels from the Netherlands to Germany, Australia, Indonesia, Hong Kong and China with an expectation that the conversations and explorations of cultures would be the "mirrors" that reflects her identity. However, although the expedition provides a contextualised understanding of her family history, it also presents how the migration journeys influence each individual's perception of belonging. For the artist who doesn't speak the language and share the culture there's always a distance between her and her relatives which the artist observes. Tan doesn't find herself in them, instead she states "my self-definition seems an impossibility, an identity defined only by what it is not".[116]

From Tan's earlier documentary films to later works integrated with fictional elements, the artist constantly touches on the question of identity through portraits — portraits of the self and others. In her work *Nellie* (2013) Tan found a part of herself in Rembrandt's illegitimate daughter Cornelia van Rijn, whose life journey from Amsterdam to Jakarta resembled Tan's, although in reverse. The artist found herself in the Japanese yearbook photos that remind her of her school uniform in Australia and of the hairstyle her grandmother had.[117] In Tan's *Provenance* (2008) she also found herself between six individuals from her personal social life in Amsterdam, including her mother-in-law, neighbour shopkeeper, the actress playing Cornelia and Tan's son. Between the close friends and family, Tan's persistent mirroring highlights the need to posit oneself between the familiarity and alienness. Almost inevitably reviewers continue to refer to the artist's mixed cultural inheritance, the European cultivation of her art and her settlement in the Netherlands. "A professional foreigner", which Tan calls herself in *May You Live in Interesting Times*, hence is popularly quoted by journalists and researchers.[118] [119] [120]

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[114] 'Bergen Art Museum', *Fiona Tan* (personal website) <https://fionatan.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/BergenArtMuseum.pdf> [accessed 8 November 2021]

[115] Thorsten Sadowsky, 'With Other Eyes', *Fiona Tan* (personal website) <https://fionatan.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ThorstenSadowsky_WithOtherEyes.pdf> [accessed 8 November 2021]

[116] *May You Live in Interesting Times*, dir. by Fiona Tan (1997).

[117] Torunn Liven, 'Ten Questions: Fiona Tan', *Nordic Art Review*, 2015 <https://kunstkritikk.com/ten-questions-fiona-tan/> [accessed 8 November 2021]

[118] See note 115.

[119] Dawn Chan, 'Fiona Tan - Wako Works of Art' in *Art Forum*, September 2014 <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201409/fiona-tan-48796> [accessed 8 November 2021]

[120] Jacqueline Lo, 'Moving Images, Stilling Time - The Art of Fiona Tan', *Third Text*, 28:1 (2014), pp. 57.

Although as many critics suggest, Tan's upbringing is indeed indispensable in shaping her practice, I consider the mother characters are what separate some of the artist's projects from others given their shared focus on identity. This perspective can be found in *Provenance* where Tan portrays the children of her close friends and her own son. In an interview on the project the artist says "there was a belief that if you commissioned a painting of your children, that it somehow protected them."[121] This caring tone can also be sensed when Tan talks about her research of Cornelia.[122] The artist emphasises the forgotten lady was erased from history because of her illegitimate status despite being the sole surviving daughter and sole heir of Rembrandt. The mother's protective side is most evident in the voiceover of *The Changeling*, where the mother says "I feel I have failed in my duties as a mother; I could not save you from pain."[123]

This role incubates intimacy but also holds an intense sentiment as she is portrayed in a realistic way. The voices that shift between the daughter, grandmother and mother in *The Changeling* present their love but also exhibit the conflicts between them: as the grandmother tells that Daphne runs from her fear for her mother and Niobe grieves the loss of her children; the mother mourns that her daughter pulls away from her while fighting to meet her expectations. Are these female characters simply employed to form a mixed identity? Or do they refer to the notion of motherland? Perhaps they are also the cultures, the places or the languages that nourish us but also constantly battle with us in the journey of understanding the self? Or are they just caring parents that hope for the best for us despite our resistance?

I think about the voice of my mother and her role in my moving image works. Initially her narrations compensate my inability to speak Taiwanese Hokkien perfectly. But knowing her reading my perspective of my father's death and the memories about him is a way that I exchange my experience of those events with her that would have never been expressed in other ways. At first it feels like a burden. I think it explains why I describe the depiction of the mothers in Tan's practice as realistic. Because my relationship with my mother is never perfect. It's full of love, unconditional, old-school love but also full of frictions and resentments. My mother very happily agreed to help me with the voiceover, as mentioned in the previous subchapter, she showed her love and belief in me. But did I really need her to understand me? Perhaps I would have kept all the sentiments to myself under a different circumstance? Or perhaps, because there's always a tension in this relationship, I magnified our differences and I never expected a mutual understanding? I felt I was closer to my father when I was little. Sometimes it felt like I was choosing a side. But then again did I really know him? He

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[121] Thea Joselow, 'Exploring the Video Art of Fiona Tan', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 9 December 2010 <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/exploring-the-video-art-of-fiona-tan-76199095/> [accessed 8 November 2021]

[122] Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Fiona Tan in conversation with Jasper Sharp, online video recording, YouTube, 5 June 2018 <https://youtu.be/Gne3aSsMyrY> [accessed 8 November 2021]

[123] See note 112.

collapsed when I was still too young to have a mature conversation with him. I wonder if we would have shared similar values if he was still in our lives. Do I still choose him over my mother for my unreliable memories, my fantasised closeness, a beautified trauma? My mother's narration can't answer these questions, instead it simply asks them.

Taiwanese Hokkien, although not the official language of the country, is considered to be a local dialect that represents closeness, a sense of home and one of the symbols of Taiwanese ideology for many citizens. This language is associated with the memories of our senior family members, Hoklo Taiwanese identity, and also with a history of erasure. The sentimental development of the language can be traced back to the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1946 conducted by KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party), who lost the civil war to China's Communist Party and exiled to Taiwan as the island's new governor. In order to erase Japanese, the official language then, from the previous coloniser, and to consolidate the authority of the Republic of China's government, despite spoken by the major ethnic group Hoklo Taiwanese, Taiwanese Hokkien was widely banned at schools, public spaces and offices. Mandarin became the new official language and was the only language that was allowed to be used between the island's different ethnic groups from Hoklo, to Hakka, to indigenous people. Although Taiwanese Hokkien was still very much present in everyday communications and is now taught at schools in Taiwan, many from younger generations, like myself, are not able to converse in it as fluently as their parents.

Similar to Taiwanese Hokkien, Chinese-Indonesians faced the erasure of Chinese languages, traditions and names, as a way to obliterate their identity under the Indonesian government's political suppression in the '60s. Chinese-Indonesian artist FX Harsono has actively protested this history of discrimination and violence through his practice. In his *Writing in the Rain* (2011), Harsono dips a calligraphy brush into a dish of black ink held in the other hand, repeatedly writing three Chinese characters on a wide glass wall in front of him. These three characters read his Chinese name. As Harsono continuously puts them down on his eye level, the black ink overlaps the previous strokes, creating a dark cloud on the surface that gradually covers his face. Approaching the end of this six-minute video heavy drops of water start to pour down, washing away the ink while the artist persists to wave the brush. The old colour dissolves into streams of water, and the new one soon gets flushed down as the brush skims the wall. Eventually the currents defeat the artist's stubbornness, ink turns into rivers and disappears from the scene. Harsono states he was forced to change his Chinese name to an Indonesian one when he was eighteen under the "Presidental Cabinet Decision No 127/U/Kep/12/1966" introduced by the Indonesian government.[124] This regulation "advised" their citizen of Tionghoa (Chinese-Indonesians) to have a name that aligned with Indonesian authenticity. Harsono expresses that he later realised such a decision wasn't as personal as he thought when he was a teenager — name changing is a private matter, but has everything to do with prejudice and the violence of power. Harsono's writing, that contextualises the political and personal backgrounds of his *Writing*

[124] FX Harsono, 'Writing in the Rain' (exhibition catalogue), AT Tyler Rollins Fine Art (New York: 2012).

in the Rain, is titled *Washed-Away Memories*, which reflects on that irresistible current wiping out one's roots.

Language as a representation of identity in artworks that explore history and politics is also critical in Taiwanese artist Chia-Wei Hsu's work. In his films, Hsu often combines archeological research and fictional stories to tell about forgotten memories connecting to political relations. Through his *Huai Mo Village* project Hsu investigates the history of a Chinese Nationalist troop who retreated to the border between Thailand and Myanmar. As the war and conditions changed the soldiers weren't able to return to China nor to move to Taiwan following their leader Chiang Kai-Shek's exile. The unit was abandoned in northern Thailand. As the time passed within this obscure state both geographically and ideologically their national identity got washed away. The troops dissolved into this small village called Huai Mo. Developed upon this project, the film *Ruins of the Intelligence Bureau* (2015) presents the pastor and founder of the village's orphanage narrating a traditional Thai puppet performance of the monkey god General Hanuman. The narration in Mandarin weaves the clergyman's personal stories into the legend of the monkey god, revealing that the pastor was a former officer of the CIA during the Cold War between the Chinese Communists and Chinese Nationalists. His memories blend into the story of General Hanuman obtaining a healing herb from the Medicine Mountain — a legend composed in the 4th century by the poet Valmiki. In the pastor's version of the story the monkey god brought back the medicine to treat his troops. In *The Story of Hoping Island* (2008), Hsu explores the history of the shipyard on Hoping Island in Keelung, Taiwan. Narrated by the artist's grandmother in Japanese, she tells about the memory of this shipyard, which was once a prominent base for Japan's expansion to south Asia during the empire's colonisation of Taiwan. These memories are connected through a fictional creature created by the artist called Ni-Ku (泥琥). The grandmother's voice describes it as a crab-like animal with illuminating chelae but also expresses her unsureness as to whether it actually ever existed or it was, as rumours circulated, detecting equipment belonging to the Japanese governor which was used during the wartime. Hsu looks into history through lenses of personal memories, fictions and local languages. Languages that have been implemented in his work include Mandarin, Japanese, Amis language, Yunnan dialect and Fuzhou dialect, which are all related to Taiwan's history representing different identities of the island's residents. Hsu comments on his choice of subject "although they are about Taiwan, they are parts that are forgotten and rarely mentioned" (translated from Mandarin).[125]

Artists incorporate languages as a means to recognise the voices on the periphery, as the Chinese name that's flooded away in Harsono's video and in Hsu's films where it was spoken by an exiled veteran residing in Thailand. Among my series of moving image works only one of them is voiced in Taiwanese Mandarin - *Street Vendor* comes after the ones in Taiwanese Hokkien and is followed by the English

[125] Nai-tzi Chen 陳乃慈, Unknown History by Veteran of Huai Mo Village 聽回莫村老兵講過去 揭不為人知歷史, *Art Emperor*, 12 September 2016 <https://artemperor.tw/focus/1426> [accessed 8 November 2021]

narrations. The language that I'm most familiar with is soon replaced by English, spoken by males. I found it interesting to consider Taiwan's early history as a timeline composed of persistent immigrations of the marginalised groups to the island and the colonisations by the powerful foreign dictatorships that repeatedly tried to diminish the influences of its precedent. Fast forward a century into the era of globalisation, I traveled to the West not because I was expelled but because I was privileged. In the first couple of years in the UK I purposely removed myself from contents and conversations in Mandarin just so I could fully immerse in the world in English. Perhaps by doing so I could be a valid member of this new home. I was eager to please but the slow and unconscious transition from the mindset of a member of the majority, native Taiwanese in Taiwan, to a minority, as Taiwanese in the UK, made me realise what I was by identifying what I was not.

As a member of the majority my heart told me that I wasn't like people around me. I felt the need to express the uniqueness of myself. Becoming a minority is a process of finding the value within things that used to be so banal and to distinguish the parts that drive me out of the motherland. The amplification of the nice and not-so-nice parts of my upbringing seems to place me from a more objective point of view to compare the old and the new homes, which again stretches the distance between myself and my birthplace, yet not necessarily pulling me closer in the other direction. This transition between the polar mindsets presents a stream of dilemma on a personal and political level. Considering Taiwan's international status, although its governor performs the sovereignty of the island, Taiwan is not widely recognised as a country but always placed in a vague area especially by Western powers to prevent conflicts with China. As a Taiwanese I have the inclination to distinguish Taiwan from its neighbour culturally, ethnically, politically and ideologically to consolidate a Taiwanese identity. Contrasting to this action of telling things apart, one of the needs for a minority is to find a community that shares similar values, which is to summon the likeness out of differences. But do I find a place in Taiwanese community in London on a journey that was initiated to distinguish myself from others? Or do I consider myself as part of the Far East Asian groups? Am I here long enough to be a member of any immigrant identities? I'm constantly in this swinging predicament and I don't think there is a quick resolution. I'm confused and amazed by it at the same time. The male voices in English telling my personal stories can be seen as an attempt to shift the power dynamic by adding a vulnerable side to the role that represents the West - the dominant masculine authority. Perhaps it also illustrates an ambiguous and awkward state where I withdraw myself from what was once familiar, while still conditioned as an outsider to the new environment.

I think about why we say "motherland" and "mother tongue". I think about its connotation of nurturing one in a love-filled place. It protects and gives confidence to its children, making sure they will always feel at home. But I also think about my understanding of a mother and whether its meaning is included in these words. Do these words also signify that a land or a language can also be harsh and distant sometimes? Are they terrifying but also like a harbour that embraces every returning voyager?

The mother in my work is also my background which I try to understand. I also comprehend the process of erasure, that takes place within the outbound journey from "the mothers".

I am writing this conclusion while revisiting the previous chapters. I noticed how this written thesis had embodied a prolonged rumination as I returned to the questions and confusions in those early writings made over two years ago. As I read through them, I see my transformation not only in writing styles but also in my intentions and assumptions. It took me years to come to realise what I had been communicating through the exploration of erasure and my moving image works — I wasn't making an equation but a negotiation of how personal grief encompasses a complex enquiry of identity, history, gender and politics. My selection of artists and their artworks might not directly share the same focus with mine but I chose to keep them as this slow progress manifests this long yet essential journey to understand creativity, my background and the world around me. I can not "scientifically" prove that the everyday objects in my works equates a specific memory by referring to Horner's study but I realised how a bodily movement that can be understood as the process of forming a memory can also be one of forgetting, remaking, reimagining and reconstructing, through the physicality of erasure in my work and studies of the visual expression in art history.

This research offers a structure within an academic framework to articulate this connection through developing an art practice. This structure is personalised to myself but it also presents a possibility for other practitioners showing how they can also theorise the political context of their personal experience through their practices. Through film and verbal languages, whether it's Taiwanese Hokkien that represents childhood memories but also a target of censorship, or English that is composed as a second language in a raw and unrefined voice yet also signifies an admired authority, they perform erasure as an illustration of the emptiness of losing a loved one, the fragmented memories as well as the confusion of identity that is removed from a sense of belonging as in both political and personal contexts. The making of this research releases me from a stiff learning pattern to pursue a voice that embraces all the nuances in the mundanity. I am allowed to think outside a textbook framework and dive into the fluidity of knowledge. This research develops an art practice that tells my story, as well as invites the audience, through my writing and moving image works, to become part of this process. This process not only reveals the meanings of my artworks to myself but also unfolds the meanings of a viewer's personal experiences to themselves that identify the conflicts, tensions, love and reengagements within the everyday on the journey of searching for the self. As I realised such a chemistry, what Siún Hanrahan states in her essay really resonates: "Meaning emerges in the encounter between the viewer and the artwork. Meaning does not rest with or in the artwork – it is not determined solely by the artwork – and it does not rest with or in the viewer – it is not determined

solely by the interests and conceptual frameworks of the viewer. It is negotiated in the conversation between viewer and artwork, in the act of relation between subject and object."[126]

Built upon this structure, supported by erasure, languages and auto-theory, this research contributes to diverse conversations within the era of globalisation, helping us to understand transnational experiences as an intersection between personal history and politics. My experience as a new immigrant in pursuit of an academic achievement recognised by the West is unique but is also part of the global movement constituted of millions of students each year. My research reflects on the issues and phenomena generated by globalised Higher Education, detailing the impact on an individual. It exhibits that this impact is not only presented in the physical mobility but also in transitions of thoughts concerning issues from a personal level to a greater scale that links every participant (including individuals within the institutions, within a student's social group or even of a host country) to the global economic and political landscape. Hence my story is personal but is also a story of many others. Just like Harsono considers the changing of his name as nothing personal but something that pertains to the very core of what it means to be who he is in relation to power dynamics.

This research responds to the ongoing movement of reexamining art history that "has deeply Eurocentric connotations whilst also bearing the potential of being understood as a human universal".[127] Thomas Kaufmann in his *Reflections on World Art History* notes the increasing interest of developing a coherent perspective to write world art history and identifies the challenge of narrating a huge body of work while dealing with inherited bias.[128] Margaret Tali marks that despite the presence of globalisation and the democratic changes in Europe, art collections of some European art museums seem to be organised out of those contexts, producing misrepresentation caused by "the absent perspectives and voices of minority community members" in the contemporary art world.[129] Since 2017 Asian art institutes Galeri Nasional Indonesia, MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai and Singapore Art Museum have collaborated with Nationalgalerie–Staatliche Museen zu Berlin to present an annual exhibition series 'Collecting Entanglements and Embodied Histories' which "offers alternative perspectives of small narratives to counter and contest constructed historiography in the regional and global social and geopolitical context."[130] Founded in 2000 Hong Kong based Asian Art

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[126] Siún Hanrahan, 'Poesis' in *Thinking through Art - Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) pp. 148.

[127] Noemi de Haro García and others, *Making Art History in Europe after 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 4.

[128] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, 'Reflections on World Art History' in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, ed. by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 27.

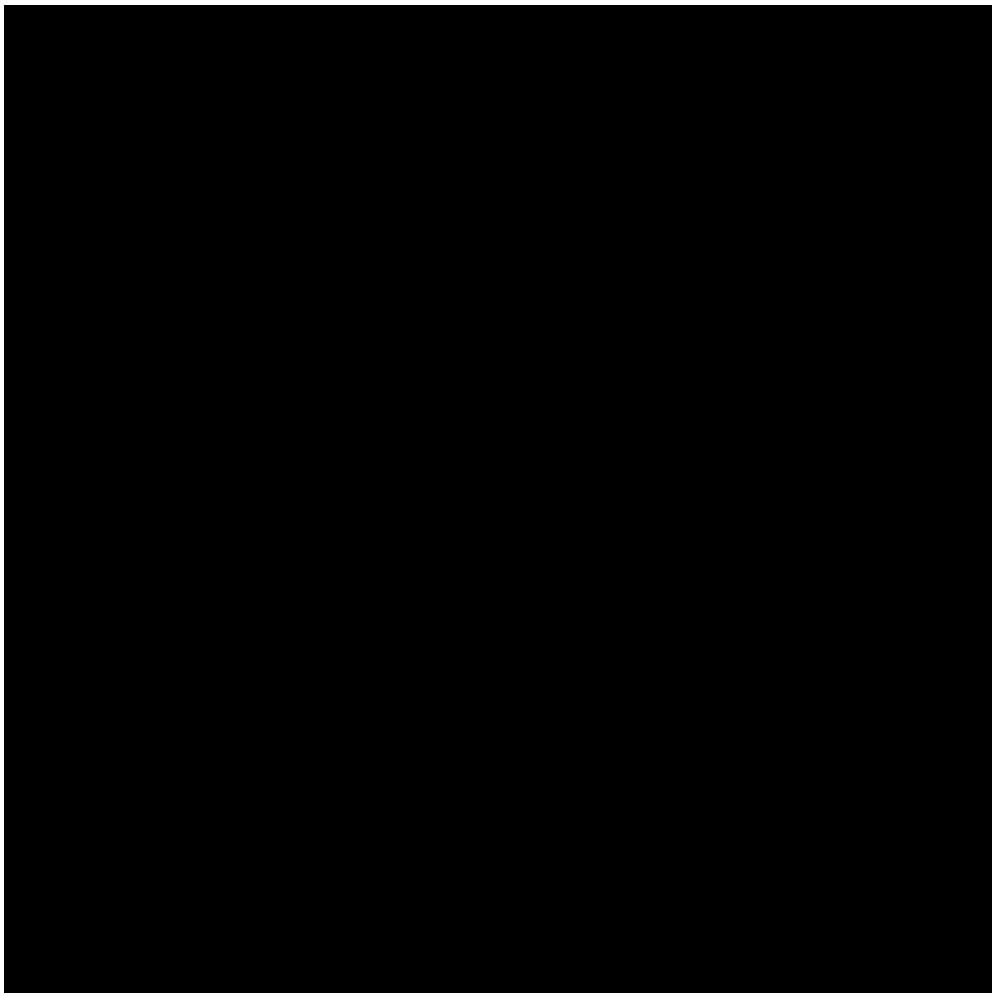
[129] Margaret Tali, *Absence and Difficult Knowledge in Contemporary Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. i, 107-108.

[130] 'Errata: Collecting Entanglements and Embodied histories', *MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum*, 2021 <http://www.maiiam.com/exhibition/errata-collecting-entanglements-and-embodied-histories/> [accessed 8 November 2021]

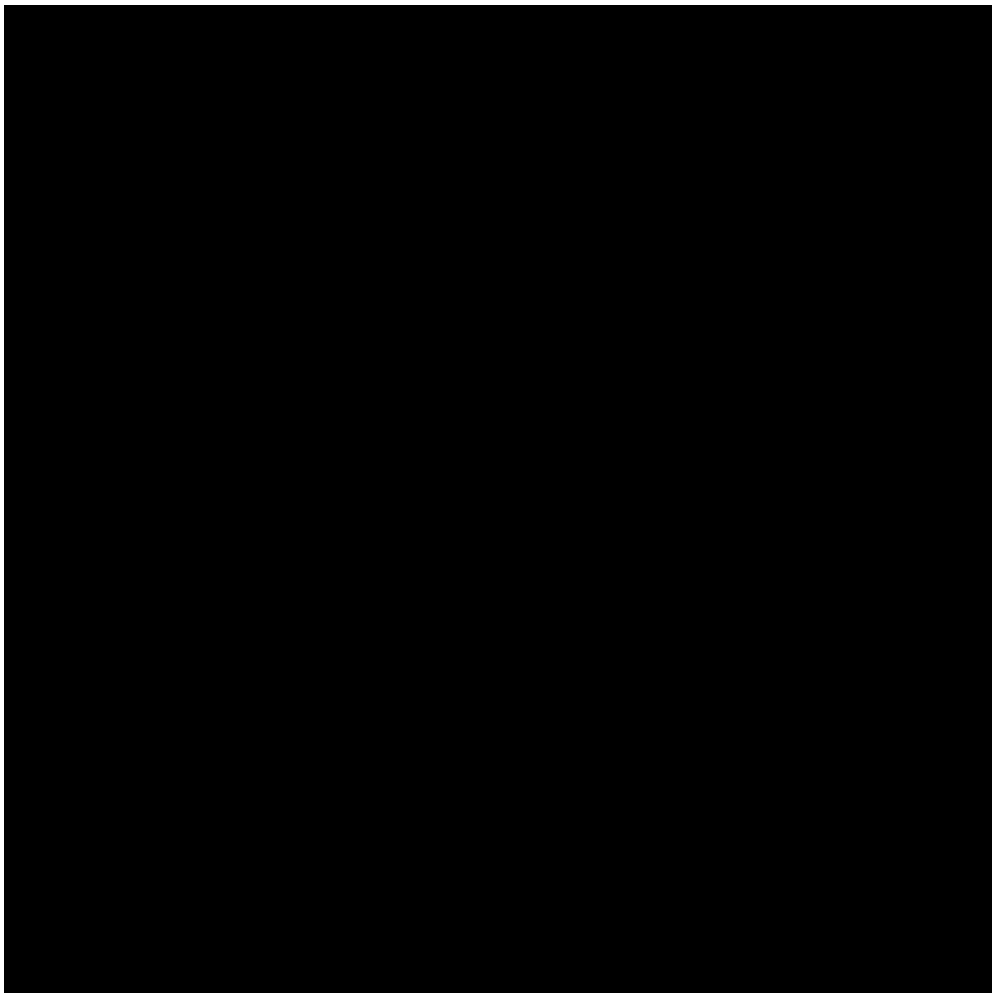
Archive also promotes intellectual inputs from art in Asia to take part in cultivating an inclusive understanding of the world.

Historically the UK has had strong connections with many Asian countries, whether they were colonised by the empire such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines or part of the allied forces during WWII, such as Nepal. The relationships persist to influence the UK's demography and culture. I believe art can provide valuable insights into the country's diverse environment. Edited by Ashley Thorpe and Diana Yeh, their *Contesting British Chinese Culture* (2018) examines the stereotypes of British Chinese Culture and the invisibility of the ethnic group in the UK by investigating how visual arts, theatre and performance, and film challenge the notion of British Chinese.[131] I see my research as an important input of knowledge within the lack of Taiwanese representation in the UK, through a female perspective, to illustrate a poetic comprehension of transnational experience that participates in the making and remaking of history.

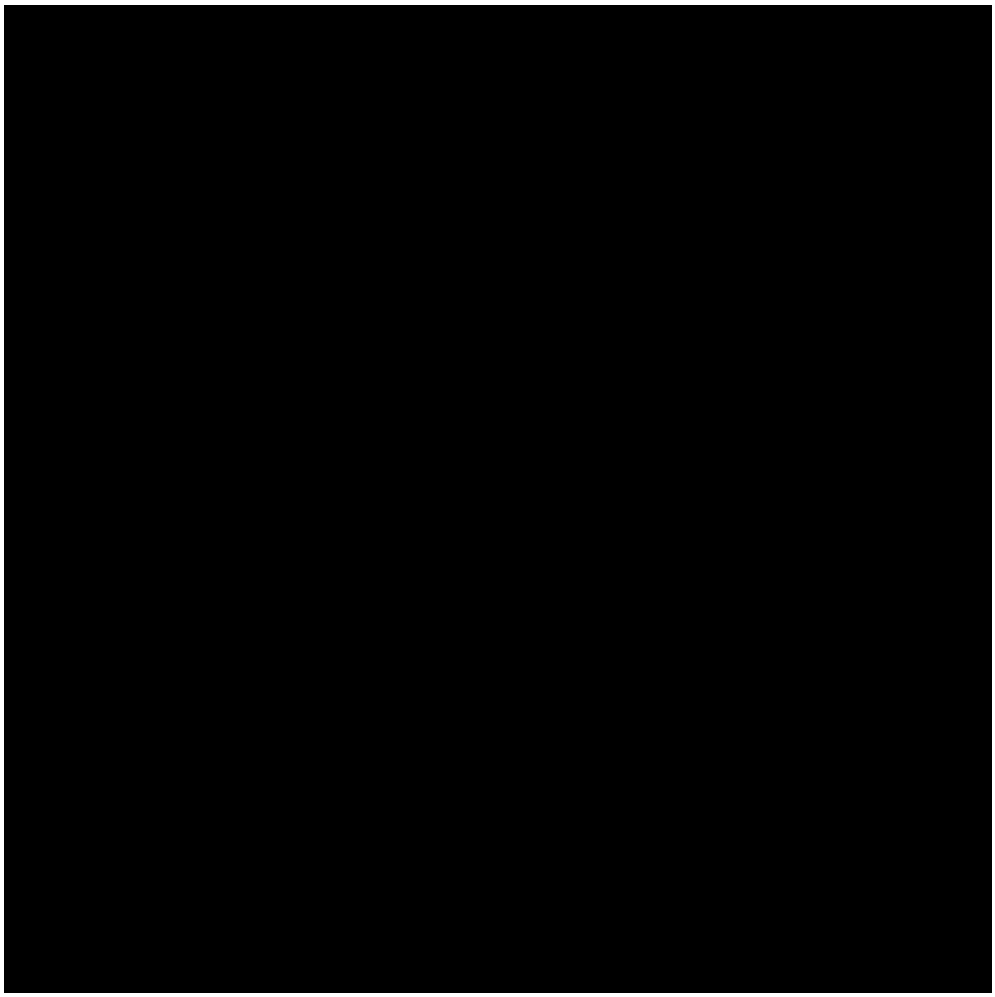
[131] *Contesting British Chinese Culture*, ed. by Ashley Thorpe & Diana Yeh (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).



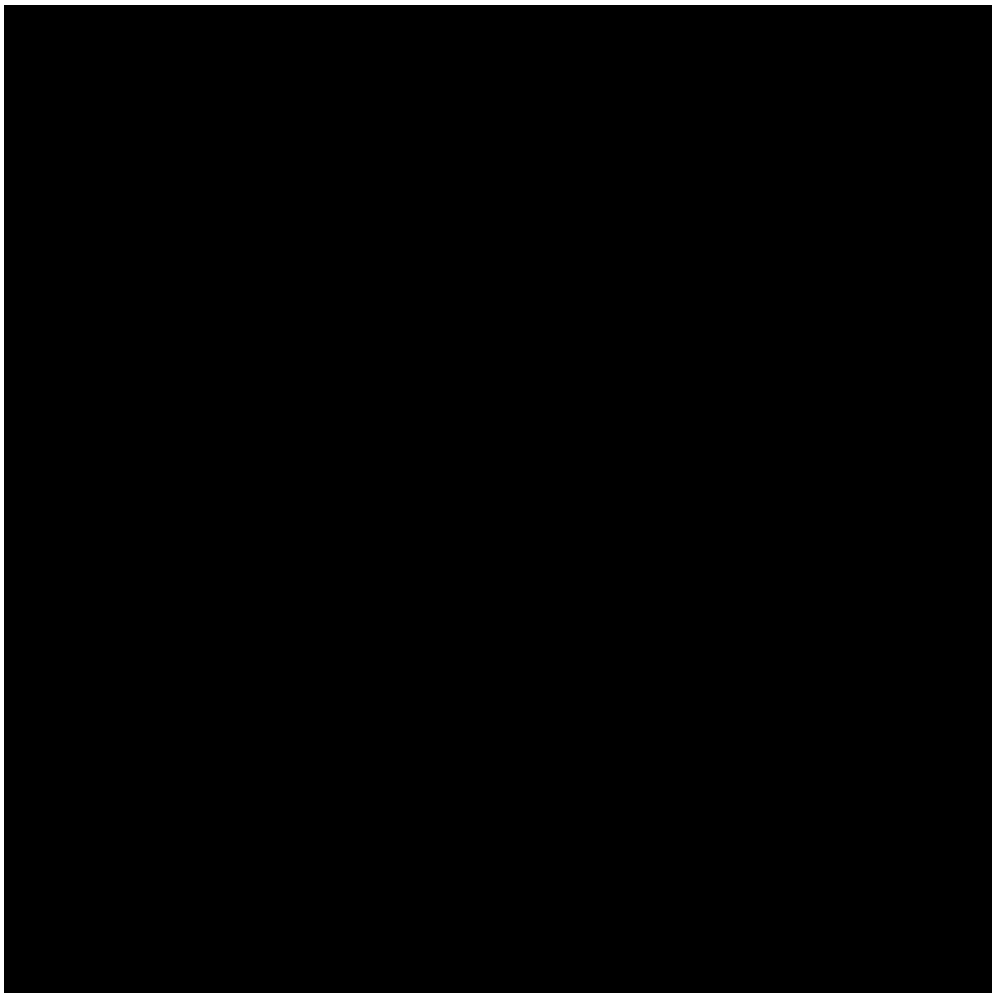
Fiona Tan
The Changeling
2006



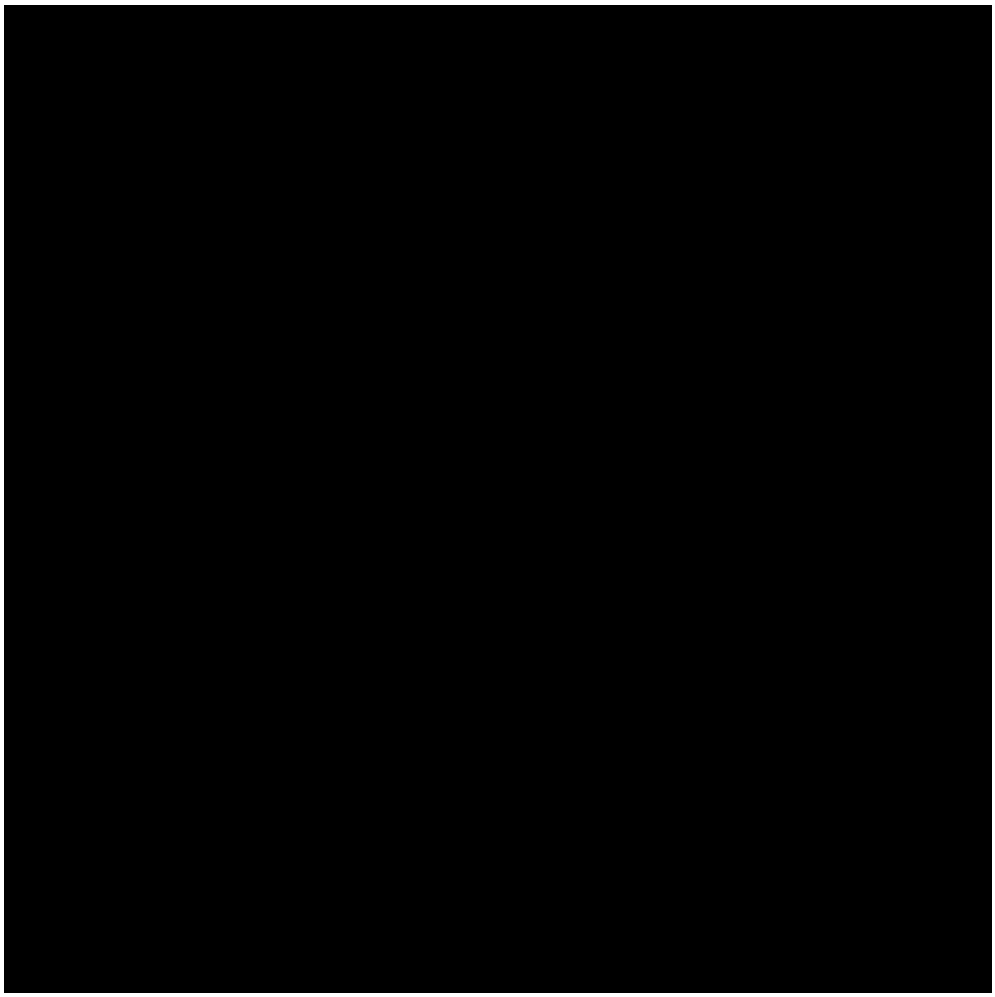
Fiona Tan
Nellie
2013



Fiona Tan
Provenance
2008



FX Harsono
Writing in the Rain
2011



Chia-Wei Hsu
Ruins of the Intelligence Bureau
2015

Back to the Drawing Class

During my undergraduate studies, I created a series of installation works where I spray painted hundreds of palm-sized animal figures in black, sticking them onto individual white bases made of plywood, and then covering them with a layer of gauze. The plastic models shored up the fabric as it expanded and stretched to the edges of the wooden boards. The shapes of animals emerged as cloth clung to the bodies of the figures. Black paint erased the details of the animal's appearance and the covering of semi-transparent linen further eliminated their three-dimensionality, turning them into flat and shadow-like sculptures.

Looking back at the works I made then, this installation being one of them, they all present an obscure state between presence and absence that is still evident in my moving image work today.

During that time, not long after my father's collapse, I had been comprehending his illness and fading. I can now see the uncertainty presented in my work as a depiction of my mixed feelings for my father's deterioration. However, whether it was sadness, pressure or guilt, I never addressed their influences when I thought or talked about my practice. Perhaps I was also too afraid to share this private matter within my work with my peers and tutors, or I was simply reluctant to be reminded of it.

Instead of confronting that uneasiness, I detached myself from my work when describing it. I would ascribe general meanings to the materials and symbols I used without alluding to any personal reasons behind these choices. In the case of the mentioned installation work, I looked up what an animal image or the piece of fabric could represent to others, and then generated a logical explanation for the artwork.

In the introduction, I express that I understood my production of an artwork as simply a materialisation of the images that came to my mind. But I didn't know how to trace their source to understand why they were formed and what they meant to me. I also chose not to consider their relationship with me. It sounds unreal to me now, but back then, I didn't think my reasons were ever relevant to others.

Through this research I explore solutions to this conundrum that has long affected my creative journey and I have gradually found the clarity that I struggled to achieve in my earlier work. This research provides insights into the relationship between personal symbols, meanings, artistic expression and shared language. Its findings will help practitioners who also feel removed from their texts, who weren't trained to articulate that inner drive, to re-examine the possibilities within their relations to writing and art-making, and to develop the clarity they may seek.

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