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# idea journal

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co-constructing body-environments

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vol. 17, no. 02

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2020

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the journal of IDEA: the Interior design +  
interior architecture educators' association



vol.17, no.02  
2020

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body-environments



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**the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
interior architecture educators' association**

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- (b) being an authority on, and advocate for, interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research.

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**co-constructing body-environments:  
provocation**

Presenters at *Body of Knowledge: Art and Embodied Cognition Conference (BoK2019)* hosted by Deakin University, Melbourne, June 2019) are invited to submit contributions to a special issue of idea journal "Co-Constructing Body-Environments" to be published in December 2020. The aim of the special issue is to extend the current discussions of art as a process of social cognition and to address the gap between descriptions of embodied cognition and the co-construction of lived experience.

We ask for papers, developed from the presentations delivered at the conference, that focus on interdisciplinary connections and on findings arising from intersections across research practices that involve art and theories of cognition. In particular, papers should emphasize how spatial art and design research approaches have enabled the articulation of a complex understanding of environments, spaces and experiences. This could involve the spatial distribution of cultural, organisational and conceptual structures and relationships, as well as the surrounding design features.

Contributions may address the questions raised at the conference and explore:

- + How do art and spatial practices increase the potential for knowledge transfer and celebrate diverse forms of embodied expertise?
- + How the examination of cultures of practice, Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices offer perspectives on inclusion, diversity, neurodiversity, disability and social justice issues?
- + How the art and spatial practices may contribute to research perspectives from contemporary cognitive neuroscience and the philosophy of mind?
- + The dynamic between an organism and its surroundings for example: How does art and design shift the way knowledge and thinking processes are acquired, extended and distributed?
- + How art and design practices demonstrate the ways different forms of acquiring and producing knowledge intersect?

These and other initial provocations for the conference can be found on the conference web-site: <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/bok2019/cfp/>.

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# introduction: unknowingly, a threshold-crossing movement

**Julianna Preston**

Executive Editor

*idea journal*

It is in this special issue that the editorial board holds true to our promise to expand the horizons and readership of *idea journal* while reaching out to associated and adjacent art, design and performance practices and drawing connections to seemingly distant disciplines. The articles in this issue have provenance in a 2019 conference event, Bodies of Knowledge (BOK), which was guided by a similar interdisciplinary ethos. With an emphasis on cultures of practice and communities of practitioners that offer perspectives on inclusion, diversity/neurodiversity and disability, this conference, and this subsequent journal issue, aim to increase knowledge transfer between diverse forms of embodied expertise, in particular, between neuroscience and enactive theories of cognition.

This brief description suggests that there are shared issues, subjects and activities that have the potential of generating new understanding in cross-, inter- and trans-disciplinary affiliations and collaborations. My experience in these modes of inquiry points to the importance of identifying what is shared and what is not amongst vocabulary, concepts, pedagogies and methods. Holding these confluences and diverges without resorting to strict definition, competition or judgement of right and wrong often affords greater understanding and empathy amongst individuals to shape a collective that is diverse in its outlooks, and hopefully, curious as to what it generates together because of that diversity.

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The breadth of the knowledge bases represented within this issue necessitated that the peer reviewer list expanded once again like the previous issue. It was in the process of identifying reviewers with appropriate expertise that the various synapses between scholarly and artistic practices became evident. It is these synapses that shape sturdy bridges between the journal's existing readership, which is predominantly academics and students in interior design, interior architecture, spatial design and architecture, and the wide range of independent scholars and practitioners, academics, and students attracted to BOK's thematic call for papers, performative lectures and exhibitions. At the risk of being reductive to the complexity and nuances in the research to follow, I suggest that the following terms and concerns are central to this issue, aptly inferred by its title, 'Co-Constructing Body-Environments': spatiality; subjectivity; phenomenology; processual and procedural practice; artistic research; critical reflection; body: experience. All of these are frequent to research and practice specific to interiors. In this issue, however, we find how these terms and concerns are situated and employed in other fields, in other ways and for other purposes.

This is healthy exercise. To stretch one's reach, literally and metaphorically is to travel the distance between the me and the you, to be willingly open to what might eventuate. Imagine shaking the hand of a stranger—a somatic experience known to register peaceful intent, respect, courage, warmth, pressure, humour, nervous energy, and so much more. This threshold-crossing movement is embodied and spatial; it draws on a multitude of small yet complex communication sparks well before verbal impulses ensue. This significant bodily gesture sets the tone for what might or could happen. Based on my understanding of the research presented in 'Co-Constructing Body-Environments,' I propose that this is a procedure in the Gins and Arakawa sense that integrates theory and practice as a hypothesis for 'questioning all possible ways to observe the body-environment in order to transform it.'<sup>01</sup> I call this as *unknowingly*—a process that takes the risk of not knowing, not being able to predict or predetermine, something akin to the spectrum of 'throwing caution to the wind' and 'sailing close to

the wind'. My use of the word 'unknowingly' embraces intuition where direct access to unconscious knowledge and pattern-recognition, unconscious cognition, inner sensing and insight have the ability to understand something without any need for conscious reasoning. Instinct. The word *unknowingly* also affords me to invoke the 'unknowing' element of this interaction—to not know, to not be aware of, to not have all the information (as if that was possible)—an acknowledgement of human humility. I borrow and adapt this facet of unknowingly from twentieth-century British writer Alan Watts:

This I don't know, is the same thing as, I love. I let go. I don't try to force or control. It's the same thing as humility. If you think that you understand Brahman, you do not understand. And you have yet to be instructed further. If you know that you do not understand, then you truly understand.<sup>02</sup>

*Unknowingly* also allows me to reference 'un' as a tactic of learning that suspends the engrained additive model of learning. Though I could refer to many other scholarly sources to fuel this concept, here I am indebted to Canadian author Scott H. Young's pithy advice on how to un-learn:

This is the view that what we think we know about the world is a veneer of sense-making atop a much deeper strangeness. The things we think we know, we often don't. The ideas, philosophies and truths that guide our lives may be convenient approximations, but often the more accurate picture is a lot stranger and more interesting.<sup>03</sup>

In his encouragement to unlearn—dive into strangeness, sacrifice certainty, boldly expose oneself to randomness, mental discomfort, instability, to radically rethink that place/ your place/ our place, suspend aversions to mystery—Young's examples from science remind us that:

Subatomic particles aren't billiard balls, but strange, complex-valued wavefunctions. Bodies aren't vital fluids and animating impulses, but trillions of cells, each more complex than any machine humans have invented. Minds aren't unified loci of consciousness, but the process of countless synapses firing in incredible patterns.<sup>04</sup>

In like manner to the *BOK2019* conference which was staged as a temporally infused knowledge-transfer event across several days, venues, geographies and disciplines, I too, ingested the materials submitted for this issue in this spirit of unknowingly. The process was creative, critical, intuitive, generative and reflective—all those buzz words of contemporary research—yet charged with substantial respect and curiosity for whatever unfolded, even if it went against the grain of what I had learned previously. For artists, designers, architects, musicians, and performers reading this journal issue, especially academics and students, this territory of inquiry may feel familiar to the creative experience and the increasing demands (and desires) to account for how one knows what one knows in the institutional setting. ‘Explain yourself,’ as the review or assessment criteria often states. If you are faced having to annotate your creative practice or to critically reflect on aspects that are so embedded in your making that you are unaware of them, I encourage you to look amongst the pages of this journal issue for examples of how others have grappled with that task such that the process is a space of coming to unknow and know, unknowingly.

**Figure 01:**

Meeting the horizon; A still image from *Shore Variations*, a 2018 film by Claudia Kappenberg that reimagines *Waning*, a 2016 live art performance by Julieanna Preston. <https://vimeo.com/user11308386>.

There are a few people I would like to acknowledge before you read further. First, huge gratitude to the generosity of the peer reviewers, for the time and creative energy of guest editors Jondi Keane, Rea Dennis and Meghan Kelly (who have made the process so enjoyable and professional), for the expertise of the journal's copy editor Christina Houen and Graphic Designer Jo Bailey, and to AADR for helping to expand the journal's horizons.

Okay, readers, shake hands, consider yourself introduced, welcome into the *idea journal* house, and let's share a very scrumptious meal.

### **acknowledgements**

*I am forever grateful for what life in Aotearoa/ New Zealand brings. With roots stretching across the oceans to North America, Sweden, Wales and Croatia, I make my home between Kāpiti Island and the Tararua Ranges, and in Te Whanganui-A-Tara/ Wellington. I acknowledge the privilege that comes with being educated, employed, female and Pākehā, and the prejudices and injustices that colonialism has and continues to weigh on this land and its indigenous people. I am committed to on-going learning and practicing of Kaupapa Māori.*

### **notes**

- 01 Jondi Keane, 'An Arakawa and Gins Experimental Teaching Space; A Feasibility Study,' *INFLeXions* 6 (2012), accessed 29 October 2020, [http://www.inflexions.org/n6\\_keane.html](http://www.inflexions.org/n6_keane.html).
- 02 Alan Watts, *Creating Who You Are* (Video) (n.d.), accessed 29 October 2020, <https://vimeo.com/76888920>.
- 03 Scott H. Young, 'The Art of Unlearning' (2018), accessed 29 October 2020, <https://www.scotthyoung.com/blog/2018/04/12/the-art-of-unlearning/>.
- 04 Young, 'The Art of Unlearning.'

# everything of which I was once conscious but have now forgotten: encounters with memory

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## abstract

This article addresses how art and spatial practise can increase the potential for knowledge transfer and celebrate diverse forms of embodied expertise. By examining the intersection of creative practise and psychological enquiry, I explore memory as embodied or sensory remembering, and ask how the encounter with material forms can engage with memory to generate meaning through the embodied associations of the materials used. Processing emotions and lived experiences through reflection, and then re-imagining and re-materialising them in a contemporary context, reveals trauma as an element of a fractured then re-forming identity. Integration in this context is a process where an awareness of painful memories of trauma is incorporated into a sense of self, and the trauma no longer constrains the individual. Through an analysis of my own multimedia practise, which references my traumatic memories, I propose that creative practise is a form of somatic experiencing. The embodied gestures involved in artmaking, together with reflection that is an intrinsic part of the process, lead to release of the unconscious pent energy embedded in trauma. I consider whether a material investigation and experimentation with the sensory aspects of memory, including affect, embodied perception, intuition and felt knowledge, is a means to transform past trauma. By releasing traumatic energy through an embodied engagement with an expanded spatial practise, I am increasing the potential for knowledge transfer, which is then expressed in the artwork. Trauma is exposed, moving from silence to testimony, and the witnessing by an audience further increases the potential for transfer of knowledge. Diverse embodiment emerges through the employment of a disparate range of materials and methods, including the creation of spatial encounters.

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## keywords:

memory, trauma, creative practise, psychological enquiry, somatic experiencing

## introduction

The French Romanian poet, Paul Celan, stated that only the artist who 'speaks from an angle of reflection, which is their own existence, their own physical nature,'<sup>01</sup> can reach the mystery of an encounter. This investigation of memory and trauma through creative practise is an elusive encounter with autobiographical memory, exploring the ways in which it can be presented as a personal narrative, and a process of re-presentation in a contemporary context. This reimagining allows a material manifestation and somatic exploration of my memories, primarily through textiles, which hold the memory of my time and connect me with memories of other times and places, as well as more temporal mediums such as video, photography and sound. Turning my attention inward, I am re-embodiment experiences and emotions to form the fabric of this research. This occurs in an interconnected way—memory/experience/emotion feeds making and making feeds memory/experience/feeling—so they are in motion together. I am investigating memory as a sensory encounter, including the physical space of encounter; trauma as an element of a fractured and re-forming identity; and memory as a temporal phenomenon.

## trauma

Trauma is now a significant concern for contemporary society; the magnitude of the issue has been widely reported and is being addressed by both private and government-led commissions and initiatives. The 2020 Sydney Biennale, *Nirin*, confined to an online presence in these socially isolated times, addresses many important issues of

trauma from a non-Eurocentric perspective. Humanity, consciousness and communities working together are the themes of curator Brook Andrew's program. Family violence and childhood sexual abuse are widespread in our society. Initiatives such as the White Ribbon campaign in Australia, a global movement of men and boys to end male violence against women, are bringing this scourge into the spotlight. Acknowledging trauma can be personally empowering and can lead to collective action, like the Australian Government's recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Childhood Sexual Abuse (2017).<sup>02</sup> My background includes significant trauma, from infant institutionalisation and adoption, to childhood sexual abuse. In this research paper I explore memory and childhood trauma through an autobiographical lens, focusing on creative practise as a pathway to memory and healing.

## the beginning

The adoption scholar, Nancy Verrier, argues that 'the integrity of the Self [sic] is necessary to the healthy development of the ego,'<sup>03</sup> and 'any injury to the 'ideal state of the self' results in the 'primal wound.'<sup>04</sup> This wound occurs before the infant has separated her identity from that of her mother. While the work, *Everything of Which I Was Once Conscious But Have Now Forgotten* (2019), starts my 'circle of trauma' as I understand it, I have no actual memories of being in an orphanage for the first year of my life. This fact was kept hidden from me and was only uncovered after my mother's death sixteen years ago. The work's title is from Carl Jung's theory of the personal unconscious, and seems to accurately reflect

an event which, although I cannot remember it, has had an enormous impact on my life.

There is consciousness, but without language, perhaps only sensory memories linger. Silence is the hallmark of trauma; if there are no words, are actions a means to acknowledge the violence of separation, abandonment and loss? Fabric, as a medium for engaging the silence, accommodates the violence of cutting the material but also the repair of

stitching. Absence and presence co-exist in this work, fragments suspended in another world, attached by fine threads to possibility. The work encompasses haptic as well as visual qualities. Its cloud-like form that can be walked under, its transparency and also density, its floating between the frame of canoes and the ground, all contribute to a Surrealist-inspired visual reading.

**Figure 01:**

*Everything Of Which I Was Once  
Conscious But Have Now Forgotten.*  
Photo by Mig Dann, 2019.

**Figures 02-04:**

*Everything Of Which I Was Once  
Conscious But Have Now Forgotten*  
(detail). Photo by Mig Dann, 2019.

These details of the small garments made over a period of months show a combination of machine and hand stitching. The process of making, with its repetitive motions and embodied gestures embedded in the sewing of so many garments, the tactility of the fabric and the mechanical sound of the sewing machine, all enable reflection—almost an automated task, but still a focused one. In *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett discusses the 'constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness.'<sup>05</sup> Repetition is a way of knowing and 'can transform everyday gestures and materials into cumulative artistic manifestations.'<sup>06</sup> The fine threads suspending the garments allude to the proscribed institutional life, the gossamer cage, while the unravelling threads hint at a letting-go of the frozen traumatic energy. Printed around one of the garments in the middle of the blue textile

cloud, from which hangs a circle of threads falling to the floor, is a line from a poem by Pablo Neruda, '... absence is a house so vast that inside you will pass through its walls and hang pictures on the air.'<sup>07</sup>

British paediatrician and psychoanalyst, D.W. Winnicott, theorises that the traumatic event of a violent separation of an infant from its mother, with her subsequent absence, leads to the infant self-defining through a lack of wholeness.<sup>08</sup> The infant must form an unstable ego which guards against a psychosomatic emptiness. This can lead to attempts to re-experience or 'remember' the traumatic absence in order to survive it and restructure oneself. The traumatised individual is unconsciously drawn to the past in order to build a stronger ego.



## memory

Canadian psychologists and academics Paul Antze and Michael Lambek propose that the past does not correspond to the present in any direct, unmediated way, since memories, already distorted by successive rememberings, are, like dreams, highly condensed symbols of hidden preoccupations.<sup>09</sup> Although memory is a temporal phenomenon, these metaphors tend to be transformed from the temporal into the spatial and can be accessed visually. Frances Yates,<sup>10</sup> a British historian and classical scholar, states that the way we encapsulate these images involves qualities of temporality, transience, and a sense of presence. This research investigates memory as experiential, operating on a number of levels, including physical, psychological, intellectual and poetic. The visual metaphor raises questions about the relationship between subjects and their memories, and how the ground between them is to be covered. As memory recedes and reappears, can it be assimilated to the self? Is it then still memory? The 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher John Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, emphasised the continuity of consciousness through time (i.e. memory) as the essence of personal identity.<sup>11</sup> In *Everything Of Which I Was Once Conscious But Have Now Forgotten*, I explore memory, as embodied or sensory remembering across time, through my creative practise. Traumatic events are suppressed when they occur, the memories becoming implicit, and time is the ground between aetiology and healing. In this context, the re-imagining and re-presentation in material form as an artwork is a transfer of knowledge.

## somatic experiencing

The American psychoanalyst and scientist, Peter Levine, re-iterates French philosopher Henri Bergson's theory that there are two fundamentally different types of memory: conscious and unconscious.<sup>12</sup> Similar observations and extensive experiments have confirmed that the two distinctly different forms of memory are explicit and conscious, and implicit and unconscious. 'Trauma is a form of implicit memory that is profoundly unconscious and forms the basis for the imprint trauma leaves on the body/mind.'<sup>13</sup> In the face of overwhelming threat, stress or injury, the body responds by flight, fight, freeze, etc., all embodied responses. Levine proposes that 'trauma is fundamentally a highly activated incomplete biological response to threat, frozen in time.'<sup>14</sup> He postulates that somatic release of the frozen energy of trauma can enable an explicit narrative to be constructed, leading to resolution and healing. Within psychoanalytic therapy, using the principles of somatic experiencing by exploring body sensations, the focus is on 'felt sense,' allowing the subject to gradually discharge the truncated energy.

Levine considers that while explicit memory is accessed primarily through cognition, implicit memory must be reached through the body. Trauma is not remembered in an explicit, conscious form; the profound urge is to complete the unrealised responses that were aborted at the time of the overwhelming traumatic event. Within a therapeutic context, a somatic approach examines the critical pathways that meld mind and body, and somatic experiencing 'builds upon a tradition

of somatic education and body-oriented psychotherapy.<sup>15</sup>

I propose that creative practise is a form of somatic experiencing, that the embodied gestures involved in artmaking, together with reflection that is an intrinsic part of the process, can lead to release of the unconscious pent energy embedded in trauma and a fresh narrative can be formed. Somatic experiencing can address the silence to give voice to previously unclaimed (elusive) encounters. I am using creative practise to acknowledge trauma, to re-embodiment experiences through exploration of material forms in order to make sense of acts that make no sense, that defy reason or logic and result in a shutting down of the self. While the effects of trauma are banished from consciousness, the bodily evidence remains.<sup>16</sup> This can take the form of anxiety, insomnia, depression, and chronic fatigue, among other manifestations. I describe it as the 'weight of being.'

Edward S. Casey, in *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, refers to body memory as being 'intrinsic to the body, to its own way of remembering how we remember in and by and through the body.'<sup>17</sup> He states that traumatic body memories 'arise from and bear on one's own lived body in moments of duress.'<sup>18</sup> One of the paradoxical, transformative aspects of implicit traumatic memory is that once it is accessed in a resourced way (through the felt sense), by its very nature, it changes.<sup>19</sup> In discharging this energy through an embodied engagement with a diverse creative practise, this

'transference of energy through its suspension materially within artworks'<sup>20</sup> leads to the potential of knowledge transfer to the artist, to the artwork and to an audience. Casey states that the transcending of mind as the container of memories was compellingly evident in his investigation of body memory. Remembering has the capacity to alter personal identity; 'we are what we remember ourselves to be.'<sup>21</sup>

### **working with the medium**

The material research at the core of my investigation centres around fabric, and I use the aesthetics of repetition and aggregation to mine memory, while subverting traditional modes of making (craft) by imbuing the work with personal perspective and commentary on social and/or political realities. Textiles have an intimate relationship with the body, carrying the marks of our existence, both on the surface and embedded within the structure. The strains, stresses, stains and smells we impress upon this second skin form an archive of our most intimate life. At the same time, textiles are also the membrane through which we formalise our relationship with the external world, while the fabric implacably records the evidence of those interactions. As an artist, I have been investigating embodied experience and experiential encounter within a sculptural installation practise over a sustained period of time. More recently, I have been exploring the body, primarily through soft sculptures, in an attempt to find poetry and meaning beyond being merely a series of objects.

*Hung Out To Dry* is a work made in 2018 in response to the ongoing findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses

to Child Sexual Abuse.<sup>22</sup> This stuffed, calico figure developed its own life and energy, which created a dialogue between me and the artwork. The artist and psychoanalyst, Patricia Townsend, suggests that 'the artist enters into a collaboration or partnership with the medium to achieve her ends,'<sup>23</sup> and 'moulds or coerces the medium into becoming a form for her experience.'<sup>24</sup> Embroidered on the body is a poem I wrote, referring to the untold numbers of survivors, myself included, whose abusers will never be brought to justice.

*What of us?*

*We who were abused in our own homes,  
In our own beds.  
The twice-yearly visits from an 'uncle'  
sent to sleep in our room.*

*What of us?*

*The Royal Commission  
has been sterling in shining the light  
letting victims speak  
acknowledging their pain.*

*What of us?*

*Carrying the same shame,  
The guilt, the feeling that it was our fault.  
The lives we've hurt  
As a result of ours being damaged.*

*What of us?*<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 06:**  
*Hung Out To Dry.* Photo by  
Mig Dann, 2018.

There is violence and healing in this work; each puncture of the needle into the fabric body is a somatic response to long-held anger and grief, while the act of stitching is reparative. This work involves existing in what one makes; inhabiting this body, bringing the inside out, transforming private pain into public testimony. Soft materials are yielding, sensuous, malleable and supple, obliging even. Softness is about compassion, empathy, balm in a time of crisis. The acts of sitting, thinking, feeling, stitching/making, use repetition as a form of process, a somatic experience that is a challenging path of discovery and a way into knowledge.

Language as text is another material form that I use to illuminate poetic propositions, to enhance visual concepts and draw out emotion, with words playing a primary role in their emphasis on ideas. The versatility and power of the written word can encourage both artist and viewer to reflect, and to challenge ideas of power, identity and sexuality.

*Under this roof* is an accordion-style book consisting of sixteen drawings, a title page, and a cover page between board covers, the front one cut out (excavated) to display the images underneath. They are black and white family archival photographs, four of them from the orphanage, and of me and my family up to the age of twelve.

**Figure 07:**

*Under This Roof*. Photo by  
Mig Dann, 2019.

The drawings are made on cotton rag paper with an old portable typewriter. In each of the drawings a single word is repeated in black ink, with one word in red. They are feelings or emotional states or desires: memory, absence, loss, silence, identity, flight, time, dislocation, politics, appetite, desire, poetics, belonging, insomnia, sorrow, and love. The embodied act of making the drawings was repetitive, immersive, tactile, and loud, as the clack-clack of the typewriter keys and the ringing of the return carriage bell induced a meditative state. There was a loss of the sense of time, a deep immersion in the present moment. The line drawings under the text represent the absent body/house; there is both presence

and absence. According to Townsend, 'as the artist works with her medium, she moulds it to reflect her inner experience and, in doing so, imbues it with her own inner life.'<sup>26</sup>

### **the insights of encounter**

While contemporary studies of memory are connected to psychology and the cognitive sciences, the metaphysical perspective of memory, such as that of Henri Bergson, views perception and memory as closely connected.<sup>27</sup> For Bergson, consciousness is a flow of time, and that is what makes memory so important.<sup>28</sup> Research on consciousness shows that our concepts of self, time and body are interrelated. 'To be self-conscious is to

**Figures 08-09:**  
*Under This Roof* (detail). Photo by  
Mig Dann, 2019.

recognize oneself as something that persists through time and is embodied.<sup>29</sup>

This research explores how to use material investigation and experimentation with the sensory aspects of memory, including affect, embodied perception, intuition, felt knowledge, and a way of looking, to encounter, examine, then reintegrate past trauma. Memory informs making and making informs memory. As I have suggested, these encounters, through an embodied, immersive, repetitive methodology with the mediums I have engaged, have enabled me to access aspects of my repressed unconscious. Through a somatic engagement, they give rise to insights. I believe that the key life experiences that dominate my work, events, and themes of absence and loss, are simultaneously personal and collectively resonant.

Early psychoanalysis established that memories are not fixed; rather, they constitute a shifting psychological landscape. Feminist approaches in psychoanalysis debate cohesive subjectivity and singular identity.<sup>30</sup> Memories are experiential and operate at a number of levels: physical, psychological, intellectual, spiritual and poetic. As a sensorial experience, memory can be accessed through vision, sound, smell and touch. This involves reflection and experimentation with those sensory aspects of memory, including affect, embodied perception, intuition, felt knowledge, and a way of looking. Through the focused immersion in making, including repetition as an aesthetic and mnemonic device,

this research argues that time recedes, and embedded, tacit knowledge acts as a portal to the unconscious, enabling a transfer of knowledge. According to art historian Claire Bishop, 'sensory perception is always placed in the service of emotional triggers'<sup>31</sup> to prompt reflection and personal associations in the viewer.

Video allows a focus on ideas behind fundamental human experiences and aspects of consciousness. Time is video's basic material; it can be stretched, condensed, accelerated or decelerated to reveal a subject more precisely, to get closer to grasping the ungraspable. It can encourage us, perhaps, to address the world beyond appearances. It is an expression of inner metaphysical experiences with no conclusion or resolution. This intuitive work can evoke emotions in a viewer through the dynamism of subjective experience.

**Figure 10:**  
*Nightsky / I remember.* Photo by  
Mig Dann, 2019.

My sensory exploration of memory also focuses on the physical world as a way of investigating embodied perception. Through reflective encounters with these spaces, I am exploring sense perception as an avenue to self-knowledge. The physical environment represents sensory, embodied, affective spaces. This phenomenological encounter, the video and sound work *Nightsky / I Remember*, is the first of a series of three videos engaging with sea, earth and sky, and is a re-imagining of physical environments that have personal resonance attached to my childhood memories. The spoken-word soundtrack, *I Remember*, is inspired by memoirs of the same name by Joe Brainard<sup>32</sup> and Georges Perec.<sup>33</sup> Each paragraph, mostly short, starts with the words, 'I remember,' with memories allowed to rise to the surface of consciousness, conjuring ideas, objects, people and events across time and space, with no attempt at a chronology. Like my use of 'everyday' materials, these recollections are both mundane and deeply personal, ranging from my earliest memories to relatively recent events. The encounter with the moon-filled night sky is a backdrop for self-reflection, a limitless fantasy playground.

### **the potential for knowledge transfer**

I am re-embodimenting the past through creative practise, attempting to establish pathways that can promote healing through re-imagination and re-presentation. Autobiographical memory is fundamentally significant for the self, for emotions, and for the experience of personhood. Repeated trauma can generate sensory-perceptual memories as well as the inhibition of memories.<sup>34</sup> The (re)construction of autobiographical memory, and the

relationship between the specific event(s) that mediate remembering from a psychoanalytical perspective, become a mediation by moving between past and present. By exploring the elusiveness and fragility of memory in a deep way through creative practise, I am re-embodimenting 'the world of my own memory outside of technological time and thus gain[ing] access to the infinitely receding plateaus of felt time.'<sup>35</sup> A somatic exploration of material form and sensory encounter enables the possibility of transforming traumatic memories to a holistic subjectivity. In doing so, the trauma of loss, abandonment, and sexual abuse can be exposed, 'thereby moving traumatic incidents from silence to testimony in its witnessing to enable a healing possibility.'<sup>36</sup> Self-knowledge is gained from this exploration, while the witnessing of testimony is a potential transfer of knowledge to an audience through an engagement with the artwork.

Through the intersection of creative practise and psychological enquiry, embodied sensation can be accessed to liberate the unconscious, implicit memories of trauma by an engagement with material forms. Trauma, particularly trauma within memory, is a broad concern, and by making artworks that can move between autobiography and referencing broader ideas, I can communicate these possibilities to an audience. The journey from displacement and dissociation to acceptance and self-knowledge emerges within a personal and social history, and resilience and empowerment can spring from separation, loss and abuse. Art therapy is a discipline that encompasses both art



and therapy. It is conducted by a clinician trained in psychology and psychotherapy, and 'the primary goal of the art activity must be therapy.'<sup>37</sup> There is an educational element involved, because the work includes helping others to create, but teaching is secondary to therapy. Although my research could be seen to overlap with art therapy, my creative practise is my primary goal and activity. While seeking to reconcile an inner and outer world through my work, being able to express myself conceptually and aesthetically is my major concern. My story is not uncommon, and my aim is that there will be a benefit, through the increased potential for knowledge transfer, to others in varied communities, both queer and heteronormative, and that my research will make a contribution within the field of contemporary art.

The 'voice' is deliberately autobiographical: self-reflection that seeks to document and analyse personal experience in a larger social and cultural context. I am an older queer artist, speaking and writing about my own lived experience across several countries and many decades. Although informed by my life, there is more than autobiography; the work can also speak to a broader humanity.

My diverse material practise is an engagement with sculptural objects, installations, text works, video and photography, where, through a deep engagement with the physical aspect of artmaking, embodied memory and trauma are revealed. The use of textiles as an affective experience is, more than any other object, closely identified with the body of the absent wearer. In working with fabric as a material

choice to explore and express my ideas, memory is triggered by the associations with my mother spending long hours at the sewing machine during my childhood, making clothes for herself and her children, as well as soft furnishings for herself and others. Townsend discusses the artist's creative process 'as an act of self-realisation in which the artist moulds or coerces the medium into becoming a form for her experience.'<sup>38</sup> She adds that 'it not only provides an external form for an internal experience but also presents some aspect of the outside world in a new light.'<sup>39</sup>

There is an intimate connection between hand and head. While the hand performs movements that it has honed over many thousands of repetitions, the mind is free to disengage with process and roam through space and time. 'The use of small repeated acts explicated with cheap, familiar and non-obtuse materials speaks of human interactions with objects in time.'<sup>40</sup> Sennet states that 'thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making.'<sup>41</sup> I believe that we learn through the things we make, both materially and personally. Working with fabric and thread celebrates its haptic qualities, and the material unpredictability leaves an imprint of thought, time, process, and the hand of the maker on and within a surface. Identity is being formed through making and repetition makes something knowable outside of time. While in the flow of making, time stops, and the conscious and unconscious mind commune. Out of this merging comes affect that has the power and possibility to communicate to a viewer.

**Figure 12:**

*Doppelgangster*. Photo by  
Mig Dann, 2020.

Spatial installation is among the diverse forms of encounter I engage with, positioning objects in a space in order to elicit embodied responses. A viewer physically enters into the space and is invited to experience the works as a singular, relational entity. 'This introduces an emphasis on sensory immediacy, on physical participation, and on a heightened awareness of other visitors who become part of the piece,'<sup>42</sup> encouraging the activation of the viewer. By installing the work in a psychologically charged space, animated by the wandering viewer who projects the unconscious onto the real, a physical and emotional encounter is provided. Another form of embodied encounter is utilised with interactive works to emphasise the importance of audience interaction and response when presented with an art object. This requires active investigation and participation by the viewer in order for the work to be complete.

*Doppelgangster* is an interactive work exploring the notion of duality, which is a functional re-organisation of the mind into enduring 'parallel-distinct structures,'<sup>43</sup> operating alongside each other without being fully integrated in aim, content, and process. Such reorganisation serves to buffer the traumatic discontinuity in and between external reality and internal world. This interactive work encourages the viewer to walk around and through the sculpture and swing the figures. The in-between space of the sculpture and the wall projection is a scaled-up space of shadows and light, and an endless return of images that keep coming back in diminishing degrees. There is a sense of entrapment, a powerful combination of contradictions in an activated, destabilising environment. The viewer swings the figures and becomes part of the recorded projection, inserting themselves among the ephemeral images, which are receding visions of time

and mirror the disjunction between internal and external worlds. Townsend, citing the art educator Anton Ehrenzweig, argues that the 'creation of a work of art can be regarded as an attempt to integrate 'unacknowledged split-off elements of the self.'<sup>44</sup>

### **conclusion**

Creative practise offers the opportunity to (re) write my own story, to declare my truth, and in so doing, approach the elusive encounter with my past. Celan reminds us that reaching the mystery of an encounter demands that we speak from an angle of reflection that emanates from our own existence and our own physical nature.<sup>45</sup> The embodied memories I explore and then re-examine in a creative practise employing diverse forms of embodied expertise can increase the potential for knowledge transfer. The artwork becomes a space in which inner and outer worlds coexist, first for the artist and then for the viewer. This is the key to incorporating implicit traumatic memories and reintegrating the fractured self.

**author biography**

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