

RECOVERED MEMORY

LARA STRONGMAN

'Once in a dream I conceived and built a palace, a chateau in which there were grottoes ... I don't know how to explain it ... but so ravishing, so picturesque, that for ten years the whole thing stayed engraved in my memory. I could not get rid of it. Of course I took myself for a fool, a maniac. I was no mason, to start with; I had never touched a trowel... I did not dare to breathe a word about my dream to a soul for fear of being laughed at in the village. To be truthful, I laughed at myself a bit. Fifteen years later, when I had almost forgotten the remote dream, a chance slip of the foot jogged my memory. I tripped and fell over an object. It was a stone of a form so bizarre that I slipped it into my pocket, in order to study it at leisure. The next day I went to the same spot and found others, even more beautiful.... I said to myself then: "Well if nature can sculpt so easily I am sure I can master masonry and architecture." Here then was my dream at last. "To work," I said to myself!'

*Le Facteur Cheval*¹

'Hysterics suffer from reminiscences.'

Sigmund Freud

There is a tendency, it seems, among certain psychologists, to open with a personal anecdote when writing about generalised states of mind. The forerunner among these psychological autobiographers was Sigmund Freud, who, in discussing the phenomenon of the Uncanny, which he defined as 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar', described a vivid dream in which he kept finding himself returning, against his will, to a narrow street which he seemed unable to detour, and from which he awoke in an intensely anxious state.² Similarly, when exploring the nature of memory, Freud confessed to his readers his own instances of forgetting,

and subsequently misremembering, the proper names of people of whom he felt to some degree ambivalent; and detailed unpleasant tasks (paying bills, returning books) that he habitually forgot to assume. Memory, concluded Freud, from a comparison of his own experience with his clinical observations, has a protective function: painful memories are 'particularly apt to be forgotten'.³ When an experience is later recalled, the memory may bear little relation to the observable reality; while false memories—images of things which never actually happened—may be painfully (re)experienced as fact. It is the forgetting—and subsequent problematic recovery—of personal experience through the interpretive screen of memory which is the subject of this essay and exhibition.

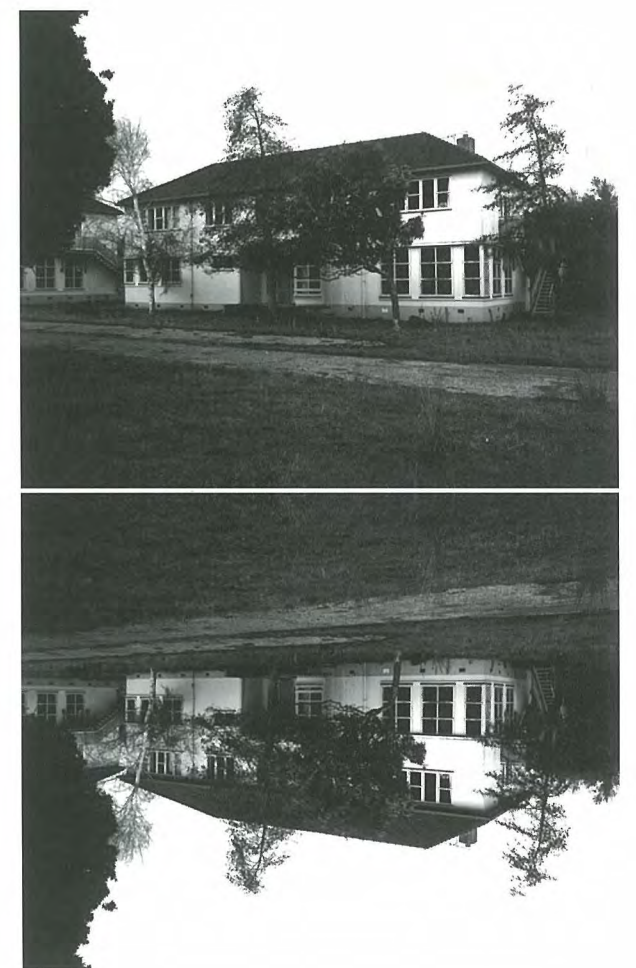
It has often been noted that Freud's greatest 'subject' was himself. It is Freud's own complex, dominant, and intensely inventive personality that provides 'a ground for the mosaic of impressions and confessions' which form his analysis and interpretive reconstruction of his patients' dreams.⁴ And it is the very *subjectivity* of Freud's interpretation of intensely-observed lived experience that has ensured his continued relevance, to figures as diverse as on the one hand, critical theorist Herbert Marcuse, who advocated the adoption of a radical personal subjectivity to overthrow capitalist society's merciless objectification of the individual; and on the other archetypal psychologist James Hillman, who has extended Freud's dream analysis as a modality of what is termed 'depth psychology', where the causes as well as the symptoms of psychiatric disorder are addressed by the therapist. Freud's interpretations of personal experience continue to provide an essential imaginary for visual artists, in their production of new speculations about the role of the individual in

contemporary society. But can we rely on the veracity of Freud's autobiographical fragments themselves?

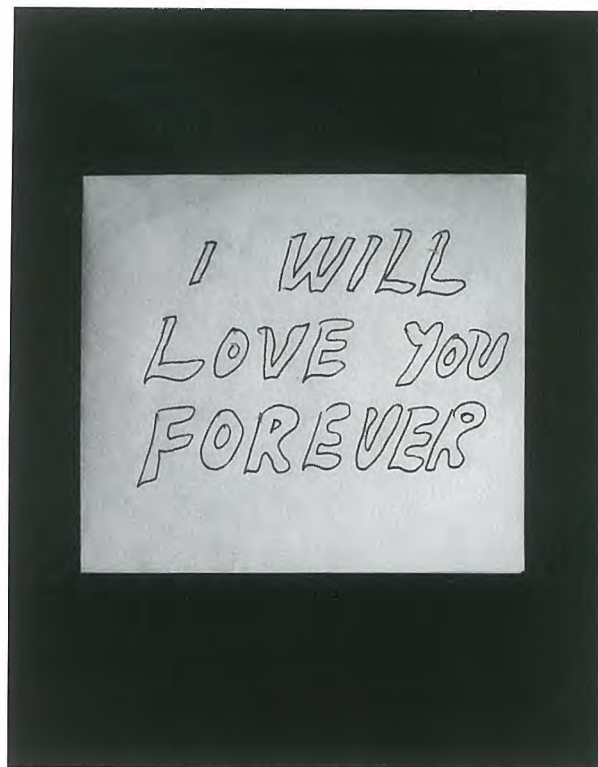
The answer is clearly no. Real lives are always a tapestry of selected fictions, of experiences later recalled and reworked into the form of what *should* have happened, rather than what really happened. What may be materially false may equally be ontologically true. In his later writings about false memory syndrome, which 'corrected' his early seduction theory, Freud commented that 'the childhood experiences constructed or remembered in analysis are sometimes indisputably false and sometimes equally certainly correct, and in most cases compounded of truth and falsehood.'⁵ It seems reasonable to suppose from this that the persona which Freud created through his writing (in itself another form of analysis) was likewise composed of constituent parts of truth and falsehood, that there was a 'fictional Freud' who operated as a near double of the 'real Freud'—the principal character in the narrative of his life and work. Such a model of autobiography assimilates within its narrative various fragmentary untruths, including 'corrections' to reality, camouflage, lies, dreams, fantasies, and experiences purloined from others. This is a framework which may be useful in approaching the expanding body of contemporary art that deals with the exploration of aspects of personal identity through the mode of psychological (and psychopathological) affect. It may be, after all, that an authentic identity is created as much from fiction as from fact.

I: 'The Sick Child'

We are a sick society. It's official: the New Zealand Ministry of Health states that one in five people will suffer from depression at some time during their lives, and that one in twenty will experience a moderate or



ANN SHELTON
Villa #10, Formerly Lake Alice Hospital, Wanganui, New Zealand 2004
c-type prints
each 900 x 720 mm



MARIE SHANNON
I Will Love You Forever 2005 (from *Love Notes*)
 silver gelatin print, selenium toned
 500 x 400 mm

severe episode.⁶ While New Zealand is thought to experience the highest rate of youth suicide in the developed world, New Zealand children are subject to serious abuse at alarmingly high rates. (A recent report from the Child, Youth and Family Service says that 'poverty, psychological stress and limited support' are key factors leading to the maltreatment of children.⁷) There is a chronic ongoing shortage of beds in the mental health sector. In general, we are subject to a sense of non-specific psychological malaise, in which we strive to regain 'work/life balance' as part of governmental policy. To take Jedediah Purdy's lead, we habitually use clinical language to refer to our everyday experiences: so-and-so is 'in denial', is 'passive-aggressive' or 'repressed'. A person with high standards is 'anal'. Using 'phrases that reduce personality to symptoms', we are self-aware in the extreme, constantly subjecting our motivations and those of others to a withering degree of psychological analysis.⁸

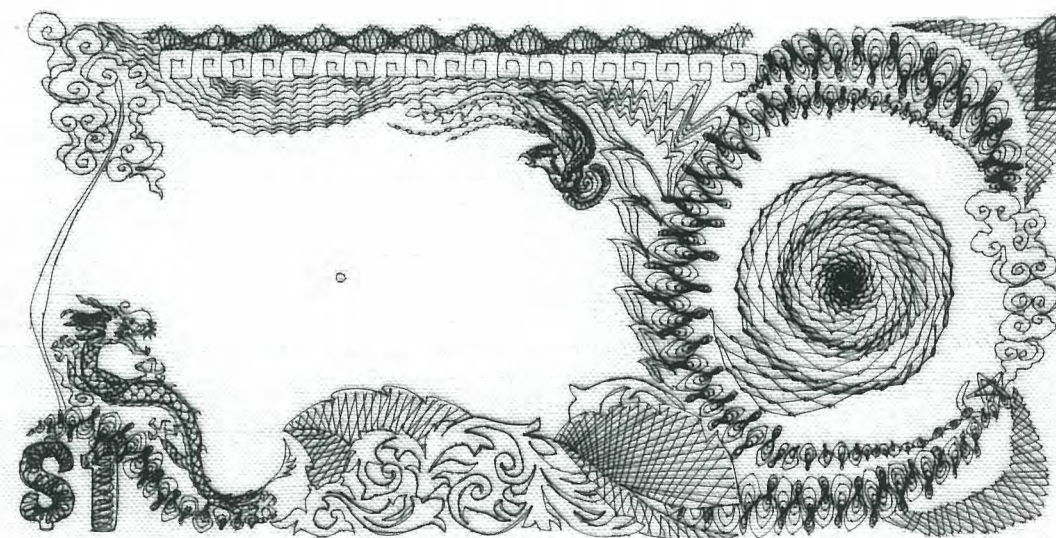
Purdy suggests that our emotional life has been bankrupted by years of media exposure to intimate moments ('falling in love, marrying, making love, reuniting with an estranged father, saying goodbye to an aged grandparent'), to a point where we begin to doubt the significance of our private worlds and lives, our intimacies reduced inexorably to cliché and banality.⁹ He blames 'the confessional culture of talk-shows and choreographed political repentance' for the loss of

faith in the validity of one's own emotional response, citing the 'curious conjunction in public life between the rhetoric of evangelical revival and the behaviour of low vaudeville', wryly commenting that 'Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker sometimes seem to have formed the mould for public figures of the past decade.'¹⁰

How then, in the midst of private mistrust of the authenticity of public emotion, are we to account for Marie Shannon's *Love Notes* (2005)? For many years a chronicler of intimate domestic moments and shared jokes between friends, here Shannon has collected, photographed—and publicly exhibited—private notes written by members of her immediate family to one another. 'Sorry for being grumpy', reads one sheepish note: 'I Will Love You Forever', announces another, while in a radical condensation of means, a third simply reads 'I. L. Y'. Standing in for decades of love and companionship, these tiny crumpled fragments of intimacy are raised to a monumental scale. Shannon's viewer must make a swift emotional appraisal on encountering the work: are the texts sincere? Are the notes authentic, or have they been written for the purpose? The balance of evidence suggests the former; the lack of 'showmanship' in the originary source of the works—the humbleness of the paper scraps (Post-It notes, beer mats), their utilitarian nature; the hasty scrawl of the texts, the crinkles of the smoothed-out paper—their very rawness; somehow speaks to the genuineness of the sentiment expressed; although, ironically, it is due to Shannon's great subtlety as a photographic printer that these abject details are apparent in the image.

In a world of increasingly bogus emotion, we are thrown on our own resource as judges of the authenticity of sentiment. We look not only to the evidence of the moment, but to our recall of past experiences. Our memory of what has been proved to be authentic in the past enables us to determine what is worthy of our attention in the present. And it is those past experiences—and the emotions and feelings which arise from them—which are instrumental in constructing our personal identity and system of beliefs. As artist Michael Harrison recently commented, 'Generally I can only believe in something if it relates to my experience or intuition of life.'¹¹ Psychologist Daniel Schacter considers that in a general sense 'all art relies on memory ... every work of art is affected, directly or indirectly, by the personal experiences of the artist.'¹² It may be that in communicating with their viewers, artworks trigger shared memories of common experience, enabling the addressee of the work to recover incidents from their personal past in order to make sense of what they see in the present.

This process is not unlike Freud's famous analysis of hysteria, which he described as 'suffering from reminiscences'. Hysterical patients' symptoms were,



LIYEN CHONG
Counterfeit Pleasures from a Malaysian Childhood (RM\$1) 2006
 artist's hair on cotton
 140 x 75 mm

for Freud, 'the remnants and the memory symbols of certain (traumatic) experiences.' He cited the example of a woman with a nervous tic, 'a peculiar smacking noise which manifested itself when she was labouring under any excitement, without any obvious cause. It had its origin in two experiences which had this common element, that she attempted to make no noise, but that by a sort of counter-will this noise broke the stillness. On the first occasion, she had finally after much trouble put her sick child to sleep, and she tried to be very quiet so as not to awaken it. On the second occasion, during a ride with both her children in a thunderstorm the horses took fright, and she carefully avoided any noise for fear of frightening them still more.'¹³ Much like Freud's theories of the Uncanny, our past haunts our present, its involuntary return heralded by a strange encounter with the familiar.

Nothing could be more familiar, and yet more strange, than the uncanny realm of childhood, a territory which has proved a recurrent source of inspiration for artists. 'Recovered Memory' collects together such diverse recapitulations of childhood experience as Ronnie van Hout's *Sick Child II* (2006), a three dimensional self-portrait with boy-sized pyjamas and man-sized head and hands; and Liyen Chong's embroidered Chinese lion entitled *When they mispronounce my name, this is what I think I look like*, a work which directly recalls an incident from her childhood—an interchange with an emigration officer while in an Australian airport in the mid-1980s. Both works

revise the historical record, enabling both artist and viewer to revisit the past from the vantage point of the present, compressing time and conflating fact and fantasy in a new hybrid memory-image. As Cliff Whiting commented in 1974: 'Artists of any type can relate their work to their own upbringing. The sights and sounds of their culture are always at arms' length during their childhood ... and later in life they come to conclusions about it in their art.'¹⁴

Childhood offers an opportunity to recover the authenticity of direct experience. Likewise, many contemporary artists are looking again, like the Art Brut practitioners of the 1950s, not only to the images of childhood but to the art of the insane and society's outsiders, finding in these images a desirably unmediated representation of experience. But rather than simply recoup the visual forms and motifs of the insane for their own practices—as, for example, Gordon Walters did with the psychiatric patient Hattaway's geometric motifs *en-abyme*¹⁵—a new kind of work has appeared which deliberately restages insane gestures. Here the artist is demonstrably sane, but knowingly adopts formal characteristics derived from the symptomatology of psychiatric disorder *within their work*. I am thinking here of Ann Shelton's majestic 'doubled' photographs of abandoned New Zealand psychiatric institutions, which recall the 'splitting' effect often documented in personalities that have undergone psychological trauma. And of Steve Carr's piles of discarded objects, such as his 10,000-piece sculpture—a huge disorderly heap of casts

of chewing gum globs, cigarette butts and peanut shells—which looks like something that might grow organically beside the armchair of a person who lives largely within their own head. The work appears as the dubious product of a presumed psychopathology, its abjection and wild multiplication seemingly recording obsessive-compulsive processes at the same time as it critiques the values of the capitalist art object.

Liyen Chong's tiny embroideries stitched with her own hair employ a similar process of painstaking repetition and miniaturization. Imaging icons from both her Chinese heritage and her western education, each work takes more than a week at a time to manufacture, slowly taking form in a somewhat addictive process that she has described as 'the act of compulsive embroidery.'¹⁶ In these works, the familiar is made strange again. Chong comments: 'I'm comfortable with the idea that I am expressing another persona who is involved in compulsive embroidery. For me this act or gesture is as important as the final object itself.'¹⁷ Kah Bee Chow's absurdist, embarrassing and completely fearless *Love Lessons* (2003) documents a performance that took place over nine days in which she continuously declared her 'unrequited love' for a fellow art student, finally dressing up in a strawberry mask and commandeering an unrelated political demonstration (a major anti-G. E. march in Auckland) to make a public spectacle of her emotion. In the work's final unsent letter, Chow commented: 'Perhaps I did consider that it might be wrong but I felt compelled to do it anyway'. Other video works, in which Chow has filmed herself tap-dancing in public spaces in downtown Auckland (*Nine Dancing Ladies*, 2004) and practicing the piano falteringly in her parents' lounge while her father watches TV (*Attempt*, 2006), likewise reveal a bravura public staging of the failures and hesitations of the private self, with similarly uncomfortable results for the viewer.

Psychiatrist Julia Kristeva described a new kind of late twentieth-century patient presenting themselves for treatment, suffering from what she termed 'maladies of the soul'. These illnesses include 'narcissism', 'false personalities', 'borderline states', and 'psychosomatic conditions', and require analysts to come up with new classification systems. Speculating that these new psychopathologies are a 'product of contemporary life, which exacerbates our familial situation and infantile difficulties and makes them into symptoms of a particular era', Kristeva comments that all of these symptomatology 'share a common denominator—the inability to represent.'¹⁸ It may be that the psychopathological personae currently being adopted by visual artists are addressing this loss of the conditions of representation.

II: 'Lost Children'

'Everything involving the sphere of loss—that is, what I have lost myself, the time that has gone; and disappearance, flight, and the general evanescence of things, and even what in the prevalent and therefore most vulgar social sense of time is called wasted time—all this finds in that strangely apt old military term, *lost children*, its intersection with the sphere of discovery, of the exploration of unknown terrains, and with all the forms of quest, adventure, avant-garde. This is the crossroads where we have found ourselves and lost our way.'¹⁹

Guy Debord

Lost children—*les enfants perdus*—is a term given by the French military to those scouts sent out into enemy territory who are not expected to return. In seeking to recover our memories of the past, we find both gaps and imposters in the account. Early theories of memory held that all experiences are retained by the unconscious, and wait only for the right trigger to release them, like the sensory prompt of Marcel Proust's *madeleine* cakes recalling a wealth of suppressed experience. Cognitive psychology of the 1960s and 1970s was informed by a conception of memory as a digital analogue, a biological machine for the permanent—though sometimes hidden—storage and retrieval of information. Subsequent psychological research has held that the theory of total recall, though attractive, is not true. Some experiences are more likely to be retained than others; others are quickly lost; and false memories may in certain circumstances grow up to paper over real experiences. (Freud posited that many childhood memories functioned like screens over what had really happened in one's early life, and that these 'screen memories' were a mode of psychic protection which insulated a person from facing uncomfortable images of themselves.)

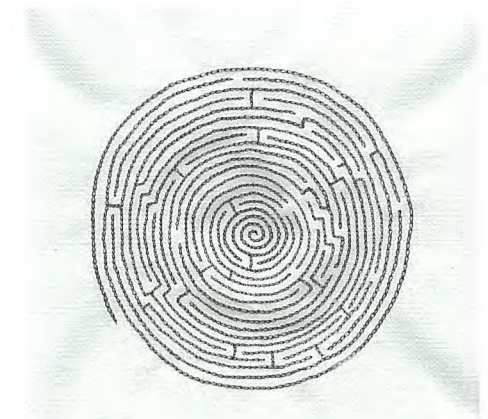
In a series of works begun in 1968, influential French artist Christian Boltanski sought to address the problem of the past's loss by reconstructing his own childhood. Where he had no 'authentic' material to draw upon, he manufactured scenes and used photographs of other people to stand in for the 'lost' images of himself. While purporting to represent the real life autobiography of the artist, through such methods Boltanski incorporated clear pointers to the fictionality of the work. By contrast, in her narrative paintings of the mid-1990s, Séraphine Pick fictionalised various traumatic childhood memories, where the slightest incident of biographical fact was adulterated with a surreal corpus of visual invention. The autobiographical authenticity of Pick's works—the factuality of her authorial

'I'—remains uncertain: the fictive persona constructed in these images stands in for the artist, as a figure similar to, but not synonymous with, Pick herself.

This doubling principle of artistic identity is made apparent in Yvonne Todd's little-known work *The Hexane Eaters*, a diptych of two photographic portraits of young women, one—the image of the girl clutching the psychology textbook—clipped from a local newspaper. Todd comments: 'I was drawn to the image of the textbook girl in the newspaper clipping because her hair looked like that of a modest Christian—un-dyed, unprocessed, mousey, in the way of the phalanx of Exclusive Brethren wives I once saw at the supermarket in Dargaville. The image on the right hand side of the diptych is a portrait of me when I was 22. I thought our smiles looked the same...'²⁰ As Barbara Steiner and Jun Yang observe, 'the fallacy is to think that by looking at an "autobiographical work" one is seeing the artist speaking authentically.'²¹

Artist Scott Flanagan operates as the curator of a diverse body of international artists, whose work he has brought together again for the current exhibition, their second group showing in New Zealand. Among his stable of artists is Alan Lacan, born in Otira in the Southern Alps, and now resident on the outskirts of Industrialstadt, Germany; Welsh painter Taf Aston, who after losing his thumb in a scouting accident initially took up painting as occupational therapy; and the enigmatic Stan Long, a South African artist whose CV records the lengthy breaks between a series of art-related 'incidents'. Long's painfully honest biographical record is unusual in the artworld: as Steiner and Yang note, artists will often fake their personal data, massaging birth dates and career details 'to help support the image of a successful artist.'²² While the gaps in the historical record hint at a series of past traumas, the artist is reticent, preferring to let his work (and Flanagan) speak for him: the exact nature of the 'incidents' which have dogged Long, and out of which his career has been formed, are not a matter of public record.

Likewise, with their brave expressions and pensive gazes, the carefully styled female figures of Yvonne Todd's recent 'Meat and Liquor' series seem to be suffering from a past trauma, but it is unclear what, if anything, has actually happened. In their proximity to a family album frame filled with images of carrots and eggs (and in their original showing, a radio mast thrusting into the sky, entitled *Porn Syntax*) a nasty psychosexual disturbance is alluded to, but never confirmed. With one hand fumbling in his pyjama bottoms and the other in a sling, Ronnie van Hout's *Sick Child II* throws into even sharper relief the troubled relation between childhood memory and wounded sexuality.



LIYEN CHONG
Picture of brain as formed by hair 2006
artist's hair on cotton
90 mm diameter

Recovered memories—whereby the subject becomes aware of long-buried trauma through a process of therapy—have been a source of great debate among psychologists and wider communities, due to the propensity of false memories, or things which never actually happened, to be believed in by the subject, and in some cases to be implanted by the therapist. Freud, of course, was initially to blame. His early theories of mental illness were informed by his enquiries into childhood sexual abuse, whereby he established that forgotten traumatic memories may later be recalled: it wasn't until many years later, in a cautiously reworded revision, that he admitted his subsequent realization that many of these traumatic events so painfully remembered did not, in fact, ever take place. It is surprisingly easy to construct false histories in the minds of suggestive patients, according to a series of experiments run in the 1970s and cited by memory psychologist Elizabeth Loftus, the 'diva of disclosure'. Working with people who had been overweight all their lives, two psychotherapists successfully implanted 'false childhoods in which the patients had grown up thin. They reflected, "Made-up memories can change you just as well as the arbitrary perceptions that you made up at the time about 'real world events'. That happens a lot in therapy.'"²³

Recovered memories have taken a dubious role in our recent cultural history. Beyond the hysteria of false memory syndrome in the 1980s, with its sweeping accusations of childhood abuse, and the satanic ritual abuse scandals in childcare centres of the 1990s, Holocaust revisionism—where the recollections of increasingly elderly survivors are dismissed, and the collective memory of society is disputed—is one of the critical issues of our time. In New Zealand, we are only now beginning to deal with colonialism's disastrous legacy of enforced forgetting.



YVONNETODD
The Hexane Eaters 2004
 Newspaper clipping and lightjet print
 210 x 280 mm

Contemporary global diplomacy appears to require a constantly shifting camouflage and obfuscation of what really happened in the recent past—in Bosnia, in Rwanda, in Timor—in the interests of future alliances. As Joan Didion wrote, 'the major cost of public life is memory.'²⁴ The past shapes the present, but its present reality is always up for revision and reinterpretation. In the face of the fragility and uncertainty of human memory attested to both by science and art, our historical records—society's collective memory banks—assume a greater and greater importance, and unsurprisingly are frequently targeted by aggressors in time of conflict. The victor not only writes history, but erases it.

III: 'The Archive'

While 'memory is a dynamic process which begins with the original event,' according to psychologist Daniel Schacter²⁵; deconstructionist critic Jacques Derrida considers that 'the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.'²⁶ The archive thus exists at the outskirts of memory; its gain is memory's loss. It enables forgetting as much as it allows remembering. Fundamentally an archive is a discriminating mechanism. Its rejections



are as significant as its inclusions: what is not archived is what is condemned to be forgotten; what the archive collects is what is destined to be remembered. But while the archive's ultimate purpose is recovery of the past, in actuality much of its content will never be recalled by future researchers. The archive, Derrida says, is a wager or a pledge, 'and like every pledge, a token of the future'.²⁷

Ann Shelton's 'a library to scale' documents the personal archive and eccentric taxonomy of Taranaki bibliophile Frederick Butler. Shelton describes his process: 'For a period of sixty years, Butler clipped articles, advertisements and images from as many newspapers as he was able to obtain; he then pasted these articles, or transcribed them when he was unable to obtain an original clipping, into upside down novels that he ordered thematically.' Butler began his archive in 1926: it ran to some 3,500 volumes, which he covered with remnants of wallpaper, inscribing their new titles by hand. His diverse subjects of interest included Indoor Bowls, Ships, Persons, Maori & Militia, Places, Containers, Art, Blood, Broadcasting, Antiques, Curiosities, Raffles, Births etc., Carp, Cheese, Chess and Draughts Club, Espionage, Cricket, War—Casualties,



KAH BEE CHOW
 Details from *Love Lessons* 2003
 laser colour photocopies and typewritten text on paper
 each 210 x 297 mm

Needlework, and Mt. Egmont, among dozens of others. Armed with only scissors and glue in his daily wager with the future, Butler developed a unique system of thinking through and arranging the world around him, based on a radical subjectivisation of customary archiving categories. As Shelton comments, 'Butler has created a taxonomy that unlike the archive in traditional terms is liminal and subjective, slipping between the personal and the orthodox, the systemic and the idiosyncratic. Butler presents a new arcade in which we see ourselves reflected back; a kind of museum in a scrapbook.'²⁸

While the archive represents the ultimate attempt to make sense of the world by imposing a structural order upon its tumultuous events and personalities, it can never be truly objective, and is always subject to the internal disorders of the culture—and of the personalities—which create it. Butler's great achievement—and Shelton's, in presenting it to the world—is to reveal the archive's secret life as *psychological process*. As Derrida notes, the process of archivization itself always 'produces as much as it records the event'.²⁹ (If any proof of this subjectivity were needed, it is in the tendency of archivists and museum curators almost without exception to refer to 'my' collection, and



to point out the tidemarks within the collection resulting from poor decision-making by earlier collectors.)

Shelton presents us with a photographic record of Butler's archive—the annotated spines of the books, the framing shelves, the final empty shelves awaiting volumes which were never made—rather than the minutiae of its contents, which we must imagine for ourselves. And in so doing, we glimpse the enormity of Butler's enterprise, reflected on a 1:1 scale in Shelton's magisterial images. As Francis Pound writes: 'There is an archival mania at work, at once in the archive itself and in Shelton's depiction of it. It is as if the archive bears within itself an inescapable contagion, in which the obsessiveness or manic profusion that Shelton had meant merely to depict has infected her very depiction.'³⁰

There are echoes of Butler's 'contagious archive' in both Marie Shannon's carefully saved disposable *Love Notes* (which in themselves extend her earlier photographic presentations of 'unworthy objects', such as *The Museum of Cat Fur* (1994), in which Shannon sellotaped samples of cat fur to a piece of cardboard, with the names of the donor cats handwritten underneath); and in Liyen Chong's 'white book', a work she made in her final year at art school. Chong's framework was the section headings of



STEVE CARR
Still from *Smoke Train* 2005
35mm on DVD video loop
Courtesy the artist and Michael Lett, Auckland

a first-year university psychology textbook, between which she interpolated the vast quantity of notes she had taken over the two previous years, 'tiny fragments of thoughts and insights' which she had 'scribbled everywhere, at any time, on any thing (including all over the back and palm of my left hand)'.³¹ The thematic chapters in an old edition of *Roget's Thesaurus* provided a secondary pseudo-order within the narrative, which is fragmentary, incoherent, and composed of multiple voices, indicated by her use of different typefaces and weights. The voices range from the confessional and diaristic: 'when I am not confident, things start to go AWRY./voice that is not my own./why do I need a voice for that?'; to the third-person and clinical: 'As she made progression in terms of her health, she became more functional. She became the exploiter of her own dreams, Buying and bartering madness for people to see. Sold her long hair.'³² While the author of many of the notes is Chong herself, other fragments have been copied from elsewhere, assimilated within the archive's self-referential narrative.

Chong comments: 'While I was in the process of putting the white book together, I was fully aware that I was creating a fictive identity and reframing and alchemizing past events. Moreover, I was aware that I wasn't only the writer of the fragments of thoughts in the book, I was also the 'editor', and the 'designer' of the book arranging the bits of text and dictating what they looked like. I was also recreating/revising the meanings of the fragments in the book by placing them in a particular order. In a way, I was distancing myself from the author of the fragments, altering their meanings, even the ones I myself had originated.'³³

IV: 'The Return of the Repressed'

'What cannot be forgotten appears in dreams', said Guy Debord in 1961.³⁴ He was recalling not only Freud's theories of psychopathology, which posit that what cannot be faced by the psyche is archived by the memory and is compelled to return in disordered form, but the early twentieth-century art movement most influenced

by Freud's ideas—Surrealism. Its chief proponent, André Breton, who worked during WWI in a neuropsychiatric clinic, wrote in 1934 that a definition of Surrealism 'rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought.'³⁵ Breton felt that given the relative proportionalities of time spent in either state, too much attention was paid to our waking moments at the expense of our unconscious: his Surrealist Manifesto of 1924 discussed his faith in 'the future transmutation of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of surreality, so to speak'.

While some contemporary artworks more directly approach Breton's exhortations to recover one's dream life as an originary source (I am thinking here of Séraphine Pick's conflation of the real and the imagined, her significant distortions of scale, and compressions of time, for example), many artists are making work which involves the uneasy persistence of the past in the present, bringing the surrealist subject into play again. They do this on occasion referencing (but not explaining) real or imagined past trauma; they do it most commonly by reworking images and events from childhood; and they do it by recommissioning dated styles and visual forms, literally recalling them from the archive and bringing the passé back into currency. It is interesting to note that this conflation of the speculative and imagined with the past is embedded in the English language itself. When we need to express how things might have been different, or wonder how they might be different in the future, this language of provisionality—the territory of art—moves time one step backwards. I wish things *were* otherwise, we say. If things hadn't happened in this way, *I would have lived* another life entirely. Post-modern culture is primarily a backward-looking enterprise: as psychologist James Hillman suggests, 'the key syllable in culture is the prefix "re".'³⁶

Art historian Hal Foster suggests in his book *Compulsive Beauty* that collectively the Surrealists were drawn to the return of society's repressed material, seeking to direct this return to critical ends. He considers that the 'recovered outmoded' (as well as the 'mocked mechanical-commodified') are strategies of protest used by surrealist artists to contest the high capitalist order'.³⁷ Whatever one's purpose, revisiting the past must always be an uncanny experience: in order to do so, artists create fictional personas and false selves which operate within the culture like Debord's 'Lost Children', as scouts not expected to return. And in their inventions which expand to fill the resulting gaps in the record, artists offer us new ways of seeing ourselves.

- 1 Le Facteur Cheval, quoted by Lawrence Durrell in 'In Praise of Fanatics', collected in Lawrence Durrell, *Spirit of Place: Mediterranean Writings*, London: Faber and Faber, 1969. First published in *Holiday*, August 1962.
- 2 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *Collected Works of Sigmund Freud* (1901), vol. XVII, transl. James Strachey and Anna Freud, London: Hogarth Press, 1953, p.220.
- 3 Sigmund Freud, 'Forgetting Impressions and Intentions', in *Forgetting Things*, London: Penguin Books, 2005. First published in Sigmund Freud, *The Psychology of Everyday Life*, 1901.
- 4 Jack J. Spector, *The Aesthetics of Freud: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Art*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972, p.x.
- 5 Sigmund Freud, *Collected Works*, op.cit., vol. XVI, p.367.
- 6 Ministry of Health, 'National Depression Initiative', <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/national-depression-initiative-faq>
- 7 'Child death from maltreatment', Child Youth and Family, <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/documents/factsheet.pdf>
- 8 Jedediah Purdy, *For Common things: Irony, Trust and Commitment in America Today*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999, p.16.
- 9 Ibid, p.12.
- 10 Ibid, p.15.
- 11 Michael Harrison, interviewed by Antonia Horrocks, in Isabel Carlos, *On Reason and Emotion*, exhibition catalogue, Biennale of Sydney, 2004, p.106.
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