Allegories of Diaspora: Gleaning the residues of spatial and temporal misalignments

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Allegories of Diaspora:
Gleaning the residues of spatial and temporal misalignments

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led research project examines contemporary thinking on and definitions of place and the phenomenon of globalisation as they pertain to my art practice. The dissertation presents an analysis of the temporal and spatial effects of nostalgia in a globalised world in which migrations and other movements disrupt familiar connections and collective identities. It focuses on the profound impact that globalisation is having on the basic ontological concepts of space and time by investigating ways in which the past is and has been recorded, mediated and re-experienced, particularly through the photograph.

The practical component of the research comprises four artworks: *Taken on the same day as the other photo* (an artist book and photographic series), *Agency of Inanimate objects* and *Blue Distance* – each explores ideas that are central to methods that engage in new possibilities for exploring the photograph as the form of an idea via an expanded photographic materiality. These artworks extract the subject (of whatever kind) from the place of origin and locate it through a universal orientation, free of specific geographical and temporal coordinates.

Throughout the discussion of the artworks, I explore the misalignment between spatial and temporal experiences and how these differences manifest themselves both visually and psychologically by using key themes of the ruin and the concept of place.

Through a convergence of practice-led research and philosophical and theoretical discourse I reflect on the artworks and their relationship to how my methodology and specific approaches to art making function as a form of 'gleaning': a poetic scavenging that also resonates with the philosophical terrain of the relationships between place, nostalgia and diaspora.

The dissertation also constructs a set of insights and influences central to my art practice through an analysis of specific works by other artists and thinkers, selected for their potential to offer up visual, material and process based parallels between the methodologies inherent to practices of archaeology and expanded forms of materiality in photography as well as within contemporary art. I explore how a work of art might adopt a certain range of artistic strategies that describe and manifest what, in the present contemporary moment, it might mean to be from another place.
DECLARATION

I, Izabela Pluta, declare that this thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

_______________________
Izabela Pluta

August 1, 2017
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PREFACE

In 2004 I made my first wall based art work titled *Credenza*, a six–meter mural wallpaper depicting an ornate cabinet. This artwork was the singular component of my solo exhibition at the Sydney artist–run gallery, Francis Baker–Smith, in 2004. It occupied my mind for months before and after the exhibition and has continued to.

Dating back to early fourteenth century Italy, a credenza was a table that took on an architectural form with column and pilaster decorations. However, the credenza that is more familiar to my experience is the one that I grew up with. Each lounge room and bedroom in my Eastern European family home had one of these elaborate
cabinets. More commonly known as a sideboard, this type of display cabinet had glass doors and inlaid mirrors on the backboard that would reflect a double image of the ‘unique’ items held inside. Objects usually included the expensive china that one rarely used as it was reserved for those very special occasions. Also included were: crystal vases and glassware; a curated array of family portraits; keepsakes; and things bought and collected abroad or gifted from other family members or friends who were lucky enough to have traveled outside of Poland.

I was born in Warsaw in 1979. The Polish People’s Republic was then governed by The Polish United Workers’ Party. The Solidarity movement grew in the late 1970s but was suppressed by a state of martial law in 1981. My father and I left for Germany in 1986 on my sixth birthday where we were accepted as refugees. I began school in Bad Nenndorf, a small town in the district of Schaumburg and learnt the German language during the 9 months we spent there. In May of 1987 we sought political asylum and arrived in Sydney as legal migrants just a few days before I turned seven. One and a half years later, my mother and younger sister – who had stayed behind in Warsaw – joined us here. Another year later, a shipping container full of my family’s belongings arrived as well. Among many personal items was also our furniture, including one ‘credenza’ that my mother purchased anew, just before she packed the container prior to leaving Poland in anticipation of her new life on the other side of the world. In 1989 the Communist regime in Poland collapsed.

My artistic investigation is born out of the experience of leaving one place due to political unrest and arriving in another. It begins with nostalgia. The very nature of my mother’s impetus to transport a specific place, her culture and her personal experience is for me found in the metaphor of the credenza: a container where memories are stored and presented for consideration as reminders of somewhere else.
So when I think back to *Credenza* (2004) (Fig. 1), the work in which I went about photographing a floor–to–ceiling veneer cabinet, lined with glass and mirrors, and objects, similar to the one in my family home, I see how this was an attempt to identify my parents’ logic and their complex longing for a place left behind. In the 2004 exhibition of the work *Credenza*, the mural print occupied the entire gallery wall and presented the cabinet life size. While the sheer scale of the photographed object had a certain presence, I realised that it did not adequately evoke the myriad of emotions and reminders of lived experience that I sought to express. The image was flat: as a substrate it was dull and static, unlike the highly gloss baroque qualities of a real–life credenza. And while you could see and distinguish the items stored inside the cabinet they remained frozen in time and somewhat void of the resonances that I was attempting to evoke.
INTRODUCTION

The artwork *Credenza* is a metaphor for my family’s migration and it also marks the beginning of my longstanding interest in photographic practices engaging with spatial experiences, and ultimately became the impetus for this doctoral research, entitled *Allegories of Diaspora: Gleaning the residues of spatial and temporal misalignments*. My early motivation for making work derived from the observation and experience of my family and their friends who, over the past thirty years, have adapted, made home, and continually re–evaluated their place in their new homeland while they re–visited and longed for their mother country, questioning their decision to move in the first place. While there is an autobiographical element to my inquiry, the work that I have been engaged with and produced since 2004 has mainly developed and been driven by an investigation into contemporary thinking on definitions of nostalgia and the significance of place, rather than a type of biographical self–analysis or a psychological study of homesickness.

This practice–led research seeks to expand my processes of making to engage with and understand this shift in my practice in relation to current discourses on nostalgia and diaspora, and their interrelationship in my work, as well as photographic practices in the expanded field. Since 2004 my use of photography has broadened, by reimagining the parameters of the medium as a way of thinking through images as well as working with them.

This research examines contemporary thinking and the shifting definition of place and the phenomenon of globalisation as it relates to my art practice. The dissertation aims to distill key ideas from these broad areas with an intention to find new ways of approaching the theoretical framework in order to provide a fluid platform on which my art practice and its methodology are inextricably linked – as opposed to
articulating a purely theoretical inquiry. In this project, I explore the ways that the materiality of images and objects conceptually and aesthetically resonates with the philosophical inquiry that forms this thesis.

Until now, my research has focused more specifically on the various ways that 'place' manifests and is experienced. I have mainly worked with landscapes that I see as universal or not identifiable geographically. I have made numerous artworks that depict places in stages of transition; for example, the key component of my exhibition Reservoir (2012) was a photomural wallpaper of an unpacked house and was first exhibited in my solo exhibition Reservoir at the Gippsland Art Gallery in 2012. This building had been demolished but rather than rubble it was stacked into various piles that included brick, timber, steel and window remnants arranged carefully around the periphery of the building's foundations. I found this scene within a luscious forest setting on the contested border between Russia and Finland, and the resulting image that I took there with my 4x5 large format camera was not dissimilar to the European scenic wallpapers from the 1970s. My earlier works have also explored my concern with serendipitous encounters, the effects of time and how the photographic image operates as a vehicle for witnessing various states of ruin.

My interest in the ruin and serendipitous encounters was first explored in my Master of Fine Art (MFA) research degree in 2007–2008, which was titled à la dérive¹ (2009). It developed as an exploration of the significance of ‘place’ – real and imagined – and ultimately stems from my personal history, in particular my dual nationality (Polish–

¹. The significance of this title and the beginnings of this research are described in the translation of this term as it was originally made in 2009 in reference to my MFA project: “à la dérive sounds very ‘figurative’ in French, it is also an interesting and attractive appellation, as it stimulates the imagination and conveys different meanings. Grammarians tell us where words come from and what connection they have occasionally with each other. The original Latin meaning applied to the changing direction of a river. Navigators on a ship made it familiar as the effect of hostile winds and waves at sea. But what is fascinating also is the feeling at times one has lost his way or may have broken the rules, wandering at random as in the bush—or in a foreign land—making all sorts of discoveries. This is the creative connotation that seems to me the most relevant in line with Pluta’s experience”. Jean-Paul Delamotte, Atelier Littéraire Franco-Australien, Paris, 2009.
Australian), which produced an ambivalent absence/presence in my sense of ‘home’ that is part of the diasporic experience of the migrant imagination.

My research for this doctoral project began by questioning the methods by which I generate my studio work. I approached this research by exploring the ubiquitous relationships between various sites that I have photographed, as well as ‘found’ materials and the connections that may result from a particular reading or evocation of that physical place or psychological space. This experiential model of creating artwork, which gathers visual material for analysis and consideration, is at the core of my creative practice.

During my MFA I engaged in my artwork and exegesis mainly with the subject of landscape as ‘non-place’, but since that time I have also used found photographs, as well as objects. Inherent in the subjective approach to the production of my work is the materiality of these things, rather than the more abstract condition of photographic images. The nature of this materiality is at the core of the interrelated research questions that I propose in this PhD: How does my creative work relate to and inform the contemporary condition of nostalgia by drawing on the history of the discourse around it? How can art engage productively with the complex ebb and flow of migratory movements, shifts and the diasporic experience of the migrant imagination? How does an attachment for the past manifest itself in places and objects that surround us?
These research questions have been considered throughout the dissertation and in the four distinct, but interrelated, artworks produced during the candidature that collectively constitute my practice-led research. These works aim, firstly, to examine contemporary thinking on the shifting definition of place and the phenomenon of globalisation, and, secondly, to enable me as an artist and researcher to better understand the complex set of methodologies and materials that inform my art practice.

During this project, I experienced an important moment of engaging with my own archive of photographs which seemed to me to be allegorical of the diasporic experience. In searching through my own archive, I found my work *Sailing for the abyss (black plastic)* (2010) wrapped in archival tissue paper. I immediately thought about the metaphoric potential of the tissue paper as a layer that partially covered the image, and photographed this work five years after the original series was made as a response to the way the original work was found.

The tissue paper conceals and reveals areas of the image, resembling the original work in an attempt to separate itself in the present. What also occurs is an acknowledgement of the physicality of the photograph: the material creases in the tissue paper; the flat surface of the photographic paper; and the black plastic covering the subject of the original image. This experience helped me understand how I could privilege the process of engagement with earlier photographs I have made and how the period between taking the image (or finding the object) and the time in which the final artwork comes into being could facilitate a broader set of contingencies within my studio process.

My aim then became to interrogate the methods by which things are collected and reconfigured as a means of producing a new way of thinking about temporal and
spatial narratives. This also led me to see that my desire to articulate the complexity of migratory experience is far more multifaceted and nuanced than what a singular metaphor of the credenza could ever suggest. Hence this research has led me on a path to find a very particular mechanism within my methodology as an artist that is framed by a philosophical exploration of what, in the present moment, it might mean to be from another place.

**Methodology**

The creative component of this research uses a methodology that I refer to in the dissertation as gleaning: a poetic scavenging that aims to drive a material and visual exploration of the complex term, nostalgia. My method of collecting images and objects for the purpose of making artworks uses serendipitous encounters – themselves characteristic of the diasporic condition – as a way of raising a sense of familiarity and longing in the artefacts and places portrayed. It also draws on a specific approach paralleled in the practice of archaeology and the photographic archive as a further, expanded methodology of the work. This creates temporal and spatial misalignments across geographical terrain and the memories of one’s own experiences.

While particular insights and knowledge arose from creating each of the four projects, coming to identify gleaning as an underlying methodology of the work provides a way of looking at my practice as a whole, and better understanding the way that the philosophical terrain reverberates through the creative practice. This developed from the process of writing this dissertation in the spirit that Ross Gibson meant when he wrote about practice-led research in his article ‘The Known World’:
The linguistic explication does not ‘decode’ the work. Rather the explication opens an arena for debate around the knowledge that has been synthesised and proffered both in the work and in the linguistic account.²

The aim of this project is to crystalise the written component and synthesise it with new, creative works, thus enabling the studio practice to engage with the theoretical and philosophical perspectives, and vice versa. My method of working takes Gibson’s vision on board and involves a cyclic process whereby the practice of making is followed by critical contemplation, further research, some resolution and then a subsequent return to experimenting, while reflecting on that which has already been produced. This method involves an unremitting consideration of my practice through research and the research through the practice in an interpretative and qualitative enquiry that occurs within a theoretical framework.

Gibson describes this process in the following terms:

While you are observing and describing what happens … the system makes its own momentum even as it also reflects back to you the consequences not only of the world’s stimuli but also of your particular actions. … you also analyse and re–analyse this ever–adjusting tendency so that over time, in the accrued account of the continuous dynamics of your own involvement, you get the best possible understanding of the ultimately imponderable workings of the system’s complexity … leading to knowledge and wisdom but never to certainty or prediction."³
My practice–led methodology examines texts and the work of other artists relevant to the field of enquiry and aims to speculate on the relationships and cross–overs rather than to fix an explanation for my approach to creative production. In Part One, *Situating concepts: spatial and temporal relations*, I have identified key themes central to my practice: those of place, diaspora and nostalgia. I use this to provide a platform from which to navigate new ways of thinking about how I approach the process of making. I then articulate the strategies, mechanisms and approaches to my practice in Part Two, *Gleaning as practice: spatial and temporal misalignments*. Part Three, *Creative Works*, is positioned around an exploratory description of each of the creative works, and develops a contextual position by discussing specific artists. In this final section, I seek to provide a critical analysis of key theorists and practitioners to propose new insight and address the complex modes of artistic creation in a globalised world in which migrations and other movements disrupt familiar connections and collective identities.

**Structure**

This dissertation is presented in three parts. Part One, *Situating concepts: spatial and temporal relations*, provides a critical analysis and the tracing of key terms – place, nostalgia and diaspora – from their antecedents to their changing evocation in the present. The aim of this inquiry is to position these fundamental signifiers of cultural roots, loss and longing as pivotal to my artistic methodology. Part Two, *Gleaning as practice: spatial and temporal misalignments*, articulates my expanded approach towards photographs, found ephemera and photomurals in the creative work that positions ‘gleaning’ as an appropriate strategy and a methodology for understanding both the way that I accumulate material for making, the materiality of my work and the way that images and objects instigate a set of studio processes. Gleaning is defined as an act of gathering and collecting and draws its modern evocation from Jean–François Millet’s painting of 1867, *The Gleaners*. The sense of being able to find
or discover something anew has significant pertinence to my methodology. Part Three, *Creative Works*, then discusses the four creative works as a reflection of my creative process discussed in Part Two, as well as the philosophical investigation offered in Part One.

My approach to the format of this dissertation has been activated through a convergence of practice–led research with the philosophical and theoretical discourse discussed in Part One. Part Two details the modes of production and methodological approach that the studio work operates within and examines the interconnection between practices of archaeology and expanded forms of materiality in photography and within contemporary art. For example, the practice of archaeology produces a number of questions relating to the recording of information, subjectivity and interpretation across time. It offers new connections and meanings about place and history that could be discovered; it proposes a method for thinking about our curiosity and the imagination as a way of connecting to our past through archaeological endeavors. Photography is a medium that is intrinsically linked to the human desire to remember and connect to the past. The relationship between the two leads to a new–found understanding of my methods of production and areas of philosophical enquiry that provide a meaningful synthesis between the conceptual impetus for creative production and my artistic strategies.

Part One, Chapter One, *Place*, begins the discussion about the complex ebb and flow of migratory movements and diasporas as a question of the significance of place to these experiences. This analysis is founded in the physical definition of belonging that exists within a specific cultural framework. In relation to this idea, the term 'place' also describes a physical area (that may also be considered empty) or a distance *between* physical places. The notion of 'space', on the other hand, is used to address a psychological state – one's state of mind – in Marc Augé's elastic sense of
'space' as an open-endedness or an incomplete void. These concepts are considered in relation to Lucy Lippard's notion of spontaneous attraction to place through an emotional response to the landscape⁴ and Nikos Papastergiadis’ analysis of loss and displacement in the context of recent diasporas as a way of thinking about the modern nostalgic condition.⁵

In Part One, Chapter Two, *Nostalgia*, the misalignment of space and time and the absence of place are positioned as an analogy of the contemporary condition of nostalgia. As a term, nostalgia’s lineage is analysed to firstly locate it historically in the philosophies of Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger, followed by recent writing by Svetlana Boym. In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) Boym produces an in-depth study of the term from the incurable illness affecting Swiss soldiers, to a modern condition coming of age during Romanticism and blossoming with the birth of mass culture. There have been a number of valuable studies of nostalgia in historical and philosophical contexts that are informed by the theoretical positions of Kant, Heidegger and Freud⁶. While these provide a background to critical discourse on the way that we relate to the past and imagine a future, they do not provide a way of thinking about the spatial coordinates of nostalgia in a globalised world in which vast migrations and other movements disrupt familiar connections and collective identities and how they can be articulated through artistic strategies.

I build on Boym’s analysis of nostalgia’s frameworks to speculate on its effect on the current experience of migrations and global movements, and propose that the disparity between contemporary spatial and temporal experiences influences the ways that these differences manifest themselves visually and via certain

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Allegories of Diaspora: Gleaning the residues of spatial and temporal misalignments

Introduction

This thesis aims to describe a connection between the perception of 'distance' in the way I have experienced migration and the impression of nostalgia through the impact that globalisation – as an experience that polarises the different senses of upheaval and movement by people of different social classes, genders and ethnicities – is having on the basic ontological concepts of space and time. My perspective on globalisation’s ‘effects’ is presented from the privileged position of an artist and migrant to Australia who was raised in an aspiring middle-class home – being neither limited by geography nor constrained by cultural tradition.

Part One, Chapter Three, Diaspora, locates the significance of place within diaspora theory to reinforce the notion that place is pivotal to the way in which displaced peoples relate to their origins. I position diaspora as centred on the home lost and nostalgia as a misalignment of experiences across time. While this argument is not unique and is informed by Nikos Papastergiadis and William Safran, it draws on Stuart Hall’s concept of ‘creolization’ to suggest that intercultural mixing and hybridity is a model for the contemporary and post global condition. This perspective proposes not only that globalisation has an effect on our experience and place in the world, but that as a result of the ability to wean ourselves of temporal and spatial signifiers, the artist could be someone that is not bound by cultural tradition or geography and can therefore produce work without reflecting the place from which they come.

Instead, the artist draws from fragments of this experience and embraces the impreciseness of their locality in order to find new ways of thinking and making art.

8 N Papastergiadis, Dialogues in the Diasporas.
that resonate with these complex, interwoven and ever-changing ontological anchors.

The premise that our experiences are bound to memory and conflated by the passing of time and the span of geographic separation became a central concern of this study. Equally important was the phenomenological experience of the material conditions of photographic images and objects that are collected or found, and importantly the methods by which these enter my creative work.

Part Two, Chapter Four, *Strategies for making*, aims to distill the methodological approaches to the studio work whereby, in the process of 'making', I unpack each element of my process to form a better understanding of my various approaches to artistic production. These are stimulated by interrelated discursive fields in psychology, autobiography, psychogeography, photography, archaeology and the archive. This section aims to carefully thread and connect the influence of these discourses into my practice to introduce new reflections and insights that locate gleaning as an artistic strategy and as a central method in my art practice.

I collect images and objects through the processes of photographing and archiving that deliberately exclude geographical coordinates from the images. This approach sets up a strategy which renews the possibilities for interpreting and constructing images from a 'distance'. Photography's inextricable link to the temporal – in that it fixes a moment – is pivotal to this exploration in two ways; it materialises our desire to connect to the past whilst being capable of obscuring *temporal* distance; and it operates like an artefact that, when archived, is removed from the time when it was made and reinterpreted through a type of archaeology after a period of time has passed.
The time–based feature of photographs and objects considered via the archival lens positions gleaning as a key methodology. In Chapter Four I look to *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–1929) and Aby Warburg’s revision of the role of the archive and the photographic practices surrounding it to challenge linear concepts of temporal progression.

By continually reflecting back to the idea of an expanded photographic materiality orientated through key texts by George Baker\(^\text{12}\) and Rosalind Krauss\(^\text{13}\), I examine found photographs and their ability to image an absent object or absent place: this may be depicted as an actual and tangible place or as a trace of one, but their significance to my work is as an *imaged* place and an *imagined* one. To demonstrate I discuss the photograph and how it operates as both object and image to explore an ‘expanded’ use of photographic images and the cultural and social spheres that these forms reference and function within. My expanded use of photographic images draws on the work of photographic theorists Geoffrey Batchen and Elizabeth Edwards, who notably speculate on how photographs cannot be separated from the experience they provide by their material presence.\(^\text{14}\)

By expanded photography I mean the different ways that my artworks use photographs as a 'memory image' probing desire for a place, as a subjective translation of my experience, and as a photo mural that alludes to a way home is manifested and the fantasy to be 'somewhere else' that a vista provides.

Finally, Part Three, *Creative Works*, presents the four art works: *Taken on the same day as the other photo* (an artist book and photographic series), *Agency of Inanimate*...
objects and Blue Distance, each of which explores ideas that are central to methods that engage with new possibilities for exploring the photograph as the form of an idea via an expanded photographic practice. These artworks each comprise several components, which play with the visual syntax of not only the photographic imagery and objects as the work, but also the space of the gallery, and how the experience of the work in a specific location – in relation to every other component – draws on the metaphor of spatial separation by using various combinations of photographs, found images and objects, photo murals and collage.

In looking at the psychological function of photo albums, the various modes of remembering and how they are translated into photographic images are also examined in this section. The storage and subsequent retrieval of people and places through photographic albums in photography’s 160–year history is inherent and is materialised in the creative work, Taken on the same day as the other photo. In this work, I examine Martha Langford’s suggestion that oral consciousness provides the link between the memory of the album and its experience in the present. From this perspective I aim to articulate Taken on the same day as the other photo as an illustration of a broader visual narrative where the performance of an album re–enacts its narrative in many different contexts.

Taken on the same day as the other photo also reflects upon the image/object and how it operates when removed from its original context and function in the world, thereby being reflected upon across time. The second iteration of the work uses a non–linear and eclectic presentation of photographs of my father in the form of an artist book. This approach aims to signify shifts in the experience of time by way of using pauses and temporal slippages within the visual methods used to position the

photographs in the book. I draw on the imagination and psychological “pull” of images to evoke another time or place in the third work, *Agency of inanimate objects*. Beginning as an exploration of the ebb and flow of objects and images that operate in the everyday, this set of works depicts tarpaulin, coal and the museum itself as a way of disrupting temporal continuity to think about the relationship between preservation and transformation. The final work, *Blue Distance*, focuses on prefabricated ruins dating back to eighteenth century England: architectural follies and ‘eye-catchers’ of classical structures that push ideas central to constructions of reality, illusion and temporality. As the subject behind the ideas rather than the subject matter of the work itself, *Blue Distance* explores the ways that spatial and temporal displacements can be elucidated through expanded photographic materiality and the way that the work operates in the spaces of the gallery. Each of these four creative works intend to extract the subject (of whatever kind) from the place of origin and locate it in a universal orientation, free of specific geographical and temporal coordinates – a nowhere in the Heideggeean sense of a ghostly presence or memory that is omnipresent no matter where you are.

But “nowhere” does not mean nothing; rather, region in general lies therein, and disclosedness of the world in general for essentially spatial being–in. Therefore, what is threatening cannot come closer from a definite direction within nearness, it is already “there” – and yet nowhere. It is so near that it is oppressive and takes one’s breath – and yet it is nowhere.16

The core of the research that is presented in this dissertation, *Allegories of Diaspora: Gleaning the residues of spatial and temporal misalignments*, explores a new way of understanding spatial and temporal orientation and how images and objects can hold several meanings. Conceptualising allegory through the title

proposes that we may again be experiencing a sense of estrangement. Craig Owens identifies allegory’s two most fundamental impulses as “a conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present.”

PART ONE

SITUATING CONCEPTS:
SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL RELATIONS
Chapter One

Place

This chapter outlines the philosophical terrain of migratory movements and their diasporas in order to examine the significance of place on these experiences.

**Negotiating place: background to the investigation**

The inherent complexity of the notion of place and the way in which I negotiate its meaning within my studio based work is at the core of this chapter’s exploration. This inquiry stems from my experience as a migrant to Australia, where over the past thirty years I have observed the lives of family and friends who have adapted, made home, and continually re-evaluated their place in their new home land, while they re-visit and long for their ‘mother’ country, and question their decision to move in the first place. My interest is also the contemporary actuality – that of my own generation’s potential and resolution to traverse homelands fluidly. In contrast to the waves of migrants who left Poland post-war and during the Communist period out of necessity, many of us now living in the first world shift nations and places freely and fluidly.

In examining the original place and desired place, and the influences of the past on the present, I found myself considering a contemporary actuality: a sense of loss as experienced through cultural dislocation. This condition has produced new philosophies of place, home and identity by cultural theorists such as Marc Augé, Lucy Lippard, Stuart Hall and Nikos Papastergiadis, who ask how we exist within this complex ebb and flow of migratory movements, shifts and recent diasporas.
Spatial [dis]connection: Place, Space and Non–place

This research has developed from an analysis of the concept of place, using Marc Augé’s theory of both place and space as a foundation. In Non–places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, Augé highlights the difference between space and place: A place is 'anthropological' space, one that has a purpose, an identity, a connection or reference to history (or cultural significance).

Place is usually defined against the notion of space. According to Augé 'space' is non–symbolic and abstract, and exists outside the tangible places that humans have made from space through processes of acculturation. A 'place' is anthropological; it has a purpose, identity, a connection or reference to history (or cultural significance). Or, as Lucy Lippard suggests, place is a 'layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there'.

If an anthropological place creates a social habitus, 'non–place' enacts a solitude through its 'psychological distance' and alienation. In our age of 'supermodernity', Augé argues, these anthropological signifiers are emptied. This doesn’t return place to space but produces what he calls 'non–place'. Through this understanding of place and its evacuation of meaningful signifiers as suggested by both Augé and Lippard, it is my intention to investigate the effects of non–place on states of belonging and longing for a recent or distant past.

Michel de Certeau finds it equally important to distinguish space from place when writing about spatial practices in The Practice of Everyday Life. He explains that "a place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in

relationships of coexistence."\(^{21}\) A place is therefore "an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability" while "space is composed of intersections of mobile elements".\(^{22}\) This idea of space as something produced by temporal aspects of occupation and the movements of the human body has a rich heritage. Similar notions can be found in Henri Lefebvre's ideas of body space\(^{23}\) and Merleau-Ponty's concept of anthropological space.\(^{24}\)

De Certeau's concept thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location. The law of the 'proper' rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It suggests an indication of stability.\(^{25}\)

This concept implies that space is a relational geography composed of dynamic elements that intersect, meet or diverge in constant flux. This idea has provided me with a conceptual framework for considering the ways in which traverse spatial and temporal positions are traversed. The distinctions between place and space made by both Augé and de Certeau correspond to the distinction between a map and an itinerary. One signifies a stable configuration of elements and connection to history that represents knowledge, while the other represents the practice by which information is interacted with.

In this thesis, my understanding of place is founded in the physical definition of belonging that exists within a specific cultural framework. In relation to this idea, the term 'place' also describes a physical area (one that may also be considered empty)

\(^{22}\) ibid.
or a distance *between* physical places. The notion of ‘space’, on the other hand, is used to address a psychological condition that arises from serendipitous movements and displacements as a methodology for artistic production.

**Global mobility and patterns of change**

The key to my approach is understanding the different effects of place and space on the imagination, or psyche\(^{26}\), and the ways in which our relationship to them can generate a way of moving through the world in shaping experiences, habits, and one’s understanding of self in relation to one’s cultural heritage. Global mobility shifts our understanding of experience and connection to place. Nikos Papastergiadis likens the patterns of cultural exchange to the routes of global migration which seem to be shaped by turbulent forces in disarray.\(^{27}\) Migratory movements have historically comprised forced exile and the trauma of banishment with a longing to return to the remembered place. Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, for example, twelve million Africans were shipped to the Americas, instating a devastating narrative that has lasted centuries.

**Cultural dislocation: in search of home**

Perhaps the place of home in the age of diaspora and globalisation is no longer a geographic position in our present or the past. It remains elusive, provoking a desire to search for the possibility of a new home and a new destination. The meaning of home, as Papastergiadis suggests, "now combines the place of origin with the struggle for destiny".\(^{28}\) Is this desire for somewhere else a sentiment of loss and displacement? Is the longing for a fixed place or home that no longer exists, where

\(^{26}\) I use the original Greek term 'psyche' as a way of addressing the complexity of the human mind, consciousness and unconsciousness. Later, in Part Two, I also reference Freud’s analogy of the ‘human psyche’ as an archaeological site.


the memory of a time and place move away from us, a romantic struggle to locate ourselves in the world?

Marianne David and Javier Muñoz–Basols argue that the memory of the displaced home, or place lost, has countless attachments and sensations:

The sense of belonging destabilized, disrupted, dislocated both literally and figuratively, it was a loss not merely of the original impressions of the childhood ‘paradise’ that is everyone’s lot – primal, unmediated colours, sounds and shapes, sensuous textures, tastes and smells constituting the ‘familiar’ at the deepest level of feeling – but the double, compounded loss of an actual place. Etched in memory and idealized by nostalgia, the vanished home associated with the angst of exclusion, loss, abandonment would become a driving force, a relentless desire to recover one’s emotional center against the unbearable pressure of an alien reality. Hence the self–conscious drama of diasporic identity: of the homeless self in search of both a home and a land, a home–land.29

Spatial fluidity: belonging in transience

Contemporary global cultures seem ever more transient, moving back and forth between places with the notion of home becoming more distant and sometimes absent, replaced by the new technologies of connectivity. Miwon Kwon uses the concept ‘wrong place’ to discuss how one may imagine a new model of ‘belonging–in–transience’ – countering a rooted place of belonging for which we may become nostalgic, and embracing a nomadic ‘fluidity’ of movement, while remaining anti–nostalgic.30 Privileging a state of flux to a place–bound identity, Kwon proposes a

mode of existence that might relieve us from the burden of nostalgia. In this spirit she rethinks site–specific art practices in order to make art more appropriate to current cultural and social–political contexts. Suggesting that the link between place and identity is no longer essential, she argues that it is "historically inevitable that we will leave behind the nostalgic notion of a site and identity as essentially bound to the physical actualities of a place."31 Yet the nostalgia for the 'identity–giving' properties of places is able to exist indefinitely alongside whatever new cultural forms might be introduced by or emerge from it.

On the other hand, Kwon purports Lippard's inability to resist the nostalgic impulse:

> Since our sense of identity is fundamentally tied to places and the histories they embody, the uprooting of our lives from specific local cultures and places – through voluntary migrations and forced movements – has contributed to the waning of our abilities to locate ourselves.32

In *The lure of the local: senses of place in a multicentered society*, Lippard mediates on the agency of place, the relevance of a location having a history, and the criticality of one's relationship to place in a location's broader narrative. Place, according to Lippard, is "a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar ... the external world mediated through human subjective experience."33 A 'sense of place' for Lippard is "the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to a prevailing alienation."34 This way of examining personal history, place, geography and culture unavoidably evokes a romantic and nostalgic sensibility. Lippard's personal experience is interwoven into her ideas while Kwon's approach is more analytical and

32. M Kwon, p. 158.
33. L Lippard, p. 7.
34. ibid.
emotionally removed. Both approaches – ‘nostalgic’ or ‘anti-nostalgic’ – suggest that moving through the world in a globalised context requires a way of negotiating the experience of place – its physicality and actuality.

The critical questions are what is the relationship between place and identity, and what effect does this have on our experience and connection to place and how does this state of mind emanate a nostalgic disposition? Or, otherwise, as Kwon proposes, what enables us to remain ‘anti-nostalgic’? Is this emotional numbness possible, even in the current mode of technological and spatial mobility? Kwon’s ideal suggests a certain cosmopolitanism – a way of detaching oneself (identity) from place, thereby becoming emotionally disconnected from a specific locale or culture – a letting go of the burden of place.

In contrast Marsha Meskimmon deploys the idea of cosmopolitanism as “grounded, materially specific and relational…”, and so questioning the ethical and political implications of belonging as a “…committed address to cultural diversity and movement beyond fixed geo-political borders”. She describes the ‘cosmopolitan imagination’ as something that is “premised upon an embodied, embedded, generous and affective form of subjectivity in conversation with others in and through difference?”35

The idea of cosmopolitanism is discussed in relation to artistic practices (as relevant to my position) by Papastergiadis in Cosmopolitanism and Culture, where he acknowledges that the term 'hybridity' is somewhat problematic in the context of cross-cultural exchange and ethnic mixing: "One of the most contentious aspects of the discussions over cosmopolitanism is the status of hybridity in cultural identity and

cultural practice*. He reminds us that the concept of cosmopolitanism – in cultural studies and anthropology – has been pivotal to the understanding of how ordinary lives are being affected by global mobility and that “everyone is now required to engage in some level of reflexive evaluation of how their own experiences are entangled in transnational networks of communication and attachment.”

Is what Papastergiadis proposes as ‘reflexive evaluation’ in measuring experience and personal connectivity actually a way of thinking about the modern nostalgic condition? I propose that a lack of belonging and loss of anthropological place generate a new form of nostalgia specific to the contemporary age – one that is devoid of place connections and cultural allegiances, and is shaped by spatial and temporal transience.

This chapter has located the term 'place' and the notion of 'space' as central to understanding one’s place in the world. Chapter Two will explore the changing representation of nostalgia, from the origin of the term in the seventeenth century to its present–day implications. This will elucidate that the experience of nostalgia is tied to something more complex than simply transporting the viewer back to another time or place.

37. ibid, p. 85.
38. I use the term ‘anthropological place’ as one that has a purpose, identity, a connection or reference to history (or cultural significance). An anthropological space according to Marc Augé in Non–places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, creates a social interaction (formed by its connection to history), and a non–place enacting a solitude through its ‘psychological distance’. Augé, p.93.
Chapter Two

Nostalgia

This chapter addresses the changing definition of nostalgia, from the origin of the term in the seventeenth century to its current meanings. This reveals that nostalgia means more than simply transporting the viewer back to another time or place. While much has been written on its historical context, little attention has been paid to how nostalgia as a contemporary condition is imaged in contemporary visual arts. I survey the philosophy of nostalgia from Immanuel Kant’s discussion of its temporal dimension in his theory of self-consciousness to Gaston Bachelard’s notion of memory shaping our perception of home and Dylan Trigg’s discussion of nostalgia, post-rational aesthetics and modern ruins. Trigg’s exploration is critical to my creative work where I am using the ruin as a means to visually articulate and synthesise these theoretical tangents in a set of visual materials and forms. This chapter also undertakes a close analysis of Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* as a framework to speculate on nostalgia’s effect on our current experience of migrations and global movements, and acknowledges more recent studies by Alastair Bonnet, who notes a conceptual narrowing of the previously acknowledged spatial and temporal dimensions of the term.

**Bringing the distance near**

Phenomenology and psychoanalysis are both distinct methodologies for understanding nostalgia. Nostalgia can be perceived to be a distance from the spatial/temporal world in which memories bring the distance nearer. 39 On the other hand, psychoanalytically nostalgia could be seen as an emotional response to the

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absence of the other. My exploration of the term moves across both distinctions as I navigate personal experience with a detached and analytical exploration of time and place. As much as these two polarities are mutually exclusive, in the context of my investigation and the scope of this research it is critical to interweave the two interpretations in order to locate a nuanced position within my creative work.

In its everyday use and philosophical context, the term nostalgia is usually taken to be pejorative, referring broadly to a state of mind that privileges the past over the present. Its significance, however, is ever more complex and changing, evoking not only the relationship one has to place and the longing for it, but also an awareness of spatial and temporal displacements.

**Ascendants**

The origins of the term 'nostalgia' derives from a medieval diagnosis of homesickness to the point of pathology, implying a purely physical condition. The term was coined by a Swiss medical student, Johnathan Hofer, from the Greek nostos 'to return home' and algos 'pain'. Subsequent iterations of the term include nostalgia being announced as a disease of atmospheric pressure "causing excessive body pressurisation, which in turn drove blood from the ear to the brain, thereby producing the observed affliction of sentiment". In the hope of avoiding this overpowering sense, Swiss soldiers were told to avoid auditory associations which may remind them of home, including the sound of alpine melodies and cow bells.

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40. ibid, p. 72.
41. This idea of homesickness links to notions of the ‘uncanny’ emerged in the late nineteenth century in relation to many modern diseases which were described by psychoanalysts, philosophers and psychologists as “a distancing from reality by reality… Its symptoms included spatial fear, leading to paralyses of movement, and temporal fear, leading to historical amnesia.” The uncanny also reinforced its link to nostalgia during the devastation following the first world war as a form of ‘transcendental homelessness’ which many writers, such as George Lukas, saw as the modern condition. A Vidler, The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1992, p. 7.
43. ibid.
Immanuel Kant argued that the temporal dimension of nostalgia is pivotal to its function. His analysis acknowledges the power of the imagination and the role that time plays in determining the affect of place.\footnote{I Kant et al., \textit{Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View}, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1978, p. 69.} He suggests that our place or origin (native place) becomes an arena in which temporal events transpire and as such we are in fact always "confronted with a remembered place structured temporally."\footnote{D Trigg, \textit{The Aesthetics of Decay}, p. 54.} Trigg concurs that, due to the way time and place are experienced and recalled, "place remains in flux, unable to seize the past in the present. Thus a temporal loss, unlike a spatial loss, can never be returned to or regained".\footnote{Ibid.} Kant describes the return of the Swiss to their remembered place, observing that they perceive everything to have changed, yet in fact it is that their youth has escaped them and can no longer be retrieved. Kant concludes that place has importance in marking the absence of time\footnote{I Kant et al., \textit{Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View}, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1978, p. 69.}.

In the early nineteenth century the romantic focus on subjective reflection changed the understanding of nostalgia to something inherent in the self. Sigmund Freud considered nostalgia not a disease but intrinsic to a human desire linked to the 'death drive' – the body's instinct to return to a “primeval, inorganic state” within the darker functions of human psyche.\footnote{S Freud, ‘Civilized sexual morality and modern nervous illness’ trans. David McIntock in \textit{Sigmund Freud: Civilization and Its Discontents}, Penguin, London, 2002, p. 118.} Freud speculated on the issues associated with ways of relating to the past and makes a distinction between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is a reaction to the loss of a person or a concept such as one’s country or liberty and is not associated with a pathological issue – it is a normal reaction to loss and can be overcome with time. Melancholia on the other hand is more complex as the loss cannot be observed and has deeper psychological effects: “In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.”\footnote{S Freud et al., \textit{The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud}, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho–Analysis, London, 1953, p. 246.}
The rise of nationalism following the World Wars introduced the notion that homesickness could be remedied by homecoming. However, place cannot be separated from the temporal. Nostalgia comes into effect when the place of home becomes temporally distant: “The mood of nostalgia, so closely linked to memory, is thus always one that remains somewhere between nostos and algos – between the return home and the pain of its irretrievable loss.”

Nostalgia is complex in part because temporality is experienced in complex ways. Martin Heidegger criticises the idea of time as derived from Aristotle's Physics as 'clock–time': a linear and infinite or uniform 'now', where the future is the not–yet–now, and the past is the no–longer–now. The present in this context is the 'now' experienced as each moment passes in relation to the future and past. He suggests this notion to be the ordinary conception of time: “Not ‘time is’, but ‘Dasein qua time temporalizes its Being’.” He reinterprets ecstasies as 'horizons', a notion that suggests limits or edges, thereby revealing or bringing something to light. According to Heidegger, the past, present and future remain essentially interwoven yet are thought of independently and without conventional sequence. “The future is not later than having been, and having–been is not earlier than the Present. Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in a process of having been.”

This temporal dimension, free from the conventions of everyday awareness of past, present and future, could illuminate the very essence of the nostalgic sensibility. Drawing on Heidegger’s fundamental approach to time, I speculate that not only does place fall from one’s certainty (Trigg) when trying to analyse nostalgia, but so too do linear notions of time or progression.

Present–day migrants and globalisation

I relate to the idea of cosmopolitism and that I am a migrant of a new kind. While large cohorts still shift from one homeland to another, from places such as the Middle East and Africa, there is a 'casual' first world migrant who seems to traverse many places: an itinerant traveller, traversing cities in a form of leisurely quest for place and belonging. The anti–nostalgic desire to always be somewhere else is becoming more commonplace. This traversing between one place and another in a world in which travel has become easier, faster and more affordable has made the world appear smaller. As such, the significance of place (origin) may be lost, and we will come to exist only within a temporal locale, always in transit. One could suggest that this state of ‘transit’ could be not only physical but also virtual, where instantaneous modes of communication produce an incessant bind of diverse cultural transmissions.53

The curator Okwui Enwezor has written extensively on a new temporality brought into effect through migrations, dislocations and displacements made within bounded national territories – particularly those made through spatial distinctions between here and there, home and exile – and especially in reference to the difficulty of defining the identity of the African artist in the age of globalisation. He states that:

They travel both at home and abroad, journey physically and psychically, migrate in between the pixelated and information–saturated sites of the cyberworld, and inhabit the complex matrices of popular culture that form part of the transterritorial dimension of the global network and exchange systems.54

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has described the changes that are occurring in urban and technological contexts, creating a new temporality that is influencing the ways

that we are defining our personal attachments to place.\textsuperscript{55} According to Augé, in the contemporary world movement seems to provide a solitude, so that moving through and experiencing these spaces and non–places offers a certain melancholy pleasure, where:

we are able to find prophetic evocations of spaces in which neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make any sense; spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality, in which only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesize the existence of a past and glimpse the possibility of a future.\textsuperscript{56}

Further, he says, the abundance of available places to experience perpetuates a dislocation, imprisoning us in a kind of 'limbo': “the spatial overabundance of the present ... is expressed in changes of scale, in the proliferation of imaged and imaginary references, and in the spectacular acceleration of means of transport.”\textsuperscript{57} He proposes that the current saturation of events impedes our memory of the past and the way in which we experience the present, generating a need to make sense of the world and our place within it.

Papastergiadis equally identifies that “the representation of both culture and identity are not only related to each other but are part of broader ruptures and flows of globalization.”\textsuperscript{58} He suggests that cultural identities are formed by uncertain desires for mobility and connection (to place) rather than enclosed by fixed spatial coordinates or exact temporal positions. Instead, cultural identities are shaped by the contradictions between local traditions and global culture. Artists in this sense, according to Papastergiadis, have:

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\textsuperscript{56} M Augé, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{57} ibid, pp. 25–26, 29–31.
\textsuperscript{58} N Papastergiadis, \textit{Spatial Aesthetics}, p. 10.
\end{flushright}
responded to these transformations by displaying kinds of self–images that are neither totally fictive nor a version of the person that is represented on their passports. The gap between the biography and the fictive self that is presented in art is a space that is used to question the distance between the place from which the artist originates and the other places in which he or she now belongs. Culture and identity are increasingly constructed in hybrid ways. These images often draw from but do not reproduce the totality of a local vernacular.59

In Australia during the 1970s and 80s there was a growing awareness of cultural transformation within certain art practices. Latvian born Imants Tillers was interested in moving beyond the idea that local art necessarily reflected local conditions. He brought to the fore the idea that we can be connected across nations and homelands through shared experiences, images and ideas. His own ideas developed in relation to a ‘centre–periphery’ debate driven by Terry Smith in an article titled ‘The provincialism problem’.60 Smith suggested that Australian artists were in a provincial bind, unable to escape the power of the centre’s control of the discourse – to engage with the art world you needed to inhabit not just the place of its centre, which then was New York, but also the discourse of this place. Tillers’ article ‘Locality Fails’61 argues that everything can in fact be in more than one place at once. Importantly, both his practice and his philosophies distilled the notion that local concerns could coexist with concurrences across places.

For the failure of the principle of local causes implies that there can be unexplained connectedness between events in different ‘space–like separated’ places and that this connectedness allows, for example, an experimenter (e.g.

an artist) in one place to affect the state of a system in another remote
(apparently unconnected) place. Or this can happen in reverse.62

The position of the artist being neither limited by geography nor constrained by
cultural tradition has also been central to Enwezor’s philosophy of contemporary art.
As curator of the 2002 Documenta 11, he staged events at various sites around the
world, though the exhibition in Kassel remained the main platform. The curatorial
direction rested on the idea that artists could create politically and culturally engaging
art anywhere in the world without needing to gravitate to the centre to make it.
Documenta 11 located its difference from other Documentas,

in an ethical and intellectual reflection on the contemporary global scale of
cultural transformation. This confrontation with globalisation maps the new
geographies of contemporary discourse particularized in this exhibition as a
literal documentation of different spaces of trauma.63

The artist in this case becomes a conduit for intersections between cultures, places
and experiences with the effect of globalisation being at the fore of their practice and
the ways in which they engage with content of their work. Establishing the connection
between the background of a work, the origins of the artist, and the subsequent
meanings of the artwork is not always sufficient. The mapping of biographical or
social influence onto the meaning of the art not only requires a more sophisticated
grasp of psycho-social connections, but also an appreciation of how the symbolic
fields that define a sense of place have been radically altered by new geopolitical and
technological forces64.

63. SO Ogbechie, ‘Ordering the Universe: Documenta II and the Apotheosis of the Occidental Gaze’, Art Journal, 64, no. 1, 2005, p. 82.
64. N Papastergiadis, Spatial Aesthetics, p. 15.
Mobility in this sense, which associates freedom and liberation with movement and change, also defines a ruptured psychogeography of uncertainty. In DJ Demos’ terms, it calls up “the longing for home and the embrace of elsewhere.”

Migration, henceforth is “adverse to any unified meaning and is therefore here defined in relation to the individual artistic circumstances in which it appears.” Demos draws on these ruptures as functions in contemporary art to locate forms that might express the devastating spatial and experiential effects of displacement.

Philosopher Peter Osborne raises the experience of global transnationality in relation to art and a ‘geopolitical contemporaneity’. He states that: “With the historical expansion, geopolitical differentiation and temporal intensification of contemporaneity, it has become critically incumbent upon any art with a claim on the present to situate itself, reflexively, within this expanded field.” He goes on to say that:

> The coming together of different times that constitutes the contemporary, and the relations between social spaces in which these times are embedded and articulated, are thus the two main axes along which the historical meaning of art is to be plotted.

If art is to engage ‘the contemporary’, it should acknowledge the processes and effects of globalisation, and in effect the post–global condition. The complexity of this lies in the nuance between acknowledging the past (history) and the transnational present.
Contemporary analysis of nostalgia

The gap between the past and the present imparts a state of flux upon our memory which begins to realign the actual experience and our iteration of it across time. If the symbolic and the material place has great significance in the making of home, both physically and psychologically, how can the absence of place find agency in the contemporary condition of nostalgia?

“Home is the centre of the world.”

My family migrated to Australia from Poland when I was 6 years old. Place within my own experience results from traversing between different cultures and establishing a new home in Australia after immigrating here 30 years ago. As a child leaving my homeland, my sense of nostalgia for it does not seem enduring. Is that because I have little or no memory of my life there, and hence I cannot long for something I do not remember? In my case perhaps there is a lack of longing but an innate feeling of connection to my place or origin. However, if memory binds us to our first home, it could also provide us with a sense of place and an ongoing longing for it.

In The Poetics of Space, Bachelard argues that the idea of one’s first house – where one grew up – forms one’s idea of home; we therefore have a memory of that space which surpasses consciousness. “Walls protect us, comfort us, and many rooms are invested with great psychological resonance. Our understanding of time and space begins with the room, the basic unit of architecturally defined space.” In a similar way, Dylan Trigg, who specifically refers to childhood spatiality, proposes that

the nostalgic desire for one's original home creates a place of estrangement. The symbolic and the material place of one's childhood, therefore, seems to have great significance in the making of home, both physically and psychologically.

It seems to me that the notion of home can be instilled in a particular place – a house, city or country. Perhaps it may also be grounded in a psychological space that roots itself deeper than anything physical. Does a home then become primarily symbolic, rather than physical, through boundaries that are emblematic and more meaningful than the material and structure of the actual house? Louise Bourgeois suggests that architecture has to be an object of your memory. When you summon, when you conjure the memory, in order to make it clearer, you pile up the associations the way you pile up bricks to build an edifice. Memory itself is a form of architecture.

I understand that one moves through the world carrying a fictitious memory (of association) which over time is altered. This is perhaps what we refer to as nostalgia, a not–so–accurate awareness that forms one’s sense of place. Through his discussion of the house, Bachelard also gives value to the spaces that we inhabit and how they shape our perception of home together with our imagination. I believe our sense of home is achieved through the memory image (of the home which has been left behind) and the imagination (the nostalgic longing for home) that forms the new poetic arrangements of space – a particular way of constructing our surroundings to achieve a sense of place. There is, as Papastergiadis puts it, a disjunction of 'cultural signs' when the new home is recreated, where shifting the 'home' to a different place displaces its original essence and so our manifestation of home is distorted.

The longing for home becomes, in the times with which we are familiar, a longing for a time of stability and security, a time that cannot be found in the present. It is almost, one might say, a longing for a stable temporality – since, in modernity, it is as if time has become nothing more than a succession of disjointed moments, in which there is no longer any more encompassing sense of time as that within which one could orient and place oneself.\(^7^4\)

Svetlana Boym focuses on the way in which nostalgia arises within the sociopolitical circumstances of Russia, her native country, and in Eastern Europe. As a migrant to America she is keenly aware of the effects of moving homelands, and much of her book on nostalgia refers directly to both personal and collective experiences of returning to Russia at various times of her life. My first return to Poland occurred almost 20 years after my departure. That initial reuniting with my homeland occurred in the thick of a European winter in 2001 which added to a very heightened experience of reality and provided a more romantic indulgence in the place from which I came. My grandmother still owned the house where I grew up as a child on the outskirts of Warsaw. My stay there was spent confined in the house from the shock of the cold on my new–Australian body temperature. I took the opportunity to become an investigator, both objectively as an outsider, and subjectively as a granddaughter and former resident of the house, to inspect and trace each corner of the rooms and spaces I once knew so well. I used a video camera to record in detail each surface and wall so that I could somehow contain it in my recollection instead of having to rely on memory to excavate it from the ever–confusing pool of memory images that then began to infiltrate my childhood experiences with the experiences I was having upon returning for the first time after being spatially and temporally separated from the place. Since I do not ‘suffer’ from nostalgia, it was about retaining or creating a new connection with that place.

\(^7^4\). J Malpas, p. 164.
A more recent analysis of nostalgia by Alastair Bonnet suggests a conceptual narrowing where the previously acknowledged spatial and temporal dimensions have in a sense dissipated since the late 19th century. He presents nostalgia as both a product of modernity and a force that surpasses and challenges modernity. According to Bonnet, “nostalgic forms become new standpoints from which to observe the world. And they have the capacity to mess up neat demarcations between the modern and non–modern, the real and the fake.”75 Like memory, nostalgia could be perceived to be irrational and inaccurate, yet it may be able to “exceed the cognitive terrain in which memory is narrated.”76

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76. ibid, p. 17.
Memory: primary/secondary witness

Since my experience of returning home to Poland where I was born and spent the first 6 years of my life, I have been able to try and make the distinction between memorial recovery and loss, a sense of home and of displacement, and the relationship between nostalgia and a romantic desire for place. These complex cross-overs and relations between experience and memory are a product of my own experience, but also, more importantly, are firmly embedded in the experiences my parents had and continue to have which I relate to through their stories. You could say that my experience of nostalgia is as ‘secondary witness’. I borrow this term from Joan’s Gibbon’s inquiry of primary and secondary witness where she examines issues concerning the strategies of remembrance of the Nazi Holocaust. While my own experience is not one of such tremendous trauma, I use the notion of the primary and secondary witness as a way of considering the process of translation and reflection – how is it that I draw on my own (primary) memory of leaving Poland, while simultaneously ‘reading’ into the memory that my parents brought with them (secondary) to Australia. I am aware that I do this because the memories of my childhood (via the process of departure and arrival) are somewhat blurry and difficult to pin down. I have come to understand through the process of this research that this may be a result of mild trauma as well as a sign of the young age at which I experienced this relocation.

Dominick LaCapra perceives the secondary memory as being the work of an ‘observer-participant’ as well as an intersection between the primary participant and the secondary witness, who is able to think more critically about the primary memory. The secondary witness possesses greater distance, drawing on the primary testimony to develop a new form of expression.\(^{77}\)

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\(^{77}\) J Gibbons, p. 75.
In this sense I am both the primary participant and the secondary witness. My memory is occluded and abstracted, and it is also located and re–experienced through family photographs. In this complex process I have 'distance' to be able to make an artistic enquiry which is neither autobiographical in nature nor sentimental. While I acknowledge that this experience is the foundation of my creative interest, the aim of this awareness is to better understand how the mechanisms and effects of memory can shape my creative work.

The process of memory is a slippery one. While ancient Greeks saw memory as a means of recovering divine knowledge of the ideal world or of recording experiential knowledge, philosophers such as John Locke in the seventeenth century “claimed that the knowledge that is recalled is frequently reproduced through images or sense impressions. Because of this emphasis on imaging or the formation of impressions, memory became closely related to the imagination.” Gibbons points out the two key shifts in thinking about memory that eventuated from these ideas. The first was that memory was an agent for the imagination and hence in direct contradiction to its traditional function as a means of accurate recall. The second was the questioning of the veracity of memory by acknowledging that images and sense impressions are both never the 'real' thing, making it difficult to distinguish between memory images and those images generated by the imagination.

I am interested in what these fundamental positions on understanding memory suggest for creative practice today. Contemporary art has employed memory in a variety of ways and represents a wide range of attitudes towards memory and its uses in culture as a whole. Henri Bergson defined memory as the intersection of mind and matter – Gibbons proposes that art constitutes a similar intersection, but in this case, “acting as a 'memory–object' or a memory–work that intervenes and forms

a connection she continues to say that “in performing this function, art provides a locus in which the re–cognitions and reconfigurations of memory can be communicated and shared.”

Here, Gibbons reminds us that “the claims that are made and the stories that are told in the name of memory can alter people’s understanding of the world and, of course, alter the ways in which they act in or upon that world.” As an 'observer–participant' I recognise the potential of memory as told and re–told through stories and photographs to shape our experience in the present. It is evident that memory and imagination are inextricably linked, and that this link creates nostalgia.

**Spatial and temporal misalignment**

Nostalgia can often be mistaken for mythophilia – a longing not for what is remembered, but for what is known only through storytelling and myth. Jeff Malpas examines nostalgia as a mood that is characteristic of philosophical reflection. He traces through the Greek etymology of longing and the impossibility of returning home and, within that emotion, the questioning of our own being in the world. He suggests that the contemporary treatment of nostalgia takes it to be a form of escapist fantasy rather than seeing it in terms that combine remembrance with loss – a resistance to the insistent present while privileging the function of memory and romanticism.

Thinking about memory in this way in relation to how we experience nostalgia, Boym draws a distinction between what she terms "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia.

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81. ibid, p. 1.
83. ibid, p. 161.
She suggests that restorative nostalgia stresses nostos and attempts a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home:

Reflective nostalgia thrives in algia, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, whereas reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt.84

Lippard calls nostalgia “a way of denying the present,” history as “highly selective,” and the past “not as separate from the present as its manipulators would like us to think.” She adds that we need to know our own histories “so that we are not defined by others, so that we can resist other people’s images of our pasts, and consequently our futures.”85

If reflective nostalgia is the kind that questions experience and recollection, then the authenticity of memory is bound to place and ultimately the broader notion of home and its ultimate absence. If, as Trigg suggests, our temporal classifications become dislodged by the act of returning to a remembered place, the disparity of space and time becomes so stretched it can undermine the reality of the past. He grounds this strongly in the idea that “the impossibility of nostalgia predicates itself on the desire for the absent.”86 Trigg’s examination questions the logic of nostalgia, suggesting that it is an illusion determined by a desire for finding place.

85. L Lippard, p. 85.
In looking at the fracture of temporal and spatial coordinates as being at the core of nostalgic experience, my interest lies in the possibility of imagining an alternative place (of absence) somewhere else and how it materialises in the psyche of travellers or migrants. I see the contemporary condition of nostalgia as an abyss between being connected and disconnected from a place: here and there, in the physical place of home and the psychological space of the imagination. This chapter has formed a connection between the perception of 'distance' in the way we now experience the world and the impression of nostalgia through the impact that globalisation is having on contemporary ontologies of space and time. Chapter Three will consider the term ‘diaspora’ in relation to the concepts of place discussed in Chapter One. It will also explore the notion that ‘place’ is central to the way that displaced peoples relate to their origins.
Chapter 3
Diaspora

This chapter undertakes a close analysis of the term ‘diaspora’ in relation to the concepts of place discussed in Chapter One. It supports the notion that ‘place’ is pivotal to the way in which displaced peoples relate to their origins. I draw on Nikos Papastergiadis, William Safran and Stuart Hall to suggest that intercultural mixing and hybridity is a model for the contemporary and post–global condition.

Diaspora in context

The classical use of the term Diaspora was confined to the study of the Jewish experience and their dispersal to two or more foreign destinations following a traumatic event in the homeland. Later in the 1960s, it also became a description of the dispersion of Africans, Armenians and the Irish. From the 1980s diaspora was used in a more metaphoric way, as Safran argues, to describe different categories of people: “expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities tout court.” Safran identified that several other groups had also experienced traumatic circumstances surrounding their forced departure from the homeland, having limited acceptance in their new country, and that the term needed an extended meaning. The importance of the homeland within the diasporic condition, as argued by Safran, meant that members of diaspora retained a strong connection to their homeland, where following their departure it became idealised.

The role and significance of place within Diaspora theory is critical to the way in which the displaced relate to their home, or origin. It seems that without a strong sense of belonging or stability the effect of upheaval and shifting home would not evoke the 87. W Safran, p. 83.
diasporic condition. In Papastergiadis’s words, “the validity of a diasporic culture, or the significance of cultural difference, is measured by its degree of attachment to a specific place.”

Architecture may be able to provide us with a reminder of our cultural identity or place. By being in–between an ‘old’ and a 'new' home, an interstitial space develops – a non–physical sense of being dislocated that may be linked to a sense of cultural dislocation. Papastergiadis suggests that moving the 'home' to a different place cannot maintain its original essence; consequently it is altered, or we are altered as we move, and so is our manifestation of home. There is a disjunction of 'cultural signs' when the new home is recreated. This disjunction may operate in the form of a new aesthetic that is created by the migrant in nostalgically recreating their homeland in the new place:

By leaving home migrants create new connections with the rest of the world. In a fundamental sense they can never return to the place they have left. All attempts to recreate the original home will expose new gaps and tensions. Even a brief glance at the interior of a migrant home reveals a disjunctive assemblage of cultural signs.

Diaspora theory in relation to nostalgia

Diaspora theory suggests that fragments of the past could be reconstituted in a form of nostalgia. While Diaspora is centered on the home lost – shaped by place, circumstance and a collective identity – nostalgia is a misalignment of experiences across time. A sense of belonging is disrupted by having to relocate to a new place and find ways of re–making the familiar in a foreign location. Dislocated physically and

88. N Papastergiadis, Cosmopolitanism and Culture, p. 127
psychologically the original homeland becomes “etched in memory and idealized by nostalgia.”  The diasporic self is in search of a home yet the further that familiarity is separated from the actuality of the familiar place – temporally and spatially – the more the essence and accuracy of the place remembered is lost. Boym’s ’reflective nostalgia’ and Trigg’s ’desire for the absent’ are both important analogies here.

Everyone to some extent is living in a border zone while negotiating the “flows of cultural symbols and meaning of artefacts as they circulate across numerous cultural boundaries.” In contemporary society it seems that people of all classes and cultural backgrounds are amidst constant change, adjusting to cultural frameworks and thereby creating new interpretations of their experiences. Papastergiadis believes that this form of translation and constant negotiation of self to place gives particular emphasis to the popular and hybrid practices of diasporic culture that have shaped metropolitan life.

Creole: cultural translations

Hall’s concept of creolization suggests that intercultural mixing and hybridity is a model for the contemporary and post–global condition. ’Creole’ is a slippery signifier. It mainly concerns the changing nature and adaptation, or fusion, of vernacular language which had developed in the colonies and became the native tongue of the inhabitants. Creoles were originally white settlers who had lived in the colonies for such a time that they acquired ’native’ characteristics. Later, the term also described black slaves. Interestingly, before the term’s contemporary meaning of racial mixing, it had (in the Caribbean context) both a black and a white referent deriving from a process of cohabitation in a colonial context.

90. M David & Muñoz–Basols, p. xi.  
91. N Papastergiadis, Cosmopolitanism and Culture, p. 85.  
92. ibid.  
In 2006 I spent several weeks on the Island of Mauritius and briefly visited île de La Réunion. This was my first experience with Creole culture first hand. The Island of Mauritius was initially visited by Portuguese sailors in the sixteenth century; however, it was the Dutch who sought to colonise it only to abandon the island a few decades later. Subsequently, it was colonised by France, then during the Napoleonic Wars Britain took control of the Island. In 1968 Mauritius gained independence and became a republic within the Commonwealth. The country’s population currently comprises descendants mainly from the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Madagascar, France, Great Britain and China.

My response to the place resulted in an artwork that was subsequently installed in an exhibition at Artspace, Woolloomooloo in 2006 titled Making Mirrors (2006) (Fig.3). During my stay in Mauritius I had glimpsed a particular dwelling from the road several times whilst driving. With each sighting I became more fascinated by the complexity of its cultural signs. The design of the home to me seemed western. It was enveloped by luscious greenery from a Caribbean climate and the house was fully constructed with the exception of some parts of the roof. The second storey had no walls but support pillars extending to the sky, allowing for a further floor to eventually be added when the inhabitant’s offspring married and a new family joined the one living below. The roof was a platform supporting several concrete sculptures, most commonly associated with an Italian tradition of architectural decoration and ornament. Apart from a few missing windows and cosmetic finishes, the house seemed complete and occupied. Its intriguing characteristics revealed both a history and anticipated future for its occupants, while indicating to me a complex intercultural mix of aesthetics and signs.
Making Mirrors operated on a number of levels: as a complex sign of a cultural framework, a family home set within the Island of Mauritius; as a representation of occupying a space and making it one’s own; and as a reference to the historical and psychological uses of a photo mural wallpaper. My creative and conceptual concern was with how one subjectively constructs spaces through movement, migration and adaptation; how the physical place and the psychic space can be interwoven. Making Mirrors articulates the capacity of dwellings to become artefacts of different cultures across time – a creole architecture of different cultural traditions and of the fabric of the place itself.
The transculturation of Réunion and Mauritius possesses a rich character and creative vibrancy that is distinct to these 'translated' societies. According to Hall, there is a logic inherent in cultural translation that always bears traces of the original, but without the possibility of restoring the original. He uses James Clifford's term 'narrative of movement' to highlight the essence of these transformations – rather than the intrinsic nostalgia of the diasporic condition – of 'roots' and return. While Hall uses the term diaspora to describe Caribbean cultures, its fundamental principle rests on the idea that diaspora experience is not delimited by memories of home as an essence or pure origin of identity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

This implies that difference is important to cultural identity: that the constant flux, ebb and flow of global movements may in fact result in a hybridisation of cultures and ways of being in the world. While Hall and Papastergiadis define diaspora differently, each highlights the role that nostalgia plays in the diasporic condition where fragments of the past could be reconstituted in a form of nostalgia for the lost home. In considering the ways in which this notion could be applied to creative reflection and artistic practice – and how it may draw on a visual language within my own creative work – I reflect on the narrative of displacement in imaginary visions, for example, of the 'islands of enchantment' that recreate an endless desire “to return to lost origins, to be at one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning.”

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96. ibid, p. 236
likens the nostalgia for another time and lost origin to the imaginary in Lacan – a
desire that is relentlessly impossible to fulfil and becomes the reservoir of our
cinematic narratives – through memory, myth, search and discovery.97

The 1988 exhibition *Elsewhere* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, curated
by Iwona Blazwick, and Ross Gibson’s accompanying catalogue essay, explore the
diasporic aesthetic as useful in understanding Australian identity. *Elsewhere* was
developed in response to the Bicentennial during a time when questions of how
identity is created and understood in Australia received much focus. In his essay,
Gibson makes the point of an Australian 'spiritual vagrancy' through geographic,
historical, psychic and aesthetic preconditions.

Using the analogies present in John Berryman’s *The Dream Songs*, Gibson
speculates on the character Henry, his yearning to feel at home and its impossibility,
whereby he (Henry) draws on his American heritage but isn’t able to fix his identity in
one place – rather remaining colonial and forever tentatively in his place. Gibson
employs this poetic excerpt to introduce the premise of the *Elsewhere*: displacement,
discontinuity and realignment, hence asking whether an artist working in Australia
could find or fabricate a sense of place. He suggests that it is important to
acknowledge that external forces which 'impinge' on Australian culture are actually
inherent to it and are in effect definitively Australian. The Australian photographic
artists in the exhibition, including Julie Brown–Rrap, Jeff Gibson, Bill Henson and
Jacky Redgate, ‘focus much of their attention on memorabilia, bric–a–brac and
decorums that non–Aboriginal Australians have always imported into this country in
an effort to make a home for themselves.’98 Through these examples, Gibson
highlights the essence of 'looking out' from an immediate local and that it is through
this process – that I consider as gleaning – that one may find one’s destination. Like

98. R Gibson, *Elsewhere: Photo–Based Work from Australia: Julie Brown–Rrap, Jeff Gibson, Bill Henson, Jacky Redgate*,
Enwezor’s notion of diaspora in relation to the artist, who is not bound by geography nor constrained by cultural tradition, Gibson alleviates the burden of ‘the local’ on artistic production.

This perspective proposes that globalisation has an effect on our experience and place in the world. It also suggests that the ability to wean ourselves of temporal and spatial signifiers allows the artist to be someone who can operate outside of cultural tradition, geography, and independently from the place she originates. It allows the artist to draw from fragments of this experience, thereby embracing the impreciseness of their locality in order to find new ways of thinking and making art that resonate with these complex, interwoven and ever-changing ontological anchors.

Marsha Meskimmon responds to Terry Smith’s article, ‘Currents of world–making in contemporary art’ (2011) concerning the worldliness of contemporary art (in and through time) toward an understanding of the ethical potential of contemporary practice. In particular, she focuses on the ways in which contemporary practice might engender a future beyond teleology, be made anew and opened to difference. She proposes that artworks may also enable us to “mobilise the nexus between response–ability and responsibility, such that a change that is effected at the level of the subject has the potential to transform social and political life in material ways.”

Ultimately, this might occur through an active engagement with imagination, by where contemporary art can provide an “articulation of an ethical address to the political conditions of globalization.”

It is from within these perspectives that I position the framework of both my desire to make work, and the inherent logic to produce as an artist that works independently of

100. ibid.
the place I come from and where I now live. My aim is to assert that my relationship
to place and my sense of self as both a primary and secondary witness have
deployed a certain self-reflexive relationship to a set of strategies in my work. This
analysis of roots, loss and longing is useful in understanding how I approach the idea
of an expanded photographic materiality within my practice and how it corresponds
to the content of the work, which has helped build an understanding of how
measures of distance could be conveyed through images and operate as a form of
gleaning.

Part Two of this dissertation will explore the set of strategies and approaches that I
have recognised as key to this form of creative practice. In Part Three I will describe
and discuss the four creative works, sketching out how their expanded materiality, as
well as the methodology that governs their production, resonates with my
understanding and conceptual engagement with notions of spatial and temporal
misalignments: a way of thinking about place, nostalgia and diaspora in the present
moment.
PART TWO

GLEANING AS PRACTICE:
SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL MISALIGNMENTS
Part Two, *Gleaning as practice: spatial and temporal misalignments*, articulates my expanded approach towards a photographic practice, in which I use objects, found ephemera, images and photomurals in my creative work that positions gleaning as a strategy for understanding the materiality of my practice and the way that images and objects come into being in my multi-component installations. This approach has been stimulated through a convergence of practice-led research underpinned by the philosophical and theoretical discourse discussed in Part One.

This section details the modes of production and methodological approach that the creative works operate within and examines the interconnection between practices of photography, archaeology and the functions of the archive in contemporary art. It leads to a new-found understanding of my approaches to making art and areas of philosophical enquiry that provide a meaningful synthesis between the conceptual impetus for creative production and my artistic strategies, or methodology.

The creative work produced as part of this research employs three philosophical tangents that have informed my approach towards material and spatial explorations. Firstly, Augé’s notion of 'anthropological' place as having a purpose, identity and connection or reference to history functions as a platform for understanding place in my work as something inherent to states of belonging and longing. This is tied to Papastergiadis’s proposition that globalisation and new forces of connectivity have changed the way we experience place. I unpack this further in relation to Enwezor’s critique of a new temporality brought into effect through migrations, dislocations and displacement. I reflect upon these views when considering how nostalgia may be the misalignment of time and our experiences across time. Thirdly, Hall’s concept of creolisation and Diaspora as a notion that centres on the lost home (place) form a critical framework for the art work. Each of the four creative works explores how attachment and nostalgia for the past manifests itself through spaces and places in the present – particularly through the ways that this attachment exists within the complex ebb and flow of migratory movements, geographical drifts and temporal displacements.
Chapter Four

Strategies for making

Four projects have been realised as part of this research and comprise the creative work: *Taken on the same day as the other photo* (an artist book and photographic series), *Agency of Inanimate objects* and *Blue Distance*. In this section of the dissertation, Part Two, Chapter Four, Strategies for making, I discuss the methods by which each of these works come into being, while in the final section, Part Three, I describe and discuss each creative work offering a parallel to these artistic strategies.

This chapter is written in an exegetical mode and introduces a series of strategies that, overall, function as a methodology for the projects produced as part of this PhD. The methodology aims to show how the material functions and modalities of these strategies are bound up with the physical, conceptual and metaphorical invocations of displacement and loss. Each of these strategies provide insight into how my creative work draws on a range of pictorial, aesthetic, material and communicative devices that operate out of broader fields of photography, the archive and practices of archaeology. The process of making the creative work and thinking through how the components of each project have come together led me to interrogate each of these strategies in greater depth. While the recurring element of each work is located within the practice of expanded photography – which I will discuss in detail later in the chapter – the method by which the work comes together draws largely on finding, fragmenting, translating and reconfiguring material that is both made (photographed) and found, each being of equal significance to my creative journey. Hence the strategies described in the sections that follow are areas that are not only bound to photographic reflexivity but engage with the explicit ways in which material objects are encountered, experienced, collected, deciphered, presented or interpreted. This analysis aims to draw together an understanding of
how such strategies and approaches to art making function as a form of 'gleaning' – a term which also resonates with the philosophical terrain of the relationship between place, nostalgia and diaspora.

I conclude the chapter with further examination of the resonance the artistic strategies I have employed have (conceptually and aesthetically) with the philosophical inquiry presented in Part One.

**Personal encounters and autobiography**

I have come to realise that the processes I use to generate studio work provide a reflection of the way I remember place and my own experiences. In 1987, my father and I migrated to Australia from my birthplace in Poland, leaving my mother and sister behind. I was six years old at the time. Two years later, after being granted residency in Australia, my mother and my sister joined us. I have almost no memory of this period, nor of my childhood prior to this.

The impact of my migration on my artistic practice operates on varying levels. I was not born Australian, nor am I sentimentally Polish. I do not long for my mother country, or homeland, but I do have an intense affinity with it. There are gaps in the way that I speak and comprehend my native language, which is usually revealed when I converse with other native speakers. Signs of my fractured relationship with my homeland begin to show when I visit Poland and find it difficult to assimilate into cultural life. In Australia, my cultural heritage is often still that of first generation migrant – I sound and appear 'Australian', yet the way in which I understand my identity is partially foreign.

Italian–Australian writer Rosi Braidotti introduces her concept of nomadic subjectivity in her book *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary*
Feminist Theory, by also reflecting on her own biographical experiences as a migrant moving from Europe to Australia and back again. She explains that much of the material in the book has been expressed in several different languages. Additionally, the essays in Patterns of Dissodence, originally drafted in French then rewritten in English, became a translation without originals – an analogy which has become a defining feature of her texts which reflect the experiences of a multicultural individual. Braidotti equivocates the idea of a migrant becoming a nomad and her work as having “no mother tongue, only a succession of translations, of displacements, of adaptations to changing conditions.” 101

While my practice is not exactly autobiographical or self-referential, there are methods and affinities with the way I might engage with a place or translate a set of objects in a creative work that covertly bring up an encounter with displacement, loss, nostalgia and the effects of memory. I draw on experience without binding it to a certain time or place; rather, I seek to transform it anew in a hybrid form that is both a reflection of the past and an anticipation of the present. I am aware of the weight of these experiences and how they are an undercurrent of my impetus for making art.

Papastergiadis identifies the changing nature of artistic practice in his book Spatial Aesthetics, Art, Place and the Everyday indicating that cultural identities are unlocked through the ruptures and flows of globalisation and reshaped by uncertain desires for mobility brought forth by opposing forces of local traditions and global culture. He suggests that artists respond to these changes by questioning the ‘distance’ or ‘space’ between the place they come from and where they now belong. 102

This ‘other place’ belongs partially in the imagination. For me this is split between two continents in the separation of one home from the other, and also a temporal stretch

102 N Papastergiadis, Spatial Aesthetics, Art, Place and the Everyday, p. 10.
between the before and the after of migration. This inquiry is the personal, philosophical and conceptual anchor of my practice–led research, and the foundation of the approach to my creative work.

My process of making images utilises my own visual logic and photographic language as a means to make sense of the world and my experience within it. I empty meaning from specific places via the medium of photography in an attempt to speak more universally about the themes discussed in Part One. I also homogenise the landscape in a way that photography welcomes: flattening the image and removing place specificity from the photograph. The way in which the camera can describe a scene in immense detail while inscribing it with other meanings and symbolic potential is a force that enables a multilayered relationship between the place, the memory of it and the desire to excavate the image for an infinite number of other associations and meanings in what John Berger calls the 'radial energy' of consciousness, or, as Papastergiadis suggests, “the juncture at which the private photograph, with its unique meaning, meets the public status of an icon, that is, an image that is divested of any specific reference to the past but is expressive of the general condition of living.”

I use the idea of the photographic ‘mirror’ to engage our awareness and offer a glimpse of a temporally distant view which would otherwise go unnoticed. The photograph becomes a mirror of the world and a reflection of it – or an opportunity for the viewer to reflect using the image and discover something about themselves. Undoubtedly photography becomes a trigger for memory and for association – resemblance and fragments which are like constructed and inaccurate memories. This is done by using newly taken and found photographs – often presented side by side.

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104 Geoffrey Batchen explores the pre–photographic desire to freeze the image replicated by the mirror in relation to the desire to permanently fix fleeting images in *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, p. 36.
side. I will discuss this in relation to the four art works created during my candidature in Part Three.

The photograph (usually a landscape) depicts a real place, one that I have experienced and subsequently removed from its context. All ties to the location in which it was taken, the time (in relation to the past or present) and emotive capacity are removed. This erasure of geographical coordinates presents this place without the weight of history that presses upon the image.

**Landscape: an imaginary geography**

My approach reflects what Lippard refers to as the spontaneous attraction to place through an emotional response to the landscape.¹⁰⁵ Landscape seems to me to have an immutable history that mediates a sense of permanence and belonging. Perhaps that is why I am drawn to landscape, as it is a place. I choose sites to photograph premised on a degree of serendipity. I involve the possibility of chance encounters premised on Guy Debord’s dérive and psychogeography. Debord’s notion of the dérive relates to movement within a geographical environment and its effect on human behaviour and emotion: "in a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there."¹⁰⁶ There is an analogy here to the way I approach the landscape, referencing travel and migration. Debord’s ‘drifting’ perceives axes of passage, arrivals and departures, measuring distances that may not be physical: abstract experiments of the dérive that probe thought regarding the changing urban landscape.¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰⁷. ibid.
Landscape is loaded with cultural and political signifiers, especially when pictured in artefacts such as postcards. In photographing a landscape one assumes a certain responsibility to form a true account of the site itself with the photographic representation of it, hence the place and its image as inseparable, and indexicality is paramount. This is particularly the case with sites that have entered the popular photographic vocabulary in their ubiquitous familiarity through modern travel and media coverage, such as Niagara Falls or Uluru. These types of sites are impossible to photograph without the weight of their history and vernacular imaging preempting their potential meanings.

Place, in all its complexity, is replete with human histories and memories. It is difficult to separate a memory of an event from the place in which it occurred. The practice of taking photographs of locations – those that bear little or no significance to me – creates a form of removal or displacement of the experience and an iteration of the psychological distance from place. I take the photographic image and store it. Usually this occurs though a methodical process of using a 4x5 field camera where the sheet film is unloaded from the double dark after the exposure, stored and subsequently processed. Without the meta-data that is embedded automatically in digital images, analogue film does not carry with it the encoded or inscribed information of geographical position. As a collector of 'places' or sites, the GPS co-ordinates are irrelevant to me – what fascinates me is that the place in the photograph is now without a 'location', its exact position, and inherently the experience and memory of taking the picture are irretrievable. This becomes the starting point for my process of excessive collecting, storing and retrieving photographs that, through the images’ indexicality, are linked to the world from which they were taken, while through the creative process they become separated from it.
Longing and psychological distance

In light of my theoretical approach my creative work examines sites that may invoke a longing for place – locations that appear universal and drift between a place in the present and a past place. Eduardo Cadava describes it well: “This oscillation between space and time, between distance and proximity touches, on the very nature of filmic media, whose structure consists in the simultaneous reduction and maximization of distance.” Consequently my research methods investigate the approach of acquiring photographic images (both taken with a camera and found), and examine the ways in which the photograph becomes removed from the moment of reality therefore suggesting a psychological disconnection from a place. Although my approach to artistic production is experiential and speculative, at its core is the psychological nature of human experience.

All of the creative works made during this practice–led research make an inquiry around the disparity between spatial and temporal experience. They engage the photographic image as a form and the aesthetics of the ruin to visually investigate how an empty site may invoke a longing for a place: how sites of redundant urban landscape or otherwise evoke an interstitial space; how images void of human presence become distant but at the same time are familiar; and how images can provoke us to feel a longing for what is no longer there.

While many artists are returning to the landscape to draw on the perception of time and experience and to locate new type of romantic sensibility, as discussed in Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art\(^{109}\) and New Romantics: Darkness and Light in Australian Art,\(^{110}\) I adopt the genre for its ability to resonate with the possibility of a nostalgic psyche while at the same time considering the function of memory in temporal and spatial experience.

My use of photographs operates on a number of levels: as a physical object, specifically embracing found photographic ephemera – a tactile object, reminiscent of a place in one's memory; as a ‘memory image’ probing desire for a place; as a subjective translation of my experience; and as a photo mural that alludes to a way home is manifested and the fantasy to be 'somewhere else' that a vista provides. Photographs cannot be separated from the experience they provide and as photography historian, Geoffrey Batchen, might suggest, their “volume, opacity, tactility and physical presence in the world.”\(^{111}\)

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Material substance and photography

Throughout my practice-led inquiry photography is employed firstly as a medium that represents the real, in that it holds information of the visible world. A photograph is able, in a certain way, to image an absent object, absent place or non-place. This may be depicted as an actual and tangible place or as a trace of one, but what it represents to me is an *imaged* place and an *imagined* one. Each place becomes simultaneously present (in the image) and absent from our present reality. As Roland Barthes suggests, there is a "superimposition here: that of reality and of the past,"\(^{112}\) notably demonstrating, through his analysis of the found portrait of his mother in *Camera Lucida*, that the past the photographic image presents to us has no access.

While this intrinsic nature of the photographic medium is acknowledged in my work, in the process of this practice-led research I have learnt that it is precisely the material, or the physical presence of photographic images and their relations, that has shaped each of my projects. Throughout photography’s history, the visual properties of the surface of the image have depended on the material or the *substrate*. Elizabeth Edwards reminds us that this is the case in her example of looking at a daguerreotype, which can only be made lucid through the handling of the object in the hand to establish the correct viewing angle for the image to become visible.\(^{113}\) Joan Schwartz adds that “in addition to its essential nature as a physical object and its message as a visual image, we must consider the meaning-making attributes attached to its materiality.”\(^{114}\) This inherent potential of the image to change meaning based on its materiality is of key concern to my work, where I move fluidly between using photomurals, large-scale photographs, and smaller ones – printed using diverse printing technologies, both analogue and digital, and created by using, but not limited to, digital, 35mm, medium or 4x5 large camera formats. I also

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113 E Edwards, p. 5.
use anonymous found imagery, sourced from books, albums and photographic paraphernalia or images from my own archive. These are either used in their original material form, or are rephotographed, reassembled or cut-up in a collage.

Each of my creative works uses the photograph in a very specific format as well as considering each of the photographic components as separate but interrelated constructs. The scale, material, position and the image’s relation to what has come before or after and around each image has formulated much of the creative process and how the work could be interpreted by a viewer. Since, as I discuss earlier in this chapter, I use the photographic medium as a way of displacing experience and thereby drawing on a range of visual tropes to instead evoke temporal and psychological distance from places, I intend for the creative works to operate in this photographic simulacrum: between the reality they depict and the elusiveness they provide.

It has been noted by a number of writers and curators that in recent years there has been a return to an engagement with photographic materiality – for example in *New Matter: recent forms of photography* (2016) curated by Isobel Parker–Phillip at The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Several works in this exhibition use early, alternative photographic processes like Cyanotype, while others employ techniques of lens–less practices, including the Photogram, to consider ways that one can engage with the idea of the depths of the image and its form – rather that the surface. Curator Parker–Phillip draws on photography's extensive vocabulary to confound our understanding of what a photograph can show us through visual devices which can mislead these interpretations. For example, in Melbourne based–artist Kate Robertson's work our awareness of the senses and our perception of the image's subject, which includes objects like pins and seeds, are disrupted when the artist photographs the objects, and layers the subsequent images onto one another over and over until they resemble constellations or celestial maps. These pictorial
abstractions coax a mode of contemplation that takes us out of the normative engagement with photographs.

While my work does not adopt pictorial abstraction as a visual device, it does attempt to draw on a new form of engagement involving photography in the expanded field which in its own way aims to provide a similar mode of contemplation about the nature of what the image can reveal or hide. In an essay to accompany my exhibition *Blue Distance* (2014), Andrew Frost describes the nature of my work puts the viewer:

> both within the image and *outside it*. The familiarity of these scenes and experiences seem poignantly recognisable – we could easily walk around and see these places and these things. But it is because of that documentary aesthetic that we also feel so estranged from these moments.¹¹⁵

Frost acknowledges the way that the images investigate the complex relationship between our desire for an exceptional moment and the quotidian experience – the exotic and a comforted return to normality. This is accomplished via “the artist’s suite of collages and prints... overlay[ing] geometry, history and art on to the world to make sense of our place within it, yet when we see that process reflected back at us it seems incredibly strange.”¹¹⁶ I have an affinity with a photographic vocabulary that operates between various material forms: realist photomurals, rephotographed photographs, photo–collages, intimate images of found paraphernalia and discarded things from the natural world. As a way of commenting on the way that we engage with places I aim to create a tension between the typological aesthetic and the

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¹¹⁶. ibid.
elusive qualities of the photographic image by using a range of visual modes and photographic representations.

Sandra Plummer, Harriet Riches and Duncan Wooldridge published an essay in *Photoworks* in 2011 that also touches on the question of the return to materiality and the emergence of an object–based practice in recent photography. They draw on the logic of how “early incarnations of photography were defined by the medium’s relationship to its materials of making: the specific properties through which the photograph came into being.”

Early processes like the Daguerreotype or Calotype each depended on their own chemical and material constitution. These first forms of experimental and material photography eventuated from Pictorialism, Dada and Surrealist montage embracing three–dimensional objects and image interventions that have recently had a popular resurgence. This nostalgia for lost processes is, according to Plummer, a result of a “perceived crisis in photographic practice caused by the 'death' of analogue.”

Cultural critic and theorist Giuliana Bruno offers a reading of the recent materiality in contemporary art in reference to the Epicurean philosopher, Titus Lucretius Carus, suggesting that the image is itself a material substance, “configured like a piece of cloth, released as matter that flies into the air from the surface of objects. It is as if it could be peeled off, like a skin or layer of substance, forming a 'bark' or leaving a sediment, a veneer, a 'film.”

At the centre of *October*’s 2016 issue is the question proposed by David Joselit, Carrie Lambert–Beatty and Hal Foster: what are the productive materialisms for making and thinking about art today? These collated texts draw on recent philosophical developments, characterised as ‘Actor–Network Theory’, ‘Thing

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Theory’, ‘Object–Oriented Ontology’, ‘Speculative Realism’, and ‘Vibrant Materialism’, and how these have challenged subjectivity in the humanities in order to theorise a new materialism or objectivity.

In my work I do not privilege the subject of the image over the form of the work, or vice versa. Instead, each is dependent on the other in a dynamic relationship which is positioned around ideas inherent to photography, but that also speaks to a range of materials and creative processes beyond the exclusivity of the medium. I share Bruno’s ideas as a way of articulating my logic and rationale for dealing with images, objects, subjects and spatial relations, where “the material surface of things is an architecture: this is a partition that can be shared, and it is a primary form of habitation for the material world.”¹²⁰ When Bruno talks about materiality, she moves between notions of network relations and communicative devices, where it (materiality) is a permeable skin that holds the very configuration of the relationship between subjects as well as that of subjects with objects. She goes on to state that “materiality is an active zone of encounter and admixture, a site of mediation and projection, memory and transformation.”¹²¹

The idea that materiality defines art forms but also acts as a connective thread between separate art forms, thereby creating a productive exchange, is critical to Bruno’s argument. So, while there may be a shift in photographic expression and a new mode of material exploration within this specific medium, there are also new ways in which contemporary artists are engaged in this connective mode of investigating material practice in a broader sense that could be described as working in an ‘expanded field’. My creative work is situated in this direction. Bruno points out:

> The life of objects haptically conveys energies that are also layers of experience and residual existence. Things retain on their surface, and transmit, the

¹²⁰ ibid, p. 15.
movement of circulation, the fabrication of difference, the texture of negotiation, the conditions of mediation, and many other forms of passage. Materiality, in this sense, is an archive of relations and transformation.122

Bruno’s articulation of materiality echoes my own intention to create spatial experiences (in exhibitions of the work) that draw on diverse photographic languages and are fundamentally tied to matter and transmission. I think of the photograph as having body and depth, where time is evident in material space, layered across materials and forms.

Photography and the expanded field

Peter Osborne suggests that photography is undergoing changes as a result of technological and cultural–economic forces. The rapid expansion of the medium has led to a type of ‘photo–capitalism’, in which photography is a “transnational (and translinguistic) cultural–economic form.”123 Osborne questions the ontology of the image as a way of considering the current mode of unity (or the lack of it) in the “relational totality of different photographic forms coexisting within the present: chemical photography, film, television, video and digital imaging,” and establishes that (drawing on Rosalind Krauss’124 ‘post–medium condition’) “there is no ontologically fundamental basis to its [photography’s] unity – as a single technology, for example – which would allow for the specification of photography as a ‘medium’.”125 This perspective opens up a way of thinking about a way of working with images in an expanded field: of drawing on the role of images across personal, cultural and socio–political contexts, their modes of production and dissemination, while maintaining a dialogue with photography’s ontology but reimagining the ‘new

122. ibid.
125. P Osborne. ‘Photography in an Expanding Field’, p. 36.
photographic’ as plural and relational.

Can the use of the image in contemporary art find a new way of addressing the temporal? In Anywhere or not at all: philosophy of contemporary art, Osborne suggests that the image “must relate to the socio–spatial ontology of its own international and transnational sites and relations.”126 Tracing the course of the ontology of art from craft–based mediums to post–conceptual practices, his argument proposes that contemporary art converges and transforms, and is rooted in communicational and economic processes. These processes have enabled an infinite exchange and new possibilities for a generic ‘art’ via the ‘de–bordering’ of the arts as mediums.

The discourse on photography’s ‘new materialism’ could be understood as an effect of the present–day ubiquity of images in circulation led by communicational and economic processes. Opposing digital’s ‘immateriality’, there is a tendency in current photographic practices towards revaluing the handmade and the material substrate of the photographic medium.127 For example, Charlotte Cotton’s recent book, Photography is Magic, looks at the renewed interest in the materiality of photographs.128 This is not necessarily a nostalgic return to an old form of photography, but rather an expansion ‘outwards’ from a singular material mode of photography, to finding new possibilities for the image to operate as a constant renegotiation of its physicality, unrestricted by its ontological anchors.

George Baker stated in the article, ‘Photography’s Expanded Field’ (2005), that:

The medium of photography has been thoroughly transformed today, and while the object forms of traditional photography are no longer in evidence in much

126. P Osborne, Anywhere or Not at All, p. 28.
advanced artistic practice, something like a photographic effect still remains — survives, perhaps, in a new, altered form.\textsuperscript{129}

Baker’s argument is equally premised on the fact that the photographic object may be in crisis. He suggests that the terms involved in the medium’s ‘expansion’ have become more complex, rather than the expanded field itself collapsing under its own dispersal. Baker attempts to map photography’s possibilities and multiple logics by tracing the notion of ‘stasis’ and ‘not–stasis’ through Modernism to the Postmodern impulse of ‘counter–presence.’\textsuperscript{130} Baker asks:

> What would it mean to invert this exclusion, to locate a project not as the photographic suspension between the not–narrative and the not–stasis, but as some new combination of both terms, involving both narrative and stasis at the same time?\textsuperscript{131}

What Baker offers is a perspective that traces photography’s multiple operations and oppositions through art, while drawing on Krauss’ seminal text to remind us that:

> modernist medium–specificity wouldn’t simply dissipate into the pluralist state of anything goes, but rather that such mediums would quite precisely expand, marking out a strategic movement whereby both art and world, or art and the larger cultural field, would stand in new, formerly unimaginable relations to one another.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{129} G Baker, ‘Photography’s Expanded Field’, p.123.
\textsuperscript{130} Baker suggests that this ‘condition’ held at odds photography’s relationship to ‘narrativity’ and stasis, and that this was in fact counterintuitive: “the frozen fullness of the photographic image, its devotion to petrifaction or stasis, has seemed for so many to characterize the medium as a whole.” He goes on to say that “generalizing the structural condition of modernist photography is to depict it as suspended between the conditions of being neither narrative nor fully static; the modernist photograph is that image that is paradoxically then both a function of not–narrative and not–stasis at the same time.” Baker, pp. 125–127.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, p. 123.
My response to the current state of photographic practice through my work resonates with these ideas. I use images that are objects, and objects that are collected or found, as well as images that I take, or make. Theorist and writer, Daniel Palmer, in his book *Photography and Collaboration*, offers a new perspective on the use of found photography as a strategy for artists since the rise of conceptual art. His argument re-imagines the different ways in which found photographs could approach authorship as a form of collaboration, thus exploring the idea of photography in ‘circulation’. Palmer suggests that through processes of “aggregation and reconceptualization of personal photographs…artists draw out unconscious narratives with collections of amateur images, reinvesting them with a different authority and pathos”, which he suggests is more than just an act of appropriation, but in fact collaborative.¹³³

I am interested in the new relations and possibilities that bringing images from different sources together can provide, none of which is bound to a singular genre or language of photography, but shaped by what I understand as a present-day ‘contemporaneity’ of not only looking back, *but at* and *in* relation to a struggle to locate ourselves in the world. I use the image for its spatial and temporal dimension as well as for its ability to be archived, captioned and referential of the present moment. For Palmer, “it seems that the artists contributing to photography’s future by collaborating with its historical residues, revealing in the process, once again, that the photographic event is anything but past.”¹³⁴

My method of blending the materiality of photographic images/objects in my work is central to opening up a dialogue not only within an expanded use of photographic images, but with the cultural and social spheres within which these forms reference and function. My move towards this eclectic, or expanded, way of working with

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¹³⁴ D Palmer, p.170.
images seeks a form that would allow representational codes “to exceed their place within an image, within a frame, and return to re–code the reality or cultural realms that they can no longer adequately represent” due to their ubiquity and proliferation. Palmer also reminds us that, while artists used found photographs before the rise of the digital era, it is timely and responsive to photography’s exuberant transformation into ‘numerically encoded pixels’ that the appeal of the outmoded (found) image is symptomatic of “a set of anxieties – even extending to memory itself.” My approach to working with personal or anonymous found images/objects offers a nuanced process – specific to my experience of place and my understanding of nostalgia and diaspora – as a way of interpreting and re–conceptualising the function that images have in the present and how they might depict the world they operate within not only in relation to the mobility of images, but in response to the movement of people and the experiences they embody.

**Artist as archeologist: the methods by which things are collected**

The relationship between objects and images plays an important role in my artworks. I am interested in the method by which things are collected and the desire to collect in relation to both mnemonic objects and images and those acquired through some degree of serendipity. In my work, objects and images that are personal are presented alongside objects that are found, to which I have no emotional connection. A complete set of my baby teeth that were collected by my father when I was a child find their way to sit alongside a found postcard of a maelstrom in my 2011 work *Displaced images of distant objects*. My collection of objects and images comes from our intrinsic nature to collect and the curiosity held for items in a specific

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136. D Palmer, p. 139.
collection. In my doctoral project, the method of collecting and appropriating images produces further questions: How can the way that items are interpreted and deciphered be directed by the context they are placed in?

Collecting as a method for creative production borrows from the discipline of archaeology. This form of artistic inquiry was discussed in a program moderated by Hans Ulrich Obrist during Art Basel (2015) which brought together several artists whose work is influenced by archaeology, excavation and research–based practices. The practice of archaeology generates a number of questions and issues relating to the recording of information, subjectivity and interpretation. The way that a site is excavated, what is produced as data, and how this process occurs as a subjective interpretation of a 'site' are the areas of speculation that interest many contemporary artists. The process of navigating through recorded data and the lack of official interpretation as a result of the over–production of records through digital archaeology raises questions of narration. Artists like Mexican–born and Berlin–based Mariana Castillo Deball take on the role of archaeologist to engage with these ideas to both critique the complexity of the field and use it to reveal new connections and meanings about place and history.

When recalling the first time she thought about the idea of archaeology as a way of thinking about a practice, or methodology, Deball described a time when her mother was refreshing her garden. A worker, who was assisting her in the garden’s reconstruction, arrived one morning describing a dream he’d had where he believed there was something very valuable buried in the garden. They proceeded to dig up the garden for two months in an attempt to find something but never did. For Deball, archaeology is a way of thinking about an innate curiosity: the power of one’s

140. Mariana Castillo Deball discusses her practice in Obrist.
imagination and the fantasy that we can connect to our past through archaeological
endeavours.

In my work too, I draw on the imagination and psychological lure of images to evoke
another time or place. Photography is a medium that is intrinsically linked to the
human desire to remember and connect to the past. In this way, I see parallels
between photography and the practice of archaeology\textsuperscript{141}: archaeology is the study of
human activity through recovery and analysis of material culture – this analysis, like
the reading of photographic images, is a subjective process. Artefacts, like images,
become removed from their time, and the time when they were found, and are each
interpreted, analysed and deciphered across a temporal gap. The context in which
they later find themselves can shift their reading. Both photographs and the realm of
archaeology materialise what is invisible, and thereby pose the question, how do you
make traces of what is invisible?

Such willingness to appropriate archaeological and other scientific methods of
collecting, ordering, and exhibiting objects is also distilled in the work of American
artist Mark Dion. His installations evoke a certain repository of the marvelous, a place
that provokes curiosity and imagination. In \textit{Tate Thames Dig} (2003) (Fig.5), Dion and
a team of volunteers excavated the shore of the River Thames in order to explore
London’s rich industrial and cultural history through its material remains. The resulting
exhibition – following the dig, the cleaning, sorting and classifying of objects found –
was then presented in the form of an installation housed primarily in a mahogany
cabinet in the galleries of the Tate Modern. Dion’s methodology employs a system of
pseudo–archaeology, where the method by which things are collected is

\textsuperscript{141} Freud’s analogy of the ‘human psyche’ as an archaeological site suggests an equivalence to psychoanalysis, however
fraught, as he concedes in \textit{Civilization and its discontents}. In the potent mental picture that Freud draws, one can imagine the
mind as build–up of memories coexisting in the same physical space much like a city–Rome–which is made of deep, material
layers and repositories of history. Freud, \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents}. 

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Part Two Gleaning as Practice: Spatial and Temporal Misalignments Chapter Four Strategies for making
fundamental to the outcome. The work sets out a way of re-presenting a fragmented history of the city, in artefacts that span decades or even centuries, which would otherwise be considered rubbish.

Focusing on Dion’s method of ‘analysis’, Flora Vilches, Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Universidad de Chile, discusses the points where Dion’s representation of the archaeological process collides with the ones that are used by practising archaeologists. Dion began this type of practice in the 1980s. Since then critical approaches to archaeology have shifted to a form of ‘postprocessual’ archaeology that arises from a self-reflexive impetus involving diversity and lack of consensus.142 This subjectivity, which also relates to recent artistic practices discussed earlier in this chapter, is negotiated by Dion using irony.

where the endeavour itself is premised on falseness and fiction. Unlike the pursuit of archaeology, Dion doesn't intend to present a solid interpretation. Instead the essence of his work is about drawing our attention to the speculative aspects of archaeology. Vilches examines this suggesting that:

the fact that laboratory analysis is a practice hidden from view and public scrutiny can only strengthen the archaeologist's difficulty in exposing the arbitrariness of his/her classificatory methods. In the *Tate Thames Dig*, Mark Dion undermined the illusion of stability in archaeological analysis in two different ways. On the one hand, he literally turned the lab inside out by installing a field centre for everyone to see, and on the other hand, he classified many items that due to their recent origins tend not to be regarded under fixed categories, making their arbitrariness more evident.143

As a consequence, Dion's work critiques classificatory systems by *borrowing* the methodology of archaeology and overtly exposing the process of laboratory analysis as the form of the actual work. The way that objects were gathered (‘beachcombed’ rather than dug) from the Thames and later displayed in museum vitrines emphasises the notion that classifications (of objects) provide a platform for further interpretation and are in themselves *interpretations*. While Dion gathers objects from a specific place, my method of collecting spans numerous places and temporal contexts, but with a similar *intention* to critique the very nature of collecting. What is important here is that this way of borrowing from archaeology exemplifies “that works of art no longer need to pertain to remote and exotic subject matters to be anthropological”, nor do “they bear formal or metaphorical associations with the *objects* of archaeology as much as with the *practice* of archaeology itself.”144

144. F Vilches, p. 219.
Interestingly, Walter Benjamin also used the archaeological model to emphasise the importance of the location and the significance it holds in deciphering traces and remnants of the past. Benjamin explains ‘recollecting’ as an ‘archaeological excavation’ where its results depend on the approach to the search, instead of the discoveries themselves or the places from which they originate.¹⁴⁵

**The Archive: photographic agency across time**

In my creative practice, I reflect on the physical engagement with found material and also how the encounter itself can later be included in, or be integral to, the artwork. Part of my strategy that borrows from archaeological and archival practices echoes pseudoscientific excavation which examines the nature of how objects or images are found (Fig.6).

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For example, *Sailing for the abyss (black plastic)* (2010) and *Re–photographed (black plastic)* (2015) is a two–part work that depicts the original photograph as it lies in storage wrapped in archival tissue (Plates 1 and 2). I made this work after searching through my own storage space and finding the original photograph, *Sailing for the abyss (black plastic)*, wrapped in archival tissue paper. I immediately thought about this ‘veil’ and what this ‘find’ evoked. The original image depicts the section of a building in construction with the black plastic that covers the surface pulled taught by vertically positioned timber stakes. I photographed many of these sites in the North of France and in Belgium during a residency in Paris in 2008. I would stop by the side of the road regularly to take a picture whilst driving past and seeing one of these examples by chance. Before I knew it, I had a large collection of various constructions concealed by industrial foil across different intervals during the building process. These facades were usually the result of an adjacent building being pulled down, therefore the neighbouring site had to protect itself while the new vacant lot was renovated (Plate 4). I never questioned why structurally there was a need to conceal the exposed surface. I know underneath the foil were traces of the extracted building’s stairs, bathroom tiles and walls. These walls have a symbolic reference to my creative work in their temporal value. Firstly, they represent the time between an old and a new building being present. Secondly, they appear disconnected from the real world in the fragmented composition. And lastly, they can allude to ways that a place may define and re–define itself over time.
Plate 1 Izabela Pluta, *Sailing for the abyss (black plastic)*, 2010 and *Re-photographed (black plastic)*, 2015 pigment prints on photo rag
54 x 54 cm each
Plate 2 Izabela Pluta, *Sailing for the abyss (wall)* 2010 and *Re-photographed (wall)* 2015 pigment prints on photo rag 54 x 54 cm each
Plate 3 Izabela Pluta, installation view from the group exhibition *You can’t get there from here* curated by Consuelo Cavaniglia, 55 Sydenham Rd, 2015.
Plate 4 Izabela Pluta, Collapse 2015
pigment print on photo rag
150 x 200 cm
The subsequent image, *Re-photographed (black plastic)* (Plate 1 and 2), was photographed in 2015, five years after the original work was made. Importantly, this was done as a response to the way the original photograph was found. The tissue paper conceals and reveals areas of the image, resembling the original work in an attempt to separate itself in the present. What also occurs is an acknowledgement of the physicality of the photograph: the material creases in the tissue paper; the flat surface of the photographic paper; and the black plastic covering in the subject of the image.

This experiential methodology reveals my approach to creative production. London-based collaborative duo, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, approach the ‘found’ material, although anonymous, in a similar way their work *People In Trouble Laughing Pushed To The Ground* (2011) (Fig.7) examines the material traces people have left behind during their encounter with the archive. I was first introduced to this work in 2012 when I was in Belfast visiting the gallery *Belfast Exposed*. Broomberg and Chanarin made their work by appropriating material from the Belfast Exposed Archive. Their work comprises more than a hundred circular black and white photographic prints called ‘dots’. These dots reference the small stickers placed on the contact sheets by archivists to indicate the images chosen for the archive’s then recent process of digitisation. The circular area underneath the stickers has been obscured by the stickers’ placement, creating a concealed area on the original contact sheet. The artists chose to expose the spaces underneath the stickers, thereby drawing the viewer’s attention to the insignificant details of the images. The systematic selection of images and the way they were generated echoes a scientific approach, whilst the creative engagement with the archive displays a play on the nuances of an archive: dealing with ideas of absences, gaps, loss and forgetting.
It is the act of looking back into an archive for what cannot be found that is of key interest to my research. In an article that positions Broomberg and Chanarin’s work as a new way of engaging with archive material, image maker and media researcher Patricia Prieto Blanco suggests that “in psycho–analytic terms, this is a search for Freud’s ‘lost object’ and Lacan’s objet petit a, as they, like the archive material’s original meaning and context, are always–already lost.”\textsuperscript{146} As much as an archive tries to preserve the original significance of an image, the very nature of its existence away from its physical and temporal origins provides a shift in its reading.

Okuwi Enwezor has also drawn attention to the archive as a mediation on time and the different means by which artists derive and generate new historical and analytical readings of the archive. He states that:

The variety and range of archival methods and artistic forms, the mediatory structures that underpin the artists’ mnemonic strategies in their use of the archive, and the conceptual, curatorial, and temporal principles that each undertakes, point to the resilience of the archive as both form and medium in contemporary art.  

Enwezor draws on two examples which I see as also relevant to aspects of my artistic engagement with the archive: Craigie Horsfield’s artistic investigations around the central relationship between photography and temporality; and Stan Douglas’s *Overture* (1986) which, according to Enwezor, “captures the archival potential of photographic technology as fundamentally an archaeology of time.”

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In the 1970s Horsfield travelled to Poland where he began shooting with a large-format camera to create a series of antiheroic black-and-white photographs comprising portraits (Fig. 8), deserted street scenes and machinery. Their formal and aesthetic language underscored not only the matter-of-factness of the subjects, but also the fact that he was in essence bearing witness to the forces of change within the slow decline of a period pre-Solidarity. While it is of coincidence to the fact that I am Polish, drawing on this work is important, not only because it was made in the stretch of years between when I was born and when I left Poland, but also because the very nature of its production proposes a critical inquiry of photographic temporality that is also at the core of my work discussed earlier in the chapter, *Sailing for the abyss (black plastic)* and *Re-photographed (black plastic).*

Horsfield’s photographs “operate at the break between temporalities, between archival time and linear time.”  


Stan Douglas’s *Overture* (1986) (Fig. 9) captures the archival potential of time by using three separate components which contemplate the very logic of time. The work examines temporality in a 16mm looped film projecting footage made by the Edison Company in the Canadian Rockies between 1899 and 1901. The third component of this work is an audio track which recites passages from Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. Enwezor points out the contrasts between Horsfield’s practice and Douglas’s *Overture* concluding that each is constituted around perceptual breaks in, respectively, linear time and cyclical time. The uninterrupted loop enables the experience of the film to appear as an endless revolution of image and time, a strategy that I used to produce the artist book, *Taken on the same day as the other photo* (2017) (Plate 15), which I will discuss in detail in Part Three, *Creative Works*. 
The way that I collect, store and retrieve photographs that I have taken or found is a way of forming new connections and interpretations within the image and how that image comes into being and forms part of an art work. I often revisit my many folders and archive boxes where I store negatives, contact sheets, keepsake family photographs and found ephemera. It involves a process of shuffling, pondering and reading the pictures to try and ascertain their value in the present moment. The way that I read an image may change depending on when I view it, and what other parameters and influences are shaping the work at that moment. It is a process of discovery: each image is either associated with a memory from when it was taken, or completely void of a spatial and temporal connection.

In his seminal essay ‘Unpacking my Library’,151 Walter Benjamin describes a setting in which he is an active participant in a process of reviewing his collection of books: he opens the boxes and revisits the moment when each book was acquired. Through this process of distance (physically from the objects) and time (apart from them), Benjamin illustrates how memory may attach itself to the experience of things. Un packing the books and reflecting on their role in personal experience places Benjamin as an observer of his life, or as Susan Stewart suggests, “a tourist in her own life”.152

The notion that there is a temporal space between when an image is taken and when it is displayed or realised as a work proposes an interstitial space of consideration and reflection that is pivotal to my methodology as an artist. Benjamin’s state of disorder, where he finds himself amidst piles of half unpacked boxes, also suggests this space of reflection and evaluation and resonates with the way that I encounter my archive of images. Images, like books, in such a context are like fragments, each becoming agents of memory and association. My archive is open-ended, never

complete and never premised on fixed relationships. In this sense, my archive is open to rearrangement and interpretation – images can operate alongside each other in constant flux, where meaning is fluid and pinned down only through a marriage between it (the image) and other material forms.

Referencing Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, Blanco acknowledges that in recent years, postmodern archive theory has started to shift the perception of the influence that the archivist has in the shaping and interpretation of records.¹⁵³ As American photographer Allan Sekula suggests in his seminal essay, ‘Reading an archive’, the elastic nature of an archive enables the displaced photograph to find a new context, one that does not necessarily reflect the context of its original use:

> In an archive, the possibility of meaning is ‘liberated’ from the actual contingencies of use. But this liberation is also a loss, an abstraction from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context. Thus the specificity of ‘original’ uses and meanings can be avoided and even made invisible, when photographs are selected from an archive and reproduced in a book. .... So new meanings come to supplant old ones, with the archive serving as a kind of ‘clearing house’ of meaning.¹⁵⁴

What is worth noting here are the ideas that archival material is inherently interpretive and that the passing of time offers the opportunity for these interpretations to be made. “By extension, memory is not something found or collected in archives, but something that is made, and continually re–made.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵. T Cook & JM Schwartz, p. 172.
My own method of engaging with archival material recalls the fluid ways that meaning in photographs is created. Photographs are devoid of meaning until meaning is put upon them by ourselves as cultural beings.\textsuperscript{156} Therefore the way that we knowingly create connections and associations out of the material in a photographic archive is shaped by the imagination. It is important to note that in this practice–led research I refer to my own archive as an artefact of memory — where images, artefacts and objects are collected over time to create a repository for ideas to form. Within the scope of this research it has been critical to question my use of this archive and to better understand its function and significance to my methodology, as I have described in this chapter. Beyond this research it may seem possible to try and engage with a public or institutional archive to challenge the current nature of my creative practice.

**The Wunderkammer**

The modern museum plays a role in the preservation and presentation of items for our consideration. In the Renaissance these private collections were known as curiosity cabinets or ‘wunderkammer’. The collections of rare, valuable, historically important or unusual objects were compiled by a scholar for study or entertainment.

Renaissance wunderkammers were private spaces, created and formed around a deeply held belief that all things were linked to one another through either visible or invisible similarities. People believed that by detecting those visible and invisible signs and by recognising the similarities between objects, they would be brought to an understanding of how the world functioned, and what humanity’s place in it was.\textsuperscript{157}

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Approaching the wunderkammer through these ideas has assisted in informing my engagement with this particular mode of display as it operates in the way I approach installing my work. The cabinet or vitrine was used to bring disparate items and cultures together: exotic natural objects and treasure, including art, clothing and tools from different cultures, places and times were sought for the wunderkammer to “inspire wonder and stimulate creative thought.” The imaginative and speculative capacity of a collection to provoke certain meanings is important to the way in which my work can be read. I use the conceptual principle of how objects are brought together – from different places and contexts – to create an analogy for the dispersion of people across places and homelands: dissonant fragments that can intersect and align in hybrid relationships and formations in a collection — in the context of an artwork.

Figure 10 Newell Harry Untitled (Objects + Anagrams for R.U. & R.U. (Part II), L4L form–ply tables, ceramics, various artefacts, found objects, paper, ink, Tongan Ngatu, chalk Table dimensions: H 90cm x W 79cm x L 190cm (ea.) Overall dimensions variable. Roslyn Oxley 9.

The conceptual processing and re-presentation of objects and artefacts is a form of contemporary art practice today. For example, at the 2015 Venice Biennale I encountered such installations by Fiona Hall (in the Australian Pavilion), and Ricardo Brey and Newell Harry in the All the World’s Futures exhibition at the Arsenale, curated by Okwui Enwezor. Each of these artists takes on the formal and conceptual mechanisms of the wunderkammer as a way of negotiating the content and implicit reading of their work. Harry’s Objects + Anagrams for R.U. & R.U (2015) (Fig.10) included a long table on which objects were arranged — an eclectic mix of South Pacific Islander vessels, various maps, photographs and 'exotic' objects, suggesting those that one may find in an anthropological museum. Cuban-born, Belgium-based Brey’s large scale, multi-vitrine installation Every life is a fire (2009–2015) (Fig.11) comprised nested boxes and familiar objects. The vitrines evoked the object’s potential for transformation while presenting it for our interpretation. The cryptic and intricate system of display revealed each object within the case as a critical component of the whole in the installation’s overwhelming expanse that defied categorisation.

Hall’s *Wrong Way Time* was equally monumental in scale, leading the viewer through sets of cabinets that echoed the wunderkammer effect – a hybrid fusion of sixteenth century wunderkammer cabinets and post–apocalyptic dread. Hall filled the exquisite cabinets with object–based artworks and sculptures that created tensions around her intersecting concerns: global politics, world finances and the environment.

While each of these installations invites the viewer to make connections between objects, and as much as the work is informed by the wunderkammer tradition, it is also highlighting the colonial undercurrents that run through such devices. The transformation of materials, images and objects though the set parameters of a collection and the context in which it is viewed has the potential to span temporal and spatial dimensions – transcending cultural, social and geographic boundaries – and to find new ways of perceiving and interpreting the world.

**Agency of objects**

The *Museum of Innocence* (Fig.12) in Istanbul presents a complexity of objects that come together to form a fragmented account of Istanbul and Turkish culture between 1975 and 1984. The founder and creator of the Museum, Turkish author Orhan Pamuk, set out to create the 'kunstkammer' while writing a book under the same name, *The Museum of Innocence*.¹⁵⁹ I visited the museum housed in a three–story house in the Çukurcuma neighbourhood of Beyoglu, Istanbul, in 2015.

The dimly lit interiors of its three levels resembled the spaces of an intricately designed and curated museum: spot lighting and narrow timber stairs that led to the floors above and below. However, what the cabinets contained was far from a conventional set of objects – disrupting all sense of logical and chronological classification or a typology. Instead, the small vitrines were densely stacked and

tightly positioned next to one another, and displayed an eclectic array of items that ranged from postcards, posters, maps and art from the period, including cultural paraphernalia; domestic objects like tea pots, glassware, clocks and ashtrays; textiles, jewellery, shoes, hair combs and match boxes – all of which were either carefully arranged in scenes, or, quite often, in exquisitely curated dioramas.

The museum was conceived by Pamuk while writing his novel that traces a love story gone wrong in the midst of a country undergoing immense political change. The 'innocence' of an affair between the protagonist Kemal, and his young lover Füsun, turns obsessive when Kemal breaks his engagement to the character Sibel when Füsun marries someone else. Kemal ultimately forms an attachment to Füsun and throughout the novel collects objects that remind him of her, and hence the Museum of Innocence is formed. Pamuk set out to create a collection to represent each of the book’s 83 chapters, giving each box the corresponding title.
The museum becomes a theatre where the relationship between objects of attachment and objects of fantasy enter a slippery coexistence. The author spent years collecting the objects in the displays at flea markets and second-hand shops, which encipher moments in the story and in his characters' lives.

The way in which the objects are arranged and their removal from their original context proposes a rethink of their collective significance. Locked up in elaborate new configurations, they speak to one another forming new connections and vibrations of meaning, adrift from their original settings and emotional contexts. Pamuk writes:

> What I found most enthralling was the way in which objects removed from the kitchens, bedrooms, and dinner tables where they had once been utilized would come together to form a new texture, an unintentionally striking web of relationships … Their ending up in this place after being uprooted from the places they used to belong to and separated from the people whose lives they were once part of – their loneliness, in a word – aroused in me the shamanic belief that objects too have spirits.160

In the catalogue to the museum, Pamuk describes the circumstances in which the objects were collected and exchanged in Istanbul. The collectors since the 1990s focused on objects without a history, rejecting any items that had populated the flea markets since the 1950s which were left behind by mainly non-Muslims who had been forced out of Istanbul. Cultural objects that once belonged to the Christians were of no interest to the new Turkish middle-class breed of collectors, nor were they of interest to the Westernised middle-class who were indifferent to Istanbul’s past and belongings, including anything in old script, or printed in Arab alphabet from the Ottoman empire. A massacre of objects occurred during this time where items

that had once filled flea markets and second-hand bookshops – like photographs, papers, furniture, old money and knickknacks – were incinerated and destroyed.\(^\text{161}\)

This example of a culture rejecting its past and creating a new identity and a future alongside it positions their form of collecting as occurring in a 'cultural vacuum'. This seems 'anti-nostalgic', the notion of destroying the connection to the past and instead embracing all things new which do not bind the beholder to the weight of the past. Pamuk’s intention was to draw attention to not only the way that museums and collections are established, but also the way in which people’s stories could be told through objects that everyone knew and used – that throughout their preservation and presentation, in a wunderkammer such as the Museum of Innocence, they could touch the common humanity of their audience.

The notion of objects each evoking their own secret history is also explored by Australian author, David Malouf, in his novel *12 Edmondstone Street*.\(^\text{162}\) Malouf brings to our attention a sense of the way in which the objects with which we surround ourselves, and the places we occupy, build up our private maps of reality and shape our personal mythologies. Malouf, like Pamuk, displays an infatuation with everyday objects and the life they embody that echoes with the way that I appropriate material objects throughout my creative practice in order to speculate on lived experience.

**Contemporary gleaning**

While practices of archaeology and adopting anonymous, found objects inform my artistic strategy, my work additionally gestures towards a form of contemporary gleaning: a poetic scavenging that is a material exploration of the way in which things

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become separated from their origin. Gleaning is fundamentally similar to, but unique from, the concept of appropriation, as I discuss in the final sections of this chapter.

Etymologically, gleaning is defined as an act of gathering and collecting. The term refers to picking leftover and neglected items after the harvest. The ancient activity of gleaning predates Jean-François Millet’s painting of 1867, *The Gleaners*. The verb ‘to glean’ comes to English from the French ‘gleaner’, to gather and to form a collection. The sense of being able to find or discover something, as implied in the word’s definition, has significant pertinence to my methodology.

Gleaning as a form of practice is interesting to my work in two ways: firstly because it characterises the practice of rethinking the meaning behind discarded materials; and secondly because it addresses the process of forming a collection based on detritus, materials and objects that no longer hold meaning or value to those who discarded them.

German filmmaker Harun Farocki gathered the footage for his artwork *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992) from the Bucharest TV studio for an insubstantial sum of money. Depicting the Romanian revolution of December 1989, he relied on the fact that the images that were interesting to him were no longer of interest to their previous owners. Similarly, the discarded photographs or albums which I have used in several of my creative works – and which I purchased at garage sales, flea markets or second-hand book shops — have ended up there because their respective owners no longer needed or wanted them. Meanwhile, I discover something new in the way that I can adopt them into my own collection and transform them into an artistic component of a work that offers a multitude of connections and interrelations without a clear sense of temporal structure.

The way that the work of German art historian Aby Warburg and German cultural critic Walter Benjamin used gleaning is important in tracing the epistemological significance of the method and its relevance to my research.

Warburg’s *Mnemosyne’s Atlas* (1924–1929) (Fig.13) uses several panels on which the artist arranged photographic reproductions of works of art and other visual materials from different origins. At the time his approach to collecting and displaying photographs invented a fundamentally new way of handling images. His work presents the historical beginnings of the image archive as well as the photographic practices surrounding it. Warburg challenged the classical art historical narrative and linear concepts of temporal progression; in doing so, it could be said that *Mnemosyne Atlas* challenged the common practices of organising, titling and classifying images.165

Warburg’s library of aesthetics and art history is seen as the groundwork for *Mnemosyne Atlas*, a room that, at the time of his death in 1929, encompassed 65,000 volumes. Warburg proposed a new way of thinking about archiving and the encounter of archive. In his recent writing on Warburg, French art historian Georges Didi–Huberman states that:

> Art history as an academic discipline underwent an ordeal of regulated disorientation: everywhere that there existed frontiers between disciplines, the library sought to establish links … a library, thus, for work but also a library that was a work in progress … a space of questions, a place for documenting problems, a complex network at the summit of which stood the question of time and of history.166

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166. ibid, p. 21.
In this regard, Warburg maps culture through gleaning. Both *Mnemosyne Atlas* and his library conceptually span geographical space and time by using the notion of a map to draw a network of formal and conceptual interconnections within cultural production. The accumulation of images in *Mnemosyne Atlas* is grouped and based either on forms or gestures. Sometimes the same image is cut into several pieces and presented as many details of the same image, other images are presented at close range and then again at distance to one another, thereby referencing a camera’s telephoto lens which can investigate a scene from afar and also zoom in for a closer view. Some images are placed across several panels, in divergent formats, or in different surroundings. Small copies of an image placed inside the larger original and photographs of photographs are presented amongst an overall disregard for scale and spatial orientation between various images and the subjects of
photographs. The nonlinear, the eclectic and the question of reality itself seem to be at the foreground of the experience that the *Mnemosyne Atlas* provides the viewer.

Warburg’s term, ‘Pathos Formula’, expresses the traumatic encounter between man and the world. Instead of providing a formula or logic to identify visual links among images, ‘Pathos Formula’ calls on collective and individual imagination to find those links, where “it exerts its control over existing figurations in a way that endows them with new, ‘sign-giving’ qualities.” Ernst Gombrich described pathos formula as “the primeval reaction of man to the universal hardships of his existence [that] underlies all his attempts at mental orientation.”

In his work preceding the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, it is worth noting that Warburg tried to structure the *pathos formulas* in relation to the history of images. In this attempt to ‘map’ the images, he used large tables and formed specific categories using rows and columns with lists and schemas; however, most of the fields remained empty. This failed attempt at fixing a comprehensive montage of images gave way to a reworked *Mnemosyne Atlas* twenty years later. As a consequence of this experience Warburg realised that “one cannot ‘schematize’ the history of images, let alone the history of their emotive formulas, because the images do not allow themselves to be ‘pigeonholed’… except at the cost of losing their own capacities of metamorphosis and openness to overdetermination.” The failure to create through schemas and systems stemmed from the images themselves, how they operated alongside each other and the interrelationships they could create. Warburg’s comparative approach, as Didi–Huberman writes, “was less concerned with the *identification* of motifs and the law of their historical evolution than with their *contamination* and the latter’s effect of survivals over time.”

Survival in Warburg’s terms refers to a search for generative elements within things that have disappeared: a search for traces left by something in order for it to be memorised, something thus capable of a ‘recurrence’. “For expression, according to Warburg, is not the reflection of an intention: it is, rather, the return in the image of something that has been repressed.”

*Mnemosyne Atlas*, in this sense, could be perceived as an incomplete cartography, a framework for thinking through images without a final or fixed outcome. This form of display was fluid and in a constant state of flux, and the *Mnemosyne Atlas* therefore seems less premised on a preexistent analysis of the transmission of images than on a “visual matrix meant to increase the possible levels of interpretation.” On another level, the agency of images, according to Warburg, pertains to the hidden and recurring gestures that hold the most repressed elements of a culture. These traces are built up through recurrence of the (subconsciously) repressed, concealed but preserving their capacity to affect. Gombrich reminds us that “any event affecting living matter leaves a trace ... The potential energy conserved in this ‘engram’ [trace] may, under suitable conditions, be reactivated and discharged – we then say the organism acts in a specific way because it *remembers* the previous event.”

This idea is essential to my understanding of the way that images and objects enter my work and the way they relate to the notion of the ‘trace’ in photographic discourse. The superimposition of reality and the past in relation to photography and its materiality discussed earlier in this chapter is an important quality of my methodology. The photograph points not only to a certain place but also to another time. The gestures of the image are potential traces that transmit a certain culture which, given the nature of photography, is also separated from its origin. And so, in effect, the way that the images have come together in my work complicates and

disjoins them even further from the linear concept of time, much like the bearing of memory on the nature of how an event is recalled over time. Similarly, Warburg’s concept of time stands against the chronological conception of time in the way he disorients histories. Overlapping images and joining disparate elements together shapes the way that images operate in *Mnemosyne Atlas*, stretching and complicating the very nature of photographs.

Benjamin took the debris of mass culture as the subject for *The Arcades Project (Passagen–Werk)* (1927–1940). His seminal work describes the history of post–industrial Europe through nineteenth–century shopping arcades of Paris, from which Benjamin gleaned paragraphs of descriptions and reflections of fragments of historical data\(^{174}\) including texts, artefacts, quotations, research notes, photographs, works of art, and architecture, and presented them in sections. In this work Benjamin uses literary montage to transform the obsolescent fragments of commodity capitalism into groupings of things that reveal features of capitalist modernity obscured in everyday experience. “By removing objects from their place as relics littering the path of progress and placing them in new, proximate constellations, Benjamin seeks to reveal each object's particularity in light of a newly configured relationship.”\(^{175}\)

One could approach Benjamin's method of juxtaposing fragments in order to rethink the relationship between the single element and the whole as well as the place of the original being obscured from its historical context, thereby having transformative potential. Interestingly, *The Arcades Project* is organised in 28 sections, or 'Konvults', which itself translates into 'mixed lots' or 'bundles (of papers).\(^{176}\) Benjamin describes explicitly the method behind the work:

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176. ibid.
I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.177

In both *Mnemosyne Atlas* and *The Arcades Project*, gleaning has been a method for using an arbitrary mode of collating and appropriating material and is situated within a subjective impulse to present fragments from the past in another form. For my own purposes, much like the motives of Warburg and Benjamin, this is a mode that draws on a personal motivation, psychological perspectives and ways of thinking about the nature of images, archives and the effect of their decontextualisation.

Unlike appropriation however, which is premised on strategies of intentionally borrowing, copying, and altering preexisting images and objects as a form of social/political commentary in response to consumerism and the proliferation of popular images through mass media, it seems to me that gleaning as a strategy for creative production is skewed towards an interrogation of materiality itself and the possibility of chance encounters. In creating the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin noticed how in the shop windows of Paris things would be juxtaposed in accidental ways that created what Surrealists would define as a 'frisson'. This eruption in the everyday could change the object’s meaning. In this sense, the practices of appropriation and gleaning hold similar values of using preexisting images, but differ in intent and motive.

Multiple temporalities/arbitrary collections: re–thinking appropriation

Tracing the historical momentum of appropriation, Jan Verwoert suggests that "the challenge of the moment is therefore to re–think the meaning of appropriation in relation to a reality constituted by a multiplicity of spatialised temporalities."[178] Craig Owens[179] and Rosalind Krauss[180] situated the discourse of appropriation within a historical trajectory emerging alongside the concept of postmodernism in the 1980s. Importantly, photography was identified as medium of appropriation. Owens also drew a connection between appropriation and allegory, suggesting that the allegorist does not:

restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement.[181]

The Cold War gave way to a suspension of historical continuity which brought modern history to a pause, or a ‘freezeframe’. [182] “These frozen lumps of dead historical time,’ said Verwoert, ‘became the objects of artistic appropriation.”[183] For example, the use of spatial pause – *mise–en–scène* – in Cindy Sherman’s visual language of epic Hollywood cinema froze the moving picture and suggested an interruption of temporal continuity.

However, this postmodern notion of appropriation shifted after 1989 when, following the end of the Cold War, “the axes of space and time have shifted into a different

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183. Ibid.
angle in relation to each other.”¹⁸⁴ As a result of borders opening and shifting geopolitical frontiers in the acceleration of the information age, a network of asynchronous temporalities has surfaced. It is important to question the potential of the appropriated object to reveal and evoke present day relations, and through itself (as self-reflexive and via its materiality) re-address what things might mean. The practice of appropriation in essence could now be understood as an act of invocation of something that lives through time, rather than something being frozen from within a particular moment in time. My strategy of gleaning draws on the nature of the experience of temporality in globalisation amidst cultural and political axes and intersections that are constantly shifting.

My method of collecting through serendipitous encounters is a way of reawakening a sense of familiarity and longing in the objects and places portrayed. As a gleaner of material culture and places, I collect images and objects, take and make photographs and accumulate touristic paraphernalia, as well as my own personal ephemera. My world of gleaning is not unlike what French filmmaker Agnès Varda might propose in The gleaners and I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse): the way in which the everyday minutiae typically excluded from fiction is treated and focused upon to signify the wastefulness of contemporary society, but also to suggest an optimism and opportunity for finding and retrieving material discarded by one individual, having a new significance for another. Varda documents those who forage for leftover food from fields, dumpsters and urban market stalls, or those who collect discarded objects, furniture and household debris from the dark streets of the Parisian suburbs – these actions somewhat drawing the viewer into the poetics of scavenging. In this way, the everyday minutiae typically excluded from fiction are treated and focused upon to signify the wastefulness of contemporary society, but also to suggest an optimism and opportunity for finding and retrieving material discarded by one individual having a new significance for another.

In a catalogue essay to my 2011 exhibition at The Monash Gallery of Art (MGA), *Displaced images of distant objects*, curator Emma Mayall wrote that Varda had become a gleaner too:

a collector of images, experiences, stories and places which she captures with her video recorder. Plump, heart–shaped potatoes rejected by farmers and supermarkets for their lack of uniformity, and clocks without hands abandoned at the side of the road become precious things to Varda, as she confides, ‘a clock without hands is my kind of thing.’

Mayall continues in reference to my work:

I believe the same may be true for Pluta. Like Varda, she is an astute gleaner of places, images and objects, using photography as a means of witnessing sites in various states of decay and dilapidation. In their glorious ruin and disrepair each image signifies a deeper association with physical and psychological displacement and distance. Perhaps ironically, in accenting their dislocation and remoteness Pluta is able to reawaken a sense of familiarity and longing, and bring them closer to us.

Varda’s gleaning has been described as a ‘methodically unmethodical’ approach to knowledge. Gleaning could also seem ‘arbitrarily subjective’. If this mode of practice is perceived as subjective one, then it supports the serendipitous approach to making and finding images. It also allows for a non–linear enquiry in which

serendipity and creative partiality are core elements. Drawing also on Warburg’s blurring of personal collections and scientific archives – where his ordering structures seek an internal logic in the themes and their relations rather than classifying materials within preexistent structures – these distinctions and systems similarly collapse in the way that I approach collecting, storing and retrieving images, objects and ephemera.

**Bricolage: reconfiguring objects and memories**

The concept of bricolage could provide a new perspective for thinking about gleaning as a strategy that reflects certain metaphors of migratory experience and resourcefulness. Claude Lévi–Strauss saw bricolage as an adaptive way of being in the world, a mode of interpreting and adapting existing materials in new ways. “The rules of the game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand,’ that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous.”

‘Bricolage’ is one of the most well-known concepts relating to the practices of appropriation. In a historical context it could be said that creolisation was proclaimed through bricolage as an imbalanced process of cultures adapting to the New World. In Hall’s terms, the phenomenon of creolisation was created through many fragments to create a multifaceted identity, doing so by adopting and adapting fragments and artefacts from a mix of imaginative, ideological, cultural and social elements as well as religious practices, experiences, and beliefs.

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191. Stuart Hall discusses the phenomenon of creolization as being created through many fragments to create a multiple identity. These adopt and adapt fragments and artefacts from a mix of imaginative, ideological, cultural and social elements as well as religious practices, experiences, and beliefs. Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’.
Knapper argues that:

bricolage is an improvisatorial, adaptive reuse in face of the negative forces of colonization. For bricolage to serve its full potential as an art of living (and not merely survival) demands ongoing efforts to reconstitute memory, which sometimes means an examination of traumatic moments in history, in order to engage in a transformative, dialogic process for recreating and ‘re–membering’ one’s place in the world.\(^{192}\)

However, bricolage reshapes not only objects and memories, but also notions of place and relationships to being in the world. Elspeth Probyn writes: "The bricoleur actively pieces together different signs and produces new (and sometimes unsanctioned) meanings; the bricoleur is always in the process of fashioning [her] various locales. The concept of 'locale' then serves to emphasise the lived contradictions of place and event."\(^{193}\) In this sense I see bricolage as a metaphor for the contemporary and post–global condition by way of bringing together different places and experiences, which are no longer temporally aligned, but rather exist as memories and associations to another locales, both spatial and temporal, that intersect at different points in the present.

A visit to a migrant’s house is a site of this admixture and bricolage. According to Papastergiadis, we manifest our culture in any place where we are, and this intervention forms a new aesthetic. I believe this occurs when one transports belongings into a new context and away from the original place and through the process of memory itself. This presents an interrelationship between materiality, nostalgia and place. A moment or memory image is taken at departure from the homeland and frozen: time, place, feeling and sensual experiences are encapsulated.

\(^{192}\) W Knepper, p. 83.
and re-enacted through the embodiment of spaces in a new home. My interpretation is elucidated in the homes of migrants, where the décor and architecture of the home are symbolically adapted from their cultural heritage, and transferred into a new home in their new country. Even though the embellished façades, columns, credenzas and interiors are perhaps not those one had in the homeland, it seems to me they have been created here through the mental picture the individual has taken with them – a memory image that has subsequently distorted the reality of the place that was left, and created in a home here. What is crucial is the idea that bricolage is a strategy for creating an identity comprised of new fragments as well as fragments that are recalled in the context of a new culture.\textsuperscript{194} This observation suggests that the process of drawing on old and new artefacts central to different cultural identities and values in order to construct new meaning is a complex process of interpretation where place, time and identity are constantly reconfigured.

Gleaning as practice, spatial and temporal misalignments

This chapter has reflected upon a number of strategies relevant to my creative practice by presenting some restorative approaches to the notion of spatial and temporal ruptures in the present day experience of diaspora. Within my research, the concept of gleaning has been fundamental in bringing together a set of these artistic strategies as an overarching methodology within this research. Each of these approaches to creative production has been employed as a way of reimagining, destabilising and transforming the various forms and components within my creative work in an experimental way.

For Benjamin, the truth content of a thing is released only when the context in which it originally existed has disappeared, when the surfaces of the object have crumbled away and it lingers precariously on the brink of extinction.\textsuperscript{195}

\textsuperscript{194} W Knepper, p. 85.
For example, my translation of a place through photography or a set of objects draws on my personal experience with displacement and loss as a migrant to Australia. The practice of taking photographs of places that bear no personal significance to me creates a form of removal from the experience of making the image and attempts to evoke a psychological distance from place in the photograph.

It is also a method of collecting: through the process of photographing, storing and a deliberate exclusion of geographical coordinates, the place in the photograph is increasingly separated from the time and place it was taken. As a strategy, this is a way of engaging with the world and renewing the possibilities for interpreting and constructing images from a ‘distance’. This analysis has also brought to the fore the significance of the materiality of photographs and their potential to extend preconceived languages of reading and interpreting images based on their physicality. Consequently, materiality is key to opening up a dialogue not only within my use of photographic material, but with images that are objects, and objects that are collected or found.

In the process of this practice–led research, I have learnt that the way that I engage with images – as objects capable of obscuring temporal distance – is not dissimilar to the lure of objects as subjects in my work that can, on the other hand, highlight spatial distance: discarded by their owners and finding new life and meaning in the constellations that my works may evoke. Photography as a medium and pseudo–archaeology as a methodology are pivotal to this as these are both intrinsically linked to our desire to connect to the past. Artefacts, like images, become removed from the time when they were made, and are each interpreted, analysed and deciphered over time. Gleaning, as it refers to Warburg’s revision of the role of the archive and photographic practices surrounding it, challenges the art historical narrative and linear concepts of temporal progression. Of particular interest to me are the ways
that the form and installation of my work can disrupt temporal continuities. In the section that follows I discuss this and each of these works in detail.

Departing from the postmodern notion of appropriation, the positioning of gleaning in this research, as an invocation of the metaphors resonating with the migratory imagination, aims to illuminate how gleaning operates differently to practices of bricolage. Gleaning, as a close relative of appropriation, could be a strategy and artistic operation that may help to outline some of the overall effects of migratory movements on creative production today. While I have identified the differences between these two terms, and how this very identification is significant to how and why I choose to call my method 'gleaning', it is important to locate the origins of these terms from the idea of taking objects and images from popular (or foreign) cultures and re–imagining them to rethink the conventional definitions of how a work drawing on these frameworks can operate.

I approach gleaning through the lens of bricolage to draw on the idea of the migrant’s imagination, of things moving across cultures to find a new language for creative expression. Knepper reminds us that bricolage is a means of engaging with the world and restoring the possibilities for interpreting and creating new meaning and, importantly, introducing new possibilities for restructuring our understanding of time, place, and identity.196

As Françoise Vergès writes:

Creolization is about bricolage drawing freely upon what is available, recreating with new content and in new forms a distinctive culture, a creation in a situation of domination and conflict. It is not about retentions but about reinterpretations. It is not about roots but about loss. It must be distinguished from cultural

196. W Knepper, p. 83.
contact and multiculturalism because, at heart, it is a practice and ethics of borrowing and accepting to be transformed, affected by the other. In the current era of globalization, processes of creolization appear in zones of conflict and contact. They are the harbingers of an ongoing ethics of sharing the world.  

I have argued that mediating on images with all their potential connections all at once resonates with practices of bricolage and questions how things from one place fit into another. Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* conveys the openness and extensiveness of his approach but also establishes that intuition and chance, rather than 'method', are important mechanisms of the imagination that enable such a work to be conceived and realised.

Being the veritable atlas of imaginary and symbolic overdeterminations that it is, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* obviously provides no discourse on method: only the *insane requirement* to think of each image in relation to all the others, and to make this thinking itself produce other images, other relationships, and other problems, which have been occluded previously but are, perhaps, no less important.

The complexity that Warburg’s analysis of images offers to practices today is a way of approaching the overabundance of images (and things) that flood our sense of understanding ourselves. It acknowledges that with such a process comes the possibility to discern new ways of understanding the overwhelming process of change – relating to the practices of global migration and of the way that the materiality of images and objects could correspond to these ideas and convey their magnitude. Warburg’s questions seem to have resurfaced today in thinking about

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how images can become interconnected, how they can form new dialogues, and what range of possibilities for assembling them can bring to generate meanings and new visual languages in expanded photographic practices.

Using both *Mnemosyne Atlas* and *The Arcades Project* as examples of approaches to engaging with images resonates with my own methods of creative production. I have learnt that my creative work is shaped by a methodology that is both analytical and reflective, and that absorbs several modes of practice. In order to establish the connection between, firstly, the philosophical terrain that centres on the relationship between place, nostalgia and diaspora, and, secondly, the lure of my personal history to make this enquiry, I borrow methods from the practice of archaeology and from the discourse of photography. Hence the title of this research, *Allegories of Diaspora: Gleaning the residues of spatial and temporal misalignments*, suggests the rationale for working with images and outside of them.

Photographs imply truth but simultaneously deny us this perceived authenticity. They also evoke their own indexicality that binds them to the place they were taken while the absence of this data can erase their geographical coordinates from ever being known. As a way of thinking about our experience as it is bound to memory and conflated by the passing of time and the span of geographic separation, the images and objects utilised in my creative works – photographed or found – are intended to give the impression that they are of a certain place, pertaining to something specific and significant, yet the entire premise of their production and exhibition is to remind us that the very thing we seek to locate and recall is always out of reach.
PART THREE
CREATIVE WORKS
Four creative projects have been realised as part of this doctoral research and comprise *Taken on the same day as the other photo* (an artist book and photographic series), *Agency of Inanimate objects* and *Blue Distance*. These are an outcome of the research and each includes photographs I have made, found and developed in relation to certain objects and operates as an expanded form of photography. Over the course of my candidature I became interested in visual depictions of estrangement, and started using examples of mock ruins and modern spaces in my work where entropy could be experienced or evoked. One thread of my investigation focuses on prefabricated ruins dating back to eighteenth century England: architectural follies and 'eye-catchers' of classical structures that explore ideas central to constructions of reality, illusion and temporality. The other part reflects photographic ideas essential to the way that I adopt photographic materiality in my practice. Accordingly, an exploration of the physicality of the works and their spatial concerns relative to the artworks’ installation is also integrated into these chapters.

In this final section, Part Three, *Creative Works*, I describe each of the artworks to provide a visual map of the components within each creative work and how they are related to one another in a gallery space during the respective exhibitions, as well as to each other through their content, aesthetic and material form. These four creative works – presented as Plates throughout this dissertation – illustrate my practice-led enquiries into place, nostalgia, diaspora, and the lure of my personal history leading this exploration. Following a description of each work, I elaborate on each work's conceptual underpinnings and theoretical tangents. Each component takes on a very specific material shape and form and responds to the various strategies described in the previous section. Throughout this research I have repeatedly moved between the making of each work to reflecting on its production as a way of better understanding my approach to artistic production and the reason I use a specific material palette that has come to include a diverse range of photographic material as well as the
objects that are imbued with photographic reflexivity. In the chapters that follow I aim to analyse the systemic relationship between the physicality of the work, how it reflects the essence of the methodology and the way that it resonates with my broader enquiry that is presented in Part One, *Situating concepts: spatial and temporal relations*.

The discussion of the creative works explores the ways in which the desire to return homewards, or the imagined construction of the past, could be imaged or evoked. It draws on recent thinking about nostalgia and memory and aims to identify the logic and contextual rationale for working with a materially diverse, expanded photographic mode. While modernist photographic tendencies embraced the totalitarian breadth of vision, the observational and the aesthetic approach to image making, current uses of photography within contemporary art suggest new approaches and a visual logic that re–imagines the present moment – as discussed in the previous section. In this context, I expand on the significance that materiality has within my creative works and how the term 'gleaning' offers a new perspective for synthesising the philosophical terrain with the strategies and methods inherent to my artistic production which I discussed in Part Two, *Gleaning as practice: spatial and temporal misalignments*. 
Chapter Five

Taken on the same day as the other photo
Plate 5 Izabela Pluta, Untitled (boat stands), 2013
Pigment print on photo rag
130 x 177.4 cm
Plate 6  Izabela Pluta, Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2013 (detail #1–3) pigment prints on photo rag series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 7 Izabela Pluta, *Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album*, 2013 (detail #4–6)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 8 Izabela Pluta, *Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album*, 2013 (detail #7–9)
Pigment prints on photo rag
Series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 9 Izabela Pluta, Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2013 (detail #10–12)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 10 Izabela Pluta, *Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album*, 2013 (detail #13–15)
Pigment prints on photo rag
Series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 11 Izabela Pluta, Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2013 (detail #16–18)
Pigment prints on photo rag
Series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 12 Izabela Pluta, *Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2013* (detail #19–21)
Pigment prints on photo rag
Series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 13 Izabela Pluta, *Taken on the same day as the other photo*, 2013
installation view, Dianne Tanzer Gallery + Projects, Melbourne
Plate 14 Izabela Pluta, *Taken on the same day as the other photo*, 2013
installation view, Dianne Tanzer Gallery + Projects, Melbourne
A horizon of steel and wooden clutter; an oversupply of empty boat stands positioned on a shore lined with wild weeds, birch trees and monochrome dirt. This photograph, titled *Boat stands* (2013) (Plate 5), was taken in Scandinavian mid–summer, close to midnight when the night was day and the day almost night. The work depicts empty structures awaiting the returning fleet of boats that traverse the inland lakes during the summer months.

This is one of two components comprising *Taken on the same day as the other photo*. This highly descriptive picture organises the space and subject in its frame. It takes formal cues from the documentary genre of photography occurring during the 1980s and 1990s, in particularly that of American photographer Stephen Shore. With a strong emphasis on translating the world in colour and the aesthetic of amateur or 'snapshot' photography, conversely, Shore’s work also offers a topographical approach to the landscape. *Boat stands* aims to adopt the contradictory languages of photography in order to present a world the viewer may not have visited, while inviting them to visit this world imaginatively.

On another level this work also conveys the passing of time and the notion of absence. My chance encounter with this location, the empty structures and the soft hues of the time between twilight and dawn are visual tropes that have been used to signal photography’s relationship to memory. Both Liz Wells and David Campany offer a reading of our flawed recollections of the past in terms of photography and the passing of time. In Wells’s terms, “to what extent and in what respects, does the literal descriptiveness of the image which we are contemplating overlay personal memory?”

Her remarks question the nature of photography’s ability to collect and recite those experiences back at us with accuracy. Indeed, I use images in my work to speculate

that very question and to propose alternative ways that photographs can operate. As discussed earlier, my family’s own collection of photographs, comprising hundreds of pictures that my father keenly took while we were growing up, fails to reveal to me any memories that are associated with the experiences they depict. Can a photograph of a specific landscape or expanse of sea incite a recollection of how it appeared when we last experienced the place, or does it in fact occlude and override the memory? As Campany notes, “the photograph can be an aid to memory, but it can also become an obstacle that blocks access to the understanding of the past. It can paralyse the personal and political ability to think beyond the image in the always fraught project of remembrance.”

The second component of *Taken on the same day as the other photo* is a set of photographs that present, in reverse sequence, the 21 empty pages of a photo album that I purchased at a garage sale in Sydney, titled *Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album* (2013) (Plates 6–12). Before me, its owner had purchased this collectable at a flea market in London, and had brought it with him to Australia when he, along with his young family, relocated only a few years later. It was a found object, not precious to my own history, which meant that I could treat it as an example of collective ideas about cultural artefacts, symbolic possessions and the potential of photography to aid, or dissolve, memory.

In this work, I went about photographing each of the 21 *even* pages of the album. The series presents the 21 sequential pages as photographs, reproduced in the exact size of the original, but in reverse order so that the images perform a visual sequence in the evident layers of shapes and fragments that lay beneath each page as observed through the empty window pockets. Throughout the succession the depth and three–dimensionality of stacked pages is perceptible in the shadows and the repetition of illustrated elements. The pages repeatedly show deterioration: stained,

sun bleached and foxed with moisture over time. This is comparable to how Barthes defines a material object – a photograph – in Camera Lucida, showing marks of history and signs that it belonged to a broader narrative in an album, handled repeatedly in pages that were turned while re-staging its narrative in various contexts.

Elizabeth Edwards, in Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images, suggests that albums as material forms which normally house photographs reflect “an intent in the use and value of the photographs they embed, to the extent that the objects that embed photographs are in many cases meaningless without their photographs; for instance, empty frames or albums.”201 Hence, without the photographs that were once held in the album, its very function is suppressed. Similarly, in my work, the now blank pages and empty pockets interrupt the narrative flow and we are drawn to the decorative elements – bronze and gold trims bordering painterly landscape vistas, which encase the windows, exotic palms, classical busts and draped ruins, illustrate these constructed archetypes.

The outset of Taken on the same day as the other photo instigated questions around the significance and role of photo albums, how they are used for remembering and how they may be translated into images or art works. The storage and subsequent retrieval of memory, people and places seemed an intuitive path to take, thinking particularly of how John Berger articulates the album as a device that re-shapes social memory each time it is re-told, re-shaped and re-awakened. This work also addresses the image/object, how it operates when removed from its original context and function, and how it can be reflected upon across time. In this chapter, I describe these interconnected ideas and how they have shaped this creative work.

201. E Edwards, p. 11.
Photographic languages for remembering

*Taken on the same day as the other photo* provides a framework for ways of thinking about photographs as objects – collected, assembled, stored and subsequently retrieved. The means by which we encounter the physicality of photographs and their visual syntax has set up a specific language of taking and reading pictures. This work considers the spaces of association that may be created through specific objects and methods used for remembering. I store photographs in piles and boxes rather than albums. Instead of turning the album page, I handle the photographs much like dealing a deck of cards – in that expression lies a certain spontaneity and randomness, unlike the routine and rhythmic turn of the album page. My photographs can lose their place, and the order of events can therefore be stunted or even reversed.

The past is written and recorded in many ways, yet these inscriptions remain malleable; they are neither objective nor a factual record of reality. Photography has an equally problematic relationship with recording the world and the way in which it remains responsible for representing the moment. Yet in our collective remembrances the past can be reconfigured and potentially invented. From its early history it was possible to embellish or stage fictions.

Czech writer Milan Kundera opens his novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* with the description of a photograph: a group of political leaders are standing on a balcony overlooking a crowd on a snowy day – it is the year 1948. The central figure is wearing a fur hat that has just been placed on his head by a comrade who stands nearby – although he can longer be seen in the image as he was airbrushed out of the photograph because he had been tried and executed for treason four years after the photograph was taken. The hat, however, remains visible in the picture.202

As Kundera implies with his analogy in the reference to this photograph, the effort to change or erase the past is not always successful. The past shapes us and the fragments of what we prefer not to remember linger in ways we cannot control. When we try to remember we are faced with the processes of perception and memory–image. Our perception is impregnated with memory–images which complete the memory as they interpret it, and as a result, as Henri Bergson explains, “our perception is bound to expel the memory image, and the memory image to expel pure memory. And thus the pure memory disappears altogether.” The pure memory, which consists of episodic and semantic memory, can disappear as perception overrides it, as the accuracy of the memory disintegrates, and the imagination takes over. The mechanisms for memory are analogous to those used for the imagination and therefore the distinct line between what is accurate and what is imagined in our recollections is blurred.

This process of memory and questions of its authenticity and its value to the present moment are explored in my creative works and this research. Our memories – those images which are lucid – are now active and influential in our present. They complete and shape our present experience. For me, those early childhood memory–images are not consciously or readily available. The occluded memory does not allow the random and effortless recollection of events from a past that I experienced.

There is a photograph of me as a child when I am five or six years old. In this image I stand at the edge of a paddock beneath a red umbrella that I am holding. There are two cows in the backdrop. It is a picture like many others I have which my father took. I know that the person in the photograph is me; I know this because I own the photograph and because my family has dozens more like this. Therefore it must be

me. I seem to know the umbrella I am holding – I do not remember it, but if I study it closely I feel an association with the object that once belonged to me. I know the jacket I am wearing, and the trousers and the shoes, because I have seen them in other pictures. I know all these things from photographs my father took, and from the connections I have made between them. I have an accumulated knowledge of my past, but this knowledge is a memory of photographic images. I do not know where I stand in this picture, and although descriptive information may be written on the back of the piece of paper, I feel no closer to it. I am here in the present with knowledge of my past – a past that is always viewed across a spatial and temporal distance.

The process of identification as it operates through photographic images enters the discussion of how we interpret and read pictures. Martha Langford proposes a way of looking at photographs as an inventory of signifying objects in a photo scene; she likens this to “a book of photo layers surface upon surface of real and virtual intersections; clusters and breaks are spaces of association whose meaning must be taken into account.”

Taken on the same day as the other photo recalls a number of works that use found photographs as a springboard for creative production and interpretation. In this chapter I will discuss works by Tacita Dean and Simryn Gill who both engage with found material in different ways.

205. M Langford, Suspended Conversations, p. 4.
Malaysian–born Australian based Simryn Gill addresses the traversal of places while she interprets, stretches and re–interprets their histories. Also working with a found book as source material, Gill’s 32 Volumes (2006) (Fig.14) was exhibited in a retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and I remember my encounter with it distinctly. I sat down at a table on which were piles of what appeared to be blank books and a gallery attendant sat across from me – she wore white gloves and asked which volume I would like to see. What followed was her turning the pages of what seemed to depict Australia, or perhaps New Zealand – I couldn’t be sure. The complete series of Life World Library in 32 volumes was published by Time–Life in 1967 and describes specific geographical regions and the people who live there, however, Gill’s covers of the magazines were concealed in
white gesso, and all of the text inside was erased – leaving me with only the pictures to describe the place and its inhabitants.

Gill has long been interested in questioning what has been left behind, not only in her photographic work, but in the 'knick–knacks' she decontextualises. In doing so she asks: how can this thing from another place make sense here? And how does it form connections to other things? In this way, by facilitating an encounter with displaced objects, she forms a new meaning or understanding of the place, its significance and how it may be re–reconsidered in the present.

Figure 15 Tacita Dean, Floh, 2011, artist book made in collaboration with Martyn Ridgewell, Steidl, Gottingen.

British artist Tacita Dean considers the nature of photography's unavoidable strength to reveal to the beholder what he or she may already know. Floh (2001) (Fig.15) is a collection of 163 found pictures from modern times that Dean found at flea markets.
Produced as an artist book without text, the images seem to lack a narrative or system, and collectively reject any unity of the time or place from which they emanate. Through this process of extraction and de-contextualisation, the photographs draw a memory image of humanity though other people's lives. “Layered with time, they trigger memories not of the people they show, but from the people who look at them.” In this way Dean draws links between actual and imagined experience. The potential of the accidental encounters, the embellished telling of stories and incorporating documents and objects into artwork are at the core of her work.

Gill’s and Dean’s works evoke a search for moments, experiences and histories, and the ways in which these are told and retold, how they are shaped by fluid movement between actual and imagined places, and how they as artists reflect on place is of interest to my research. I argue that working with found material in both of these examples highlights how memory plays out in practices of photography and generates work that addresses the medium for its ability to draw on the slippage between fact and fiction. These, like my own works, draw on the elastic nature of authenticity within the photographic image, particularly in things that are found and therefore lack any information that might locate them in a specific time or place.

**Photo albums: sequences and interruptions**

During the making of *Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album* I experienced a sense of curiosity when I handled the album. In turning the pages repeatedly, back and forth in any order, I was inspecting the object as a three-dimensional artefact that could reveal something the more I explored it. I was acutely aware of the fragility of the surface of the pages, but also of how its wear revealed the traces of people who had turned its pages repeatedly while looking at the

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photographs that were once housed inside. It was like a game of hide and seek, of trying to anticipate what the subsequent page layout would look like when the page was turned – it seemed like a complex game of chance, yet there was a clear sequential logic and fixed geometry appearing one page after another.

Albums have performative qualities; their materiality dictates the embodied conditions of viewing. According to Glenn Willumson,

the performance of thumbing through the photographs, selecting and sequencing, and gluing them into an album breaks the bond of the materiality of the photograph from its links in commerce and mass production. In choosing, sequencing, organising and captioning the photographs for the album, the person responsible transforms the meaning of selected images into an intensely individualistic expression.²⁰⁷

Batchen also describes the materiality of the album as a way of engaging with a certain physical intimacy rather than through a distance of looking: "When we do touch, by turning an album's page, for example, we put the photograph back into motion, both literally in an arc through space and in a more abstract, cinematic way as well".²⁰⁸

In photographing each page of the album, I wanted to capture the sequential nature of viewing an album, and in doing so remind us of the way photographs could possibly narrate a lifetime of captured experiences. On the other hand, in depicting an album that is empty and void of this individualistic expression and of the personal, this work effectively asserts the failure of both photographs and the objects that house them to accurately represent experiences. Batchen notes that an addition needs to

be made to the photographic form in order for it to function as an effective memory object.\textsuperscript{209} Photographic albums embody this desire to provide a memorial experience through their tactility and physical experience.

The photo album can be described as a medium: an instrument for storage and transmission of information. Yet we know from photographic discourse that the way this information is recorded and interpreted is contextual and subjective. “Moving through time and across our cultural horizon, manifesting themselves at different moments and in diverse places, photographs are marked by their trajectory.”\textsuperscript{210} The album can provide a platform to bring these disparate moments together, present them in a certain way, thus linking experiences and pulling them apart. I have interpreted the album as a conduit for forming connections between temporal and spatial coordinates. \textit{Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album} explores the album as an empty vessel that can carry memories – an object that can be full or empty and be reconfigured to tell different stories – time and time again.

\textbf{Itinerant collector of images}

A number of years ago I began collecting various souvenir albums from flea markets and op–shops I visited. These included pictures from Italy, Belgium, Holland, France, Germany, Northern Ireland and Australia. Some were collections of hand–tinted photo reproductions of tourist sites, others imaged tourist destinations packaged in concertina fold–out wallets. Printed mostly in the 1930s and 1950s, and brought back by tourists from their holiday destinations, the postcard packs were subsequently shown alongside the holiday stories told to friends upon their return. They typically depicted near perfect scenes like mountain landscapes, lit with a particular glow that would mirror the surrounding lake, or vacant city streets with

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{210} G Williamson, p. 62.
\end{flushright}
perfectly drifting clouds tinted in pastel colours, inviting tourists to visit and experience these magical places. As Susan Stewart suggests, these postcards become the memory images of the place visited, evoking a nostalgic experience through the invented narrative or illusion created. Souvenirs could be considered as "'magical objects', whose function is to 'envelop the present with the past.'" In doing so, she argues that they authenticate a past and query the present:

The present experience is either too impersonal, too looming, or too alienating compared to the intimate and direct experience of contact which the souvenir has with its referent. The referent is authenticity. What lies between here and there is oblivion, a void marking a radical separation between past and present. The nostalgia of the souvenir plays in the distance between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience, experience as it might be 'directly lived'. The location of authenticity becomes whatever is distant to the present time and space.

Like the daguerreotype, whose value as a physical object was at once as a souvenir and a tableau vivant, the image’s role extended beyond the photographic reproduction of a place or event. The photographic object seemed to be created as a way to ‘remember’ personal experience, where the invention of narrative was intrinsically linked. Photographs are at once documents and constructions of reality. Stewart asserts this by saying that the “souvenir exemplifies the ‘capacity of objects to serve as traces of authentic experience’" and reiterates that the souvenir is required in those instances where an experience cannot be repeated: “rather we need and desire souvenirs of those events that are reportable, events whose

211. S Stewart, p. 135.
212. ibid, p. 139.
213. ibid.
materiality has escaped us, events that thereby only exist through the invention of the narrative."

The postcard, as object, never completes the narrative. As a souvenir it only has the capacity to suggest, it is and can only ever be an illusion entwined with the reality of the place or event it pictures. “As an index, the photograph is never itself, by its very nature a trace of something else.” For me, the postcard sent from a place where one has holidayed, visited or passed through presents an inherent image of that place. Recipients of the postcard are then able to imagine the destination for themselves. In appropriating found ephemera in my work, I am speculating on the symbolism of the postcard as both image and object. The postcard’s various layers convey meaning through their visual and physical characteristics, their historical references and their ability to assist in the construction of memory. The re–laid accounts or stories of places pictured may invoke associations and imaginative visions of what a place could be, generating fantasies and imaginings about a place of travel, holiday – somewhere else we would rather be or experience for ourselves. Stewart suggests this is a form of appropriation, where a narrative “attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins.”

However, the event now exists only in the invented ‘narrative’ of the object and the experience is no longer tangible. The scene pictured brings the experience back to life. The postcard as object evokes a nostalgia created through both its materiality (that of a precious object) and its referent, and cannot escape the experience that holds it. The image is no longer separated from the trace of what was once there in front of the camera. The photograph becomes a keepsake or souvenir, and the desire for the object it represents is the event or place it pictures.

214. S. Stewart, p. 139.
216. S. Stewart, p. 136.
Taken on the same day as the other photo developed as a response to a photograph I found in a Brisbane second-hand store around 2004. I have revisited this photograph on a number of occasions while considering its value as material object and its inherent loss in the plethora of found photographs that no longer belong to their respective owners. The picture depicts four men carrying shoulder packs while walking up a mountain. (Fig.16) They are positioned in the mid ground of the portrait frame, ascending a steep, rocky slope with their bodies emerging from the dark, underexposed foreground of loose stones. What makes this picture interesting to me is that the men are facing away from the camera; oblivious to the camera’s gaze, they seem unaware and in the moment, heroically venturing into the abyss. This void is the top of the mountain, lost in detail this time to the overexposed upper section of the image frame, arresting the area of the image with its misty haze.

Initially, what interested me about this object – an anonymous photograph – was the inscription on the back, reading: 'Taken on the same day as the other photo, Mt. Bagana again'.

Figure 16 Mt Bagana, found photograph.
For a number of years I overlooked that in fact the name of a place had been recorded on the back of this picture, and I returned solely to the idea of this phrase: taken on the same day as the other photo. It seemed unintentional, and in some ways complacent: that this was just one of many photos taken on that day. What day was it? Why was that day significant? Implied in the significance of this inscription was insignificance. The text also inferred that in fact in my possession was only one of several pictures taken on that day. How many of these existed? Where were they? Did the most significant picture kept by the photographer depicted the four men facing the camera?

Bagana is an active volcano located in the central part of the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. I have never visited Bougainville, nor have I myself climbed Mt Bagana. I have, however, visited and climbed Piton de la Fournaise, a live volcano located on the French island La Réunion. For me, these facts are purely serendipitous. I have no interest in Bagana as a location, as what is fascinating here is the way in which this image and its inscription stimulate associations and meanings that are inherent to photography and its materiality.
Chapter Six

Assembling photographs
Plate 15 Izabela Pluta, *Taken on the same day as the other photo*, 2017  
14.8 x 21 cm  
artist book  
softcover, 100 pages
Assembling photographs: an Artist Book

I have used the title, *Taken on the same day as the other photo*, to also title a work which developed into an artist book (Plate 15). Around the same time that I completed the album work, I came into possession of a set of photographs of my father. The eighteen images, originally printed in the 1970s as Kodak colour prints, depict the figure (my father as a young man) standing in various locations across a city unbeknown to the viewer. In each picture he wears the same clothes: a salmon coloured shirt with beige trousers. The age of the photographs has further faded the pictures and placed a certain pink cast over the entire image, typical of photographs collected from that period. In analysing these pictures, it appeared they were taken on the same day, yet my father’s posture and pose for the camera indicates he was a tourist in that city for a longer duration. The act of itinerantly going from monument to landmark within one day to have one’s picture taken seems illogical, yet possible, which is what makes these images uncanny. Equally puzzling is that the outfit my father wears remains identical in each picture, as does his engagement with the camera: a standing pose that is very aware of the camera’s gaze captured for the viewer who will see the pictures upon his return home.

Referencing Tacita Dean’s *Flo*, my work *Taken on the same day as the other photo* (2017) also aims to de-contextualise found images which lack a narrative or system but are able to trigger a memory from the people viewing the work, rather than expressing something about the people within the work. The ' beholder' brings his or her own life experience and social position to focus on or distort the reading of the image. The notion of assembling photographs into new configurations deriving from their fragmented collections is an approach that I have taken as a response to Dean, but also as a critical approach to methods of appropriation, or, as Palmer puts it, as a way of ‘collaborating’ with residues of historical material.217 The archive is one of the

considered modes of engagement not only in the content of my work, but also in its final form, and draws on the notions of mechanical time and mnemonic temporality.

In thinking about time in this way, Scott Watson argues that the endless rotation in Douglas’ Overture “is not only a technical representation of time, but rather, the looping device becomes the means by which a confluence occurs between mechanical time, which proceeds through repetition, and human time, which is known through memory.” My use of the 18 found images in Taken on the same day as the other photo also engages with the ‘mechanical’ operation of experiencing an artist book: of turning or flicking the pages in both linear and reversed order. The size, shape and weight of the paper induce the repeated nature of looking through the 100 pages in no particular direction while inviting the beholder to flick, much like a photo flip book. Mechanical time is evident not only in the materiality of the object and the physical engagement the viewer has with it, but also in the repetition of the 18 original photographs throughout the 100 pages. The experiential quality of the object intersects with the reminder that the found photographs once belonged to someone else, and they operate in this new form like fragments as reminders of the portrait’s functions as an aide memoire and, at the same time, as a misplaced object.

Photography in this context is a social tool used to record our everyday experiences, yet paradoxically it forces us to interpret images relying on both our memory and our imagination. Taking Batchen’s argument that photography’s mnemonic function as a memento operates only with the aid of some form of supplement as a starting point, I investigate this notion by thinking of the ways in which the meaning of an image can be translated through various material forms, resulting in this particular work developing into an artist book. If photographic images in a sense replace involuntary memory with their informational and historic indexicality, then, as Batchen implies, in order to induce personal memory photography must be transformed – removing it

from the past and placing it into the present. His suggestion is to enhance the material qualities of the image (at that point becoming an object) with the addition of supplements – framing, embroidery, fabric, or other images – to the photographs involved. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes wrote: “Ultimately, photography is subversive, not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.”

Approached as such, *Taken on the same day as the other photo* was conceived while giving consideration to the speculative devices available to us through expanded photographic forms. This creative work is neither a narrative nor an account of my father’s journey, but locates the research as activating and developing relations between conventional photographic language and the potential it has to engage with the non-linear and eclectic presentation of images and our encounter with them. “What we habitually refer to as photography ... no longer has a stable identity and is now subject to increasingly frequent mutations.”

Batchen uses the example of an album of tintypes in his collection that depicts a group of men arranged in a variety of poses to discuss a method which puts the photograph back into motion:

> By appearing on a number of separate pages, these photographs exploit the temporal and spatial possibilities inherent in book format, playing with small systematic differences between poses to suggest the illusion of animation, an illusion that our hand has just symbolically produced.

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Since its invention, photography has been responsible for rendering a simulation of human vision. Writers such as Walter Benjamin describe the advent of photography as the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction. Since the beginning, photography has been responsible for profound changes in the way people interpret and contextualise visual meaning. Andy Grundberg, in *Crisis of the Real*, also suggests that photography’s position and language are changing. The evolution of photography from one genre to another has shifted in purpose and definition since traditional art photography initially gravitated towards the conveyance of a 'single telling moment' or a photo essay. Grundberg proposes that photography has surrendered its role of eliciting memorable images, with the influence to provoke strong emotional responses, to television and the media. As a result, this shifts the effects of contemporary photography and its purpose. My interest is in the visual language that may have evolved out of this turn and whether this is occurring in connection with the way we now experience the world:

> We are now in a material environment where earlier 20th century models of spectatorship, contemplation, and experience are inadequate for understanding the conditions of cultural creation and reception ... recognition of this shift and a realisation that art must reconfigure itself in relation to transformed modes of cognition and experience.

Thus, the kind of shift in reading and understanding images, orientated from Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin and through to Daniel Palmer with the example provided by Tacita Dean's *Flo*, has been used as a strategy to develop the format of this artist book. The 18 found photographs are placed across 100 book pages without a distinct order or system. Several of the pictures are spread across two, three or four pages where the 'beginning' of the photograph is positioned at the edge of the preceding page, followed by the rest of the image. This 'folding' of images across

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and into sequences creates pauses and temporal slippages in the way the photographs are read. It occasionally fragments an image, spreading its 'duration' across several pages instead of the single frame. Important to the repetitive nature of my father’s pose, the figure remains in the same central position on each page, more or less equal in size. Occasionally the image is mirrored, and the photograph faces itself across two pages, evoking a complete stop or reversal of time. The play on the temporal as a state within the photograph, the separation of the image from the place and context it was taken, and the resistance of the photograph to exist as a mnemonic object in the space of this artist book, is a way of engaging my father’s pictures and making them appear in a work so that they become part of the work substrate, as well as its subject.
Chapter Seven

Agency of Inanimate objects
Plate 16 Izabela Pluta, Collection, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
110 x 150 cm
Plate 17 Izabela Pluta, *Four sides of a silver tarpaulin #1*, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm
Plate 18 Izabela Pluta, *Four sides of a silver tarpaulin* #2, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm
Plate 19 Izabela Pluta, *Four sides of a silver tarpaulin #3*, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm
Plate 20  Izabela Pluta, *Four sides of a silver tarpaulin #4*, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm
Plate 21 Izabela Pluta, Museum, 2014
latex-based ink-jet print
300 x 460 cm
Plate 22 Izabela Pluta, *Four sides of a piece of coal #1*, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm
Plate 23 Izabela Pluta, *Four sides of a piece of coal #2*, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm
Plate 24 Izabela Pluta, Four sides of a piece of coal #3, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm
Plate 25 Izabela Pluta, *Four sides of a piece of coal #4*, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm
Plate 27 Izabela Pluta, *Agency of inanimate objects*, installation view, Galerie Pompom Sydney
Plate 28 Izabela Pluta, *Agency of inanimate objects*, installation view, Galerie Pompom Sydney
Preservation/transformation

This series of works began as an exploration of the ebb and flow of objects and images that operate in the everyday. It depicts several subjects, including tarpaulin, coal and the museum itself, as a strategy to disrupt temporal continuity and think about the relationship between preservation and transformation.

When new objects appear in the world, they also bring with them new orders of temporality, new dialectical images that interfere with and complicate one another. Just when we think that things are safely dead, fossilized, petrified, and consigned to the past, they rise from their graves of natural extinction and cultural obsolescence.\(^{224}\)

The above text articulates the systemic intersection between objects and temporality. The creative work titled Agency of inanimate objects (2014) (Plates 16–25) aims to address the oscillation of objects and images operating in our everyday and how these may inform our engagement with them.

In this work, which was exhibited at Galerie Pompom Sydney in 2014, I use photomural wallpaper as a visual device to explore perception and illusion, as well as the potential of an image (through its materiality) to traverse temporal and spatial contexts. Museum (2014) (Plate 21) – a photograph taken inside a natural history museum – is a reference to Georges Cuvier’s 1795 reconstruction of a mammoth to demonstrate his new theory of fossils, transforming them from sheer curiosities into traces of life that had been extinct and proof of catastrophic transformations in the history of the earth.

This image is printed life size and installed as a photomural in the gallery space. It portrays a complex web of layers and reflections – glass, mirrors and murals of mountain vistas – that house taxidermy species. As discussed earlier, the photographic process creates a tension in the way it captures a moment in time. This image depicts a static diorama in a photographic, in-camera montage.

Another component of the exhibition is an image depicting a storage room of a museum where objects once on public display become redundant or hidden from the visitor’s eye. Like the glass layers from the subject of the Museum photograph, Collection (2014) (Plate 16) shows layers upon layers of objects and clutter including various didactic panels and exhibition furniture. In the image, the curtains are drawn yet daylight bleeds from the periphery, reminding us of life continuing outside. Both of these works aim to question the nature of collections and how they could be experienced.

The final component of Agency of inanimate objects is a set of two works comprising 8 photographs: Four sides of a silver tarpaulin (2014) (Plates 17–20) and Four sides of a piece of coal (2014) (Plates 22–25). The use of tarpaulin as a subject and object within the image stems from it appearing on numerous occasions in various works I have produced since 2009. I am drawn to its tactility when it is used on the surface of buildings in construction or renovation with the silver plastic that covers the facade often pulled taut by vertically positioned timber stakes – as discussed in reference to the work Re–photographed (black plastic) in the previous section of this dissertation. Whilst I have photographed this material for its potential to evoke the temporal states of a building’s transformation, here I use it to visually articulate the notion of temporality through sequencing. This process also draws on the convergence of mechanical time (repetition) and human time (memory).

225. In reference to Stan Douglas’ Overture, S Watson, p. 44.
With this in mind, I began by photographing silver tarpaulin in the studio, recognising that each time I positioned it, before re–positioning it again for the subsequent photograph, its shape and form had been altered. Inherent in this repetitive process was in fact uniqueness – a concept also inherent in the photographic ideas central to repetition and reproduction. As I made these photographs, each of the four images presented one of four sides of the sculptural form and became unique and impossible to reproduce again. Meanwhile the act of photographing these ever–changing objects gave way to the possibility of making infinite reproductions of each perspective – indefinitely.

This notion attests to the concept of authenticity inherent in photography: a reminder of the photograph’s reproducibility. As Benjamin famously wrote, “the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.”226 In this regard, Benjamin’s seminal ideas relating to the loss of the aura and of authenticity in art in the modern age motivated me to consider contemporary ideas about attachment to place and how, according to Papastergiadis, culture and identity are increasingly constructed in hybrid ways. If we no longer exist in connection to tradition and anthropological place, can this form of art practice and methodology – as I discussed in Part Two of this dissertation – be a way of negotiating our fluid mode of being in the world?

*Four sides of a piece of coal* follows on from the tarpaulin experiments and draws on the uniqueness of this object and its subsequent plurality through the production of this work. In a similarly systematic approach to *Four sides of a silver tarpaulin*, the coal is photographed four times, documenting its surface and cross sections throughout four photographic images.

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I found this piece of coal in 2010 when it was unearthed from the ground near my home during a renovation. I have kept it in my collection of other found things. Coal, while seemingly ordinary, represents layers of strata in a sedimentary rock formed from peat. I have been drawn to this particular object, which could be up to 250 million years old, because of its perceived banality. I am drawn to it also because in my mind it offers a certain cartography of time. The way that I have photographed this item disrupts its sense of scale such that the viewer is no longer certain of the object’s original size.

My approach to this work produces a set of photographs that trace the object’s circumference three hundred and sixty degrees, recording each possible detail at scale. This pseudo-scientific method of ‘classification’ draws on archaeological practices in order to explore the way that information from objects and photographs could be deciphered. Considering philosophical notions of photography’s reproducibility, and taking Benjamin’s manifesto in the context of the time in which it was made, I would ask how current effects of image circulation, dissemination and reception shape authentic experience in fleetingly sensing and perceiving the world.

227 This method of classification applies similarly to other disciplines including anthropology and ethnography.
Chapter Eight

Blue Distance
Plate 29 Izabela Pluta, Blue Distance, 2014. Installation detail UTS Gallery Sydney. Photo: David Lawrey.
Plate 33  Izabela Pluta, Blue Distance, 2014. Installation detail UTS Gallery Sydney. Photo: David Lawrey.
Plate 35 Izabela Pluta, Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2014 (detail #1–3)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 36 Izabela Pluta Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2014 (detail #4–6)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 25 cm each
Plate 37  Izabela Pluta, *Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album*, 2014 (detail #7–9)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 38 Izabela Pluta. Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2014 (detail #10–12)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 39  Izabela Pluta, Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2014 (detail #13–15)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 40  Izabela Pluta  Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2014 (detail #16–18)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 41 Izabela Pluta, *Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album*, 2014 (detail #19–21)
pigment prints on photo rag
series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each
Plate 42 Izabela Pluta, Folly wall, 2014
latex–based ink–jet print
300 x 1205.5 cm
installation view, UTS Gallery Sydney
latex–based ink–jet print
300 x 1205.5 cm
Plate 44 Izabela Pluta, House structure, 2014
latex-based ink-jet print
280 x 360 cm
installation view, UTS Gallery Sydney
Plate 45 Izabela Pluta, Uprooted tree, 2014
latex–based ink–jet print
280 x 360 cm
installation view UTS Gallery Sydney
Plate 46 Izabela Pluta, *Fibonacci collage #1 & 2*, 2014
Chromogenic prints on graph paper (unique prints)
56 x 40 cm each
Plate 47  Izabela Pluta, *Fibonacci collage #3 & 4*, 2014  
Chromogenic print on graph paper/graph paper (unique prints)  
56 x 40 cm each
Plate 48  Izabela Pluta  *Fibonacci collage #5, 2014*
acrylic photo-silkscreen on graph paper (unique print)
56 x 40 cm
Plate 49 Izabela Pluta, After the Pleasure of Ruins
1953/1977, 2014
acrylic photo silk screen on off set print
19 x 25 cm
Portals for longing

This series of works was motivated by the resonances found in prefabricated ruins dating back to 18th century England: architectural follies and 'eye-catchers' of classical structures that push ideas central to constructions of reality, illusion and temporality. The final creative work made as part of this doctoral project, *Blue Distance* (2014) explores the ways in which spatial and temporal displacements can be elucidated through an expanded photographic materiality.

If longing were a colour it would be blue. The title of this work and exhibition references Walter Benjamin’s invocation of the ancient topos ‘blue distance’ – ‘Fernblick ins Blau’ or, literally translated, ‘the far-gaze into the blue’ – as an expression for romantic longing.

*Blue Distance* comprises diverse components each of which plays with the visual syntax of photography and objects in an attempt to explore the ways that spatial and temporal displacements can be communicated through artworks. This work was exhibited at UTS Gallery Sydney in 2014 (Plates 29–34). The scale and space of the gallery, as well as the configuration of the walls and lighting, provided an environment where the viewer could experience each idea as they moved through a carefully choreographed sequence of spaces. The relationship of the body (viewer) within the space of each work was important in creating a passage that drew the viewer’s awareness to time and memory: visual metaphors that are alluded to across the content of each material form of this work.

The ‘tour’\(^\text{228}\) begun with a set of five collages that combine graph paper, photographic fragments and the photo-silkscreen process and use the calculated

\(^{228}\) I use the work ‘tour’ as a pun and a way of suggesting its significance when referencing pilgrims who undertook the Grand Tour around the 17th and 18th Centuries from its origins and the permutations of sentimental and romantic travel to the age of tourism and globalisation as a key exploration of this work.
logic of proportional values of the Golden Mean with scenes of prehistoric glaciers, mountains and caves as their subjects (Plates 46–48). The Cartesian grid is used in these works to reference the plotting of mathematical data, graphs or laboratory notes while the layering of imagery transforms them into potential topographical charts or abstract diagrams of an alternative reality. The constructed ‘scenes’ cascade down the page in a plotted line of carefully selected pictures, while another work depicts an infinite rainforest scene by concentric circles based upon the infinite Fibonacci spirals creating a void into the depths of the collage.

This mathematical formula is used across architectural principles while also existing in nature. In this work, I adopt its visual logic to evoke an interstitial space where our experience of time and place is hinged on providing an avenue into the imagination. The circular portal animates the image so that it recedes into the depth of the rainforest or the graph paper itself. Here, the mirrored image sequences and portals collapse away and into one other and are generated to allude to ways of thinking about illusion and perception. Four of the five collages are in fact doubles: images which mirror themselves or that have been produced with the negative space of the other image as a guide.

The following encounter in the gallery space is a set of two skeletal remains of shrubs – mirrored in their position on the gallery floor (Plate 31). The shrubs (Coleonema Pulchellum) are the same species but were grown in slightly different locations and have therefore developed into unique structures, yet still hold a likeness to one another in form. These were planted in my mother’s garden – one in the backyard, and one in the front – in Melbourne, when she and my father first built their home in the early 2000s. After a number of years my mother decided to remove them. I came across them while they were drying out waiting to be mulched and I learnt that their skeletal structure and lineage highlighted what I was thinking about in terms of this work.
To me they were reminiscent of follies: they were simultaneously in context, belonging in their native space, and out of context, appearing uncanny and uprooted from their place. I adopted them into Blue Distance, and placed them on the gallery floor, upside down and near the glass wall where they created yet another mirrored image of themselves – this time on the gallery’s periphery.

Beyond the shrubs and at the very end of the gallery space, I positioned a large photo mural of an eighteenth century stone folly titled Folly wall (2014) (Plates 42–43). This image was generated using a digital montage technique in order to depict only the folly’s corners folding inward and outward along the length of the twelve–meter gallery wall. The photomontage presents a perspective shift that provides a visual illusion in the irregular, dark grey stones and the two–dimensionality of a three–dimensional object.

The image also resembles a faux texture, similar to the one that lined my grandmother’s 1960s Eastern European kitchen which appeared to be mimicking a three–dimensional red brick facade. This was positioned inside my family home in Warsaw where I was born in 1979. Similarly, in this work, this ‘trompe l’oeil’ appears as both an actual wall and a fabrication of one. The shape, texture and sequence of stones is irregular. Edges and crevices meet, intersect or seamlessly disappear and fold into one another. The ashlar is evenly toned in a musty grey with areas that smudge the hard stone with green moss and weeds which protrude from the cracks. Importantly, the scale of this installation is life size. As the viewer walks along the image they are able to perceive the scale of their body and its presence in the gallery space in a relationship to the scale of the photographic image: a visual effect and sense of immersion that the trompe l’oeil is able to provide.

A third iteration of Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album – Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album (2014) (Plates 35–41) – was also
shown as part of the exhibition *Blue Distance*. This version presents 21 *odd* pages to draw out the oscillation that occurs in other components of this creative work: that of mirroring and a reiteration of visual forms and sequences. In reverse order, much like the original version of *Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album*, the work’s presentation performs a visual sequence depicting the empty window pockets in reverse succession; however, this time their visual language evokes an architectural space: a geometry and set of graphic elements without the elaborate illustrations that appear on the even pages in the earlier work. The stacking of vacant frames and the way they have been documented in this work draws our attention to the way in which a viewer would encounter and experience turning the pages of an album. The nature of time is implied in this motion and is further imposed in the way that the work is encountered in the space by looking down onto the printed works like a book being viewed on a table.

*Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album* lies in a set of museum vitrines. To observe the work the viewer must walk along the 10–meter span of carefully lined cases that house the photographs of these albums, and through this presentation mechanism they become photo objects rather than photographs. In a similar way to that in which one would look at objects in a museum collection, these images–having–become–objects give way to greater scrutiny as a result of their lowered position in a vitrine. In providing this platform for viewing the images, greater focus can be given to the layers of shapes and fragments that lie beneath each page as observed through the sequence of empty windows.

Another component of this exhibition is a small image that uses a found black and white plate (page) from the 1977 book *Rollof Beny interprets in photographs the Pleasure of Ruins by Rose Macaulay*. My work, *After the Pleasure of Ruins 1953/1977 (2014)* (Plate 48), was created using a photo–silkscreen transfer of another random plate from the book, onto the original image, with bronze acrylic. I
was drawn to the first iteration of this piece of literature, *Pleasure of Ruins*[^229], which was published in 1953 by Rose Macaulay and articulated the relationship between the disappearance of buildings and the desertion of words used to describe them.

The final two spaces in the gallery provide more intimate encounters with photographic photo murals. Vacant forms and uprooted objects continue to echo through these introspective corners of the gallery where two separate photo murals are positioned. These resemble interior wallpapers depicting luscious vistas and panoramas using a medium that embodies a space through its association to a place while attempting to evoke the desire to be somewhere else.

One depicts a fallen tree with elaborate roots that face the camera in the way a posing subject rests amidst the standing trees. The other work portrays an ambiguous steel structure shaped like a house that sits within a mid-ground of thick weeds. These quotidian sites depict redundant structures and placeless landscapes in an attempt to evoke a longing for place. In doing so they introduce an ambivalent sense of temporality that a photographic image might bring into play. The lighting in these two spaces was subdued and centered on the floor in front of each mural, throwing a warm spill of soft light onto the centre of each work.

This ambience resembled the way in which a movie projector would light a space through the process of screening a moving image or film. This light, together with the material form of the image and its position bleeding off the edges of a large partition wall in the gallery, attempted to highlight the still images' potential to show duration, furthermore alluding to a changing sense of temporality.

**Materiality: images, objects and spatial relations**

*Blue Distance* explores the way in which the temporalities of objects, photographs and other media are related and orientated in a space and as a multi-component work. It explores the idea and experiences of materiality: collected and photographed fragments and the spatial relationships that arise from their newly formed syntax in an artwork that is developed for a specific space.

The works discussed in this chapter as part of *Blue Distance* all consider the methods that extend the image from its flat surface and engage in new possibilities for imaginatively exploring the image as the form of an idea through expanded material forms – in the sense that Edwards means when, writing on the material characteristics of photographs, she identifies complex and fluid relationships between people, images and things. Following a linear trajectory, she details how “material forms have exceeded a direct indexical visual use, and created, literally and metaphorically, another dimension to the image.”

In *Blue Distance*, I similarly recognise the expanded nature of photography and include components that play with the visual syntax of photographic imagery and objects, where the materiality comprises photographs, found images and objects, photo murals and collage. In this example, the relationship of each component within a gallery space plays a critical role in its reading and allegorical connection. Edwards argues that “despite the clear realisation of this physical presence, the way in which material and presentational forms of photographs project the image into the viewers space is overlooked in many analyses.” While much has been written on the materiality of the image (Batchen, Schwartz), this discourse is mainly bound to the exploration of the print substrate rather than the new possibilities that might exist in what expansive presentational forms can offer.

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231. ibid, p. 4.
Blue Distance signals a new development in my practice by combining varying material iterations of images and their emphasis on the intersection between photographs, collage, photomurals and the subjects they portray. This approach acknowledges the central role of materiality in generating images that are active and reciprocal in the experience they provide for the viewer, instead of a passive or purely aesthetic vision. Through this work I also meditate on the effect of the temporal distance between when the photo was taken and the time it was re–experienced through addressing the physical experience of the photograph in this creative work. This temporal fracture may affect one’s reading of the image including the time and place evoked, thus highlighting the ambivalence between the imaged place and the imagined one.

The objective of this research is not to fix an explanation of expanded materiality, but rather to open up a dialogue in terms of how the disparity between spatial and temporal experiences could be explored in creative practice, and how these disjunctions could manifest themselves both visually and psychologically in the experience of a work. Blue Distance represents the ways in which fragments from the past could be recorded, mediated and re–experienced, and how materiality is integral to the construction of meaning. In all the creative works discussed in this dissertation, the photograph operates as both object and image and occupies the social world in its role as cultural experience: photographs stimulate interactions that are sensuous (through their physicality), subjective (ways they are read and interpreted by the viewer), and embody space (create an experiential dynamic in a gallery installation). I work between numerous material iterations using photographs that operate in various ways: as ‘photo objects’ using the postcard that is reminiscent of a place in one's memory; as a 'memory image’, probing desire for a place; and as a photo mural (trompe l’oeil) that alludes to a way home is manifested and the fantasy to be 'somewhere else'. The relationship between substrate and scale, location in a gallery
space and light is used in my work to play out a set of associations relating to time, place, the experience of places and how they operate in our memory.

**Transporting distant places into the present: photomural wallpaper and the trompe l'oeil**

Discussing Edward’s ‘Photographs as Objects of Memory’, Marius Kwint writes: “photographs belong to that class of objects formed specifically to remember, rather than being objects around which remembrance accrues through contextual association (although they become this as well).”\(^{232}\) He also suggests that, in her book, Edwards shifts:

> the methodological focus away from content alone, arguing that it is not merely the image *qua* image that is the focus of contemplation, evocation and memory, but that its material forms, enhanced by its presentational forms, are central to its function as a socially salient object.\(^{233}\)

Furthermore, Barthes also explores the proposition that the image and referent are inextricably linked, just as photographs bear meanings that are interconnected, so interlocked are the form the image takes and its meaning. Similarly, Edwards asserts that “these material forms exist in dialogue with the image itself to create the associative values placed on them.”\(^{234}\)

*Folly wall, Structure* (2014) (Plate 44) and *Uprooted tree* (2014) (Plate 45) ‘mimetically’ recall photographic wallpapers, or ‘photo murals’ that exemplify the connection between images and the substrates they embody. Wallpaper is used and referred to symbolically throughout my work. The medium takes the shape of a space through its association to a place; it alludes to the ephemeral quality of time; and evokes the

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\(^{233}\) ibid.

\(^{234}\) E Edwards, p. 2.
desire to be somewhere else. My specific interest in photo mural wallpaper comes from its existence, firstly, in my grandmother's house where I grew up in Poland. In each of the rooms of the house, one wall presented a panoramic vista of various forest settings: subdued, soft and layered with trees and ferns from foreground into the distant landscape.

This type of scenic wallpaper was hung in many houses and apartments in Eastern Europe as a vehicle for providing an appealing landscape inside the home, when in the heaviest of winters the city was barren of any luscious natural beauty. Simultaneously, it projected an escape from the reality one existed within. Secondly, I have witnessed in various migrants' homes, particularly those who arrived in Australia since the 1970s, the staging of a similar re-creation of such an ideal in their new homes here. And lastly, I draw on the idea of wallpaper as a surface, a covering device that is able to witness a lifetime of events in a particular place.
Although our idea of wallpaper may be associated with a repetitive pattern, panels that cover and construct a fashionable interior, my interest lies more with the photo mural, a vision that occupied my everyday as a child. The photo mural is a type of wallpaper with registered panels that, when laid, constitute a 'photographic' image, and were always called a 'tapeta' (wallpaper in Polish) in my family home (Fig.17).

Historically, wallpaper was used as a backdrop, something to establish a mood, an aesthetic of a room, and to reveal the social status of its inhabitants, whilst in a contemporary context it may evoke a sense of nostalgia by suggesting past generations, for example a reminder of one’s great aunt’s living room from the 1970s. As William Morris palpably expresses, wallpaper is a covering device, coating a wall in a way that not only covers, but also conceals and represents an individual’s wish to convey how they are to be perceived by others. Psychologically it may provide a decoy, and physically “it is always pretending to be something else – tapestry, velvet, chintz, silk drapery, linen, wood, masonry, a mural.”²³⁵ Presenting another reality or fiction through its imitative characteristics, wallpaper’s mimetic quality has an ability to draw us into a misled sense of belonging – a somewhat temporary relief of estrangement that only sublimates the source of this estrangement?

Another example of visual deception is demonstrated in perspective painting and the illusionistic vision of a trompe l’oeil. In ancient Greece, Zeuxis produced a still life painting of grapes so convincing that birds flew down to peck at them. When Zeuxis invited his rival, Parrhasius, to pull back the curtains to reveal the work, he too was fooled by Zeuxis’s skills of painterly mimesis. In his book Spatial Aesthetics, Papastergiadis uses the trompe l’oeil as an example of “the way art refers to signs from everyday life but also displaces the appearance of things.”²³⁶ Our expectations, says Papastergiadis, are unsettled by experiencing the gap between the perception

of a sign and the role of that sign in the way that “the trompe l’oeil plays with the unstable oscillation between the projection of conventional associations and the perception of signs which seem out of place.” Likewise in Folly, displacement is achieved when what appears to be a stone wall spanning the entire length of the gallery is in fact an image that elicits those imaginative connections to its referent.

The conundrum over the ability to judge the meaning of an image returns us to the ancient confusion of the trompe l’oeil. The work of the trompe l’oeil in art is to lead perception towards one direction only to displace the attention that follows. Today the confusion does not occur because one image can deceive our senses, but rather in the multiplicity of images that overwhelm the senses.

On another level, the subject of the trompe l’oeil is itself a folly – like a mock ruin, popular during the eighteenth century, which was built to evoke different continents or historical eras as a way of imagining an alternative place or time. The materiality of this work suggests a physicality inherent in photomural wallpapers, while its subject matter evokes a sentiment of nostalgia for the past in the way that this mechanism of imagining manifests itself via a folly. As Papastergiadis puts it:

** Allegories of linear time: prefabricated ruins as non–places**

In 2011, two years prior to beginning this PhD research, I spent several weeks in the United Kingdom at The University of Ulster in Belfast while on an academic exchange. During this period, I began collating a database of 'mock–ruins' across Britain, including places such as Rochdale, Shottesbrooke, Coniston, Plymouth and Alnwick. In compiling this information, I recorded the GPS coordinates of each site, so that when I began field work and production I could easily find them in the landscape. This

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237. ibid.
turned into an expansive road trip, where I drove from the south to the north of Britain in search of these particular places. Frustratingly, more often than not I was not able to find the exact location of the ruin, even though I had the exact location’s coordinates in the map I was using. It was a process of anticipation: of finding the place and a subsequent disappointment of not being about to reach it. As a result I was only able to record some of these curiosities and, even so, once I had photographed them they felt rather underwhelming as photographic images.

Making *Blue Distance* has illuminated some striking similarities to this experience and what eventuated as a result. It has led to my current methodology and, furthermore, it metaphorically reflects several concerns of my creative practice that I have discussed throughout this paper – the notion of ‘place’ existing in the imagination; chance encounters premised on the notion of Debord’s *dérive*; the oscillation between the present and the past, between distance and proximity – all to remind us that the very thing we seek to locate and recall is constantly out of reach. In this final work, the disparity between spatial and temporal experience is drawn upon by looking at the prefabricated ruin as a catalyst for the psychological resonances implicit in the architectural follies and 'eye–catchers' of classical structures.

The scope of leisurely travel in the eighteenth century had a two–fold effect: it brought the curious eye closer to foreign places while concurrently perpetuating an armchair traveler of those who were not able to partake in such journeys. Ruins became sought after sights where picturesque–hunters experienced beauty and the 'Sublime'. Mock ruins were those that pretended to be the remains of original buildings but were in fact constructed in a dilapidated state. Built for decoration and pleasure on affluent estates, follies represented different continents or historical eras: structures suffused with fabricated age and sentimentality for that which was seen and experienced abroad – but in other cases, only imagined. Philosophically, an 'eye–catcher' could
summon one to traverse social and temporal contexts, thereby linking the present and the past.

Ernst Bloch suggests the existence of a utopian impulse: a tendency for humans to long for and imagine a life otherwise. The desire for a better or different way of being is inherently tied to longing and may be linked to a nostalgic sensibility. Utopia, according to Bloch, is a quest for wholeness and heimat. This German concept implies the connection a human being has with a specific social unit or place: a quest for being at home in the world. Taking this concept as a scaffold, Blue Distance offers a reading of the ruin as a metaphor for social and cultural phenomena. Throughout history, global movement and travel have had a profound impact on the basic ontological concepts of space and time. Contemporary global cultures, however, seem ever more transient, moving back and forth between places with the notion of home becoming more distant and sometimes absent, replaced perhaps by the new technologies of connectivity.

Kwon’s concept of ‘wrong place’ offers the potential of ‘belonging–in–transience’. As already noted, this idea proposes a nomadic ‘fluidity’ of movement, while remaining antinostalgic and therefore countering a rooted place of belonging for which we may become nostalgic. Correspondingly, the waning of our ability to locate ourselves in the world, as examined by Lippard, suggests that this is a result of our sense of identity being fundamentally tied to places and the histories they embody. Voluntary migrations and forced movements, therefore, have uprooted our lives from specific local cultures and places and placed us in a state of flux. Does this lack of belonging, continuity and loss of anthropological place create a new form of nostalgia specific to the contemporary age?

The possibility of imagining an alternative, other place to the one we know and eliciting these allegorical connections through prefabricated ruins is in my mind a way
of imagining nostalgia. In that sense, this creative work connotes the ways in which a specific past can be recorded, mediated and re-experienced. The works in *Blue Distance* explore notions central to the construction of reality where the folly becomes a symbolic structure capable of manipulating an artificial paradise in which the viewer becomes lodged in multiple contexts simultaneously.

In his essay ‘Nostalgia for ruins’, Andreas Huyssen proposes that the ruin is a cipher for nostalgia:

> Temporality and spatiality are necessarily linked in nostalgic desire. The architectural ruin is an example of the indissolublecombination of spatial and temporal desires that trigger nostalgia. In the body of the ruin the past is both present in its residues and yet no longer accessible, making the ruin an especially powerful trigger for nostalgia.\(^{239}\)

His view attests to the complex navigation between the aesthetic (romantic) ruin of the eighteenth century and the perception of the modern ruin. He acknowledges that the twentieth century has produced a very different imaginary of ruins that has made the earlier ruin obsolete. This, he believes, has occurred as a result of ruins being metamorphosed via processes of preservation, restoration and retrofitting.\(^{240}\) In *Blue Distance* I have used the ruin as a subject, but without actually depicting it. While it exists as the basis of the *Folly* image, the nature of the photographic detail in the work spanning the gallery wall as a photomural does not make it recognisable as such.

\(^{240}\) ibid, p. 8.
Culmination of the creative works

In my creative practice I have fluidly moved between exploring eighteenth century eye–catchers and industrial ruins. While I acknowledge Huyssen’s delineation between the two, my own use of it as a visual and conceptual device is two–fold for different reasons. I am drawn to eighteenth century eye–catchers because, as sculptural objects in their original context, they symbolise a way of longing for what 'picturesque–hunters' saw and experienced abroad. The eye–catcher could also be considered non–place. On the other hand, I explore the industrial, or modern, ruin as a metaphor for the kinds of non–places that are created through the process of globalisation. In both these approaches I portray entropic sites as well as personal or anonymous discarded objects as allegories of linear time and geometric space.241 The visual devices that I adopt intend to extract the subject from the place of origin and locate it in a universal orientation, free of any specific geographical and temporal coordinates.

CONCLUSION

The core of this practice-led research has been an endeavor to better understand the complex psychological aftermath of migration. I drew on my personal experience as a migrant to Australia as a catalyst for examining contemporary thinking on the shifting definition of place and the phenomenon of globalisation as they pertain to my art practice. At the beginning of this doctoral project, I set out to discover how my work might adopt a certain range of artistic strategies that describe and manifest what for me it means to be from another place and how this has manifested in my practice. This developed into making creative works where I have explored the expanded materiality of images and objects in my studio processes, as well as the strategies by which they come into being as works of art, conceptually and aesthetically, and resonate with that philosophical inquiry.

This research had revealed to me new connections between my artworks by examining my approach to production as well as through a closer scrutiny of the aesthetic, material and conceptual qualities of the works produced.

My enquiry began with a set of interconnected questions outlined in the introduction relating to the contemporary condition of nostalgia, migratory movements and diasporic experiences. I wanted to understand how an attachment to the past manifests itself in places and objects that surround us. I used these questions in the thesis to inform, shape and contribute to the ways that I came to understand my creative processes, reflecting back and forth between my artistic strategies, the theoretical framework and how these engaged with aspects of archaeology, gleaning, photographic reflexivity and autobiography. In the making of *Blue Distance* specifically, these practices, movements and areas of philosophical inquiry produced a new way of seeing the interrelationship of these themes in my work. Through a self-reflexive and self-interrogative process, I arrived at a new way of thinking about
experience as it is bound to memory and conflated by the passing of time and the span of geographic separation. I looked at migratory experience in the context of current discourse on globalisation to frame a way of engaging with an expanded materiality in photography. Consequently, I found an approach to how this could resonate with a strategy for artistic production – gleaning – thereby reflecting on the material concerns of my practice, its expanded form, and the way that images and objects are developed (or found) and made.

In the Prelude to this dissertation, I acknowledged an earlier work of mine, Credenza. The subject of the work, its spatial presence in the gallery space and the material execution in my mind did not form a synthesis between the idea and the material outcome. I therefore decided that the complexity of migratory experience was far more complex and nuanced than a singular metaphor of a credenza could ever evoke. My aim then became to interrogate the methods by which things are collected and reconfigured as a means of producing a new way of thinking about temporal and spatial narratives, rather than by looking to the subject (or object) of the work itself. This led me on a path to find a very particular mechanism within my methodology that draws on gleaning – a poetic scavenging – to initiate a material and visual exploration of the complex terms, nostalgia and diaspora.

While the focus of Part One addressed themes in isolation – concerning place, nostalgia and diaspora – and Part Two explored the methodology of gleaning as an art-making strategy pertaining to the experience of spatial/temporal 'misalignment', the dissertation functions as a whole, aiming to carefully thread and connect these discourses with the material, visual and methodological strategies of the four works discussed in the final section, Part Three, Creative Works. In the dissertation, each of the references I have drawn upon provides a scaffold upon which my exploration was developed in greater depth and scope to progressively construct a better understanding of the interrelationship between these areas. I hope this is apparent in
the spill of themes, discourses and analyses of terms – both historical and contemporary – that occur across this study.

A key objective of this research is to provide a discussion to draw out meanings from the four art works produced during the candidature – *Taken on the same day as the other photo* (an artist book and photographic series), *Agency of Inanimate objects* and *Blue Distance* – and to cultivate new perspectives that they can offer. I have also endeavored to remain speculative and open to the way the discussions read and operate rather than closing down or limiting their potential meanings.

Like an itinerary that provides a traveller with a narrative to cross and connect sites, the components of each creative work developed during this practice–led research plot images and places across a temporal plane without a fixed time, location, or necessarily in a linear direction. The method of gleaning is identified as a methodology for the work that resonates with drawing us closer to the memory of an experience and simultaneously disrupting the connection to that object or place.

Hence the title references the idea of ‘spatial and temporal misalignment’ which alludes to the way that time and place are fundamental to photographic discourse, but also to Diaspora, being centered on the home lost – *from place* – and nostalgia, being a misalignment of experiences *across time*. Consequently, the relationship between how the work is made (acknowledging gleaning as a methodology) and how it is exhibited (through its various iterations) is critical to how it may resonate with these concepts.

My method of gleaning drew on the very nature of the experience of temporality in globalisation. In Chapter One I explored the significance of place to experiences of the complexity of migratory movements and diasporas. I drew on Papastergiadis’
questioning of whether, due to the position of home no longer being tied to a geographical position in our present or the past, our ability to locate ourselves in the world has become tentative and somewhat romantic. My inquiry built a deeper understanding of the modern nostalgic condition, arguing that a lack of belonging and loss of anthropological place generate a new form of nostalgia specific to the contemporary age – one that is distinct from place connections and cultural allegiances, and is shaped by spatial and temporal transience. In Chapter Two my investigation into nostalgia, through its historical significance and changing evocation in the present, drew on Heidegger's ontology of time and the premise that not only does place fall from one’s certainty (Trigg) when trying to analyse my subjectivity in the context of contemporary nostalgia, but so also do linear notions of time or progression. In Chapter Three I examined the idea that diasporic feelings centred on the lost home – shaped by place, circumstance and a collective identity – whereas nostalgia as I argue, is a misalignment of experiences across time. This analysis of roots, loss and longing was useful in understanding how I approached materiality within my practice and how it corresponds with the expanded field of photography, which has helped me build an understanding of how measures of distance could be conveyed through images and operate as a form of gleaning.

Given that a critical engagement with an expanded photographic materiality is at the centre of my practice, I discussed the intersections that each work has with the nature of time and how it resonates with contemporary discourse on memory in Part Two. I explored the expanding boundaries of photography as a preeminent form of archival material where the camera is literally “an archiving machine.”242 I also explored a new approach to the expanded field of photography and how my blending of photographic materiality is intrinsically linked to uses of the medium in the present moment.

The positioning of the themes, the tracing of key terms and the methodological approaches to the studio work are examined in Part One and Part Two through a close analysis of key works tied to specific aspects relating to my artistic strategies. Examining the work of other artists who work in correlating ways assisted me to gain critical distance from my work.

I looked at Mariana Castillo Deball’s studio rationale and Mark Dion’s *Tate Thames Dig* to consider how collecting as a method for creative production borrows from the discipline of archaeology, and how the way in which items are interpreted and deciphered could be directed by the context into which they are placed. I examined Craigie Horsfield’s oeuvre, Adam Broomberg’s and Oliver Chanarin’s *People In Trouble Laughing Pushed To The Ground* and Stan Douglas’s *Overture* to examine the experience of temporality within an artwork: how linear time and cyclical time can be interrupted and how the physical engagement with material from an archive (the encounter) could be integral to the work itself. I reflected upon Fiona Hall’s *Wrong Way Time* and the work of Ricardo Brey and Newell Harry in the 2015 Venice Biennale. Each of the installations took on the formal and conceptual mechanisms of the wunderkammer to transform images and objects as a way of transcending cultural, social and geographic boundaries to find new ways of perceiving and interpreting the world. I used Orhan Pamuk’s *Museum of Innocence* in Istanbul to think about the ways in which the removal of objects from their original contexts proposes a rethinking of their collective significance, thereby forming new connections and vibrations of meaning, adrift from their original settings and emotional contexts.

I also explored Agnès Varda’s *The gleaners and I*, Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* and Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* to identify gleaning as a approach to using an arbitrary method of collating and appropriating material situated within a
subjective impulse to present fragments from the past in another form. My analysis of these examples built a deeper understanding of how archival strategies are transformed into aesthetic principles. What this means for my own work is that, much like the motives of Benjamin and Warburg, this is a methodology that draws on a personal motivation, psychological perspectives and ways of thinking about the nature of images, archives and the effect of their decontextualisation.

The research carried out through this dissertation has been developed in relation to the four practice-led components of my research, which have been exhibited during my candidature between 2013 and 2015. *Taken on the same day as the other photo* was exhibited in 2013 at Dianne Tanzer Gallery + Projects, Melbourne. This work explores the passing of time and the notion of absence in an installation of two components, comprising a large scale photograph depicting empty boat stands, and a series of 21 small photographs of an empty nineteenth century album, presented in reverse order.

*Taken on the same day as the other photo* is also the title of a work that developed into an artist book as a response to a set of photographs of my father. These 18 pictures are spread across 100 14.8 x 21cm pages, and depict my father standing in various locations across a city unbeknown to the viewer. Each image appears as if it were taken on the same day as every other picture in the set. The book is arranged in a way where several of the pictures are 'folded' across two, three or four pages where the 'beginning' of each photograph is positioned at the edge of the preceding page, followed by the rest of the image.

*Agency of inanimate objects* was exhibited in 2014 at Galerie Pompom, Sydney. This work explores the connection between objects and their temporality through a number of photographs depicting: a natural history museum diorama; the storage room of a museum where objects once on public display become redundant or...
hidden from the visitor’s eye; and two sets of typologies involving silver tarpaulin and a piece of coal.

*Blue Distance* was exhibited in 2014 at UTS Gallery in Sydney. This work explores the agency of collected and photographed fragments and the spatial relationships that may arise between them as a way of looking at the disparity between spatial and temporal experience. It draws on the prefabricated ruin as a catalyst for investigating the psychological resonances implicit in architectural follies and 'eye–catchers' of classical structures. The work comprises diverse components that play with the visual syntax of photography and objects including: collages on Cartesian grid paper; two skeletal remains of shrubs; a photo mural depicting an eighteenth century stone folly; a third iteration of the found nineteenth century photo album; a photo silkscreen print onto a found book page; and two final photo murals resembling interior wallpapers that depict a steel structure shaped like a house and a fallen tree.

The three exhibitions and the artist book have informed how the artworks have functioned on a methodological, conceptual and material level. These consequently set the path for how the connecting set of inquiries have been structured in this dissertation: by locating the thesis in Part One and articulating the artistic strategies in Part Two, followed by an exploratory description of each work in Part Three.

The exhibitions of the work were presented in distinct manifestations premised upon the respective gallery spaces and developed with the particular spaces in mind. Upon the making, planning and thinking through of each exhibition, I prepared a working model of each gallery where I could test out the relationships between the works, at scale and in relation to each space. This was an important part of the working process as increasingly each set of work departed further from works that were tied together by either their size, their format or their material. In each construction the model gave way to an open ended set of possibilities for presenting the various
components. Like Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*, which could be perceived as a “visual matrix for multiplying possibilities of interpretation”, I began to understand the way I thought about each component and the things it could evoke each time I ‘repositioned’ it in the space. Hence, I have discovered that the planning of the design of the exhibition was critical to elucidating my ideas as much as each of the components were capable of exploring my conceptual concerns through its specific form and expanded materiality.

In the final iteration of this practice-led research presented at the TEAM Gallery, University of Wollongong, I have set out to test some of the more discursive concerns of the research and present a new iteration of the work. Titled *Bringing the distance near* (Plates 50–61), this exhibition draws from the three and a half years of creative practice developed within the scope of this research project. It neither presents an all-encompassing summary of the range of artwork produced, nor is it a way of re-staging the work in its first exhibition format – as neither would provide an accurate representation of how each work operated in its original sense. Instead, I have produced an exhibition that draws on the independent components – made across time, in and for different spaces – thus extending the underlying investigation in a new iteration.

This decision has arisen through my analysis of the three exhibitions, but also through the consideration of the various characteristics of the works and the artistic strategies explored in this dissertation. Such considerations have provided a clearer understanding of and personal reflection on, my methodology and how it operates in terms of gleaning. *Bringing the distance near* is not intended to be the final, most resolved iteration of the practice-led research, but rather an opportunity to provide a

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summary articulation of the concerns of this thesis and the ideas that I have presented as central to disrupting spatial and temporal continuities.

Hence, this fifth and final form of the project, presented for my doctoral exhibition, responds both to the earlier three iterations (as well as the ideas undertaken in relation to the artist book) and to the knowledge I have developed through this research. The installation includes framed photographs, a wall shelf for works on paper, an artist book, a photomural, found objects and plywood structures for displaying photographs. The exhibition format explores a pseudo–archaeological strategy of displaying work as a way of conveying our fluid mode of moving through, and being in, the world. The practice of gleaning is central to my working methods: a way of gathering and appropriating images and artefacts to suggest a desire for place. The nuanced form of this final iteration of the creative work attempts to distill the way the components become separated from their original context and the process by which they come together in different and new ways, thus resonating with strategies of archaeology, appropriation, photographic reflexivity and an expanded materiality in photography. This research forms new connections between my works through a close examination of my approach to production as well as through an involved scrutiny of the aesthetic, material and conceptual qualities of the works produced.

By its end, Allegories of Diaspora: Gleaning the residues of spatial and temporal misalignments has come to look outwards to find and describe the significance of gleaning as a methodology for the present moment in the context of global diasporas, but also as a way of introducing new possibilities for restructuring our understanding of spatial and temporal orientation, free of specific geographical and chronological positions in practices of art, as well as the everyday.
Plate 50 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation view, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 51 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 52 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 53 Izabela Piuta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 54 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 55 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 56 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 57 Izabela Pluta, Bringing the distance near, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 58 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 59 Izabela Pluta, Bringing the distance near, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 60 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
Plate 61 Izabela Pluta, *Bringing the distance near*, installation detail, TAEM Gallery, University of Wollongong.
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APPENDIX ONE

List of creative works

*Taken on the same day as the other photo*, 2017
art book
14.8 x 21cm
softcover
100 pages
Onestar press, BOOKMACHINE
Artspace Sydney 2015

*Collapse* 2015
pigment print on photo rag
150 x 200 cm

*Sailing for the abyss (wall)* 2010
pigment print on photo rag
54 x 54 cm

*Re–photographed (wall)* 2015
pigment print on photo rag
54 x 54 cm

*Sailing for the abyss (black plastic)* 2010
pigment print on photo rag
54 x 54 cm

*Re–photographed (black plastic)* 2015
pigment print on photo rag
54 x 54 cm

* Taken on the same day as the other photo *
Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2013
pigment prints on photo rag
set of 21 works
30.5 x 38 cm each

*Untitled (boat stands)*, 2013
pigment print on photo rag
130 x 177.4 cm
Agency of inanimate objects

Collection, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
110 x 150 cm

Styrofoam, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 62.5 cm

Rubber, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 62.5 cm

Museum, 2014
latex–based ink–jet print
300 x 460 cm

Four sides of a silver tarpaulin #1–4, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm each

Four sides of a piece of coal #1–4, 2014
pigment print on photo rag
50 x 50 cm each

Artefact #1, 2014
acrylic photo silk–screen and Xerox copy on rag paper,
42 x 29cm, unique print

Blue Distance

House structure, 2014
latex–based ink–jet print
280 x 360 cm

Uprooted tree, 2014
latex–based ink–jet print
280 x 360 cm

Folly wall, 2014
latex–based ink–jet print
300 x 1205.5 cm
Fibonacci collage #1, 2014
Chromogenic print on graph paper
56 x 40 cm

Fibonacci collage #2, 2014
Chromogenic print on graph paper
56 x 40 cm

Fibonacci collage #3, 2014
Chromogenic print on graph paper
56 x 40 cm

Fibonacci collage #4, 2014
Graph paper
56 x 40 cm

Fibonacci collage #5, 2014
Acrylic photo silk–screen on graph paper
56 x 40 cm

Plant form, 2014
Found shrub
Dimensions variable

Every odd page from a nineteenth century photo album, 2014
pigment prints on photo rag
Series of 21, 30.5 x 38 cm each

After the pleasure of ruins 1953–1977, 2014
acrylic photo silk–screen on offset print
25 x 19 cm
APPENDIX TWO:

Exhibition Catalogues for the exhibitions

[Enclosed as hard copy and on USB]

**Agency of inanimate objects**
Galerie Pompom, Sydney
30 April–25 May 2014

**Blue Distance**
UTS Gallery Sydney
3 June–4 July 2014
APPENDIX THREE:

Exhibition documentation of the exhibitions

[Enclosed on USB]

**Taken on the same day as the other photo**
Dianne Tanzer Gallery + Projects, Melbourne
August 2014

**Agency of inanimate objects**
Galerie Pompom, Sydney
30 April–25 May 2014

**Blue Distance**
UTS Gallery Sydney
3 June–4 July 2014

**Bringing the distance near**
The University of Wollongong TAEM Gallery
1–20 September 2017