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Satirical Index

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Abstract

‘Satirical Index’ is a thesis of short stories describing formative memories that I think outline my experience of limbo, memory, death and nostalgia. Including a poem, which has been the culmination of my research, and represents a story that keeps restarting; never fully resolving. Continuously mutating. The body of the thesis demonstrates my history with the sensation of being out of place, or distant from my surroundings. It is my personal examination of the relationship between subject and object. In the pursuit of my thesis I discovered a method of contextualizing my visual art practice through memory, as explored in the following prose writing. The result is a dissection of the themes, motifs and subject matter of my practice.

SATIRICAL INDEX

by

Jack Honeysett

B.A.(Hons), Arts University College Bournemouth, 2011

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art in Sculpture.

Syracuse University
May 2018

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Introduction

In this paper I will examine how the themes in my visual art practice, and how they have become the subject matter of my work. This examination is split into two halves; the first is a selection of prose writing of mine that explores important events from my past that I believe inform my current work, the second half (Appendices) is written to give context to the first, expressing outright the themes underlying the aesthetic of the stories.

Statement

My work is about dislocation and the idea of limbo, loneliness and fear of loss. Memory, death and nostalgia are important in my practice. Inspired by the experience of isolation one feels on a journey, fear of losing a precious memory and the social role of narrative my video work is a tantalising glimpse at something which appears to have slipped out of time; that is immortal, a moment or a place on infinite loop. Video is a vehicle for removal; memorialising a subject, crystallising it and placing it both in history and outside of a human timeline. It creates an otherworldliness which is represented by fluttering pixels.

My latest work is about the idea of mutability in language; which has the ability to represent physical form in a magical and shape shifting way. Language is a tool open to misinterpretation and incredibly dependant on a reader's moods and social context. In my video *Satirical Index: Episode 02 'Transitions'* I explore the distorting abilities of language reflected through a visual triptych: a distant horizon, an object that appears either as a celestial body or a human mask and the cinematic reveal of a miniature house. The soundscape implies a vast space of

reverberation contrasting with the intimacy of the narrator who keeps restarting anew, stories of creation and mutation, leaving them untold, lost in the cavernous space implied in the audio. The video is displayed on an iPhone, isolating the viewer, and hinting further a connection to a vast unseen network of cultural signification.

The effect of transitioning states of subject, concept and physical matter as a symbol for the mutability of the self is at the heart of my practice. Oscillating between indexical visual image making and rhetorical poetic literary signification; mapping one atop the other I use history, landscape and symbols of capitalism as motifs, to highlight contradictory desires related to the effects of nostalgia on myself and contemporary society. I search for value in story and symbol, opening up topics for re-evaluation through child-like introspection. As a gateway into, and re-evaluation of, representation and revisions of standard historical/mythological meta narratives. In the hope that I can make new connections and meanings in the world.

If I had a hundred tongues in the pines

My thesis body of work began in 2013 when Tom Hall invited me to create an audio piece as part of his Chasing Sputnik project, on the Isle of Wight, UK. This is the first time poetry and narration of a landscape enter my work. The piece I created was a poem describing the journey between two sites on the island, it was a linguistic description of the presence of the landscape highly anthropomorphised with visceral visual language. In the audio piece I read the poem three times; each time in a different tense and perspective. Past, present, future. Me, we, you.

When I began my MFA I chose to shift my focus towards Sculpture. My video practice was about the physicality of subjects through the lens, but also the physicality of the audience themselves. I phrased my desire to study sculpture as “the conversation I want to be around”. I

thought this would be a good way to understand how the lens or language was altering the physical objects and phenomena I was representing, and I thought that focusing on sculpture would help me pursue those questions.

During the first year of MFA I pursued two angles; artwork without language, artwork defined by language, typified in my early projects. ‘In the Pines’¹ was a project to map a culture with a folk song that I felt permeated time and space, race. I tried to make artwork that would present a view of America filtered through the song ‘Among the Pines’ (which has over 170 different recorded versions and many different names). ‘If I Had a Hundred Tongues’² is a project that approaches sculpture from a view point of the inability of language to accurately represent.

In the summer of 2016 I made a piece which I thought particularly successful at combining my desire to tell a story and represent landscape. Called ‘The Lost Gardens of Heligan’³, this video fictionalises a slideshow of images from a visit to a tourist attraction garden and contextualises the visuals with a first person narrative influenced by the Science Fiction of John Wyndham and Arthur C. Clarke, whose stories are often a description of world changing events told through the eyes of one character. My character although seemingly a reasonable person is wildly misinterpreting the environment around him. This work brings together themes of landscape, language and the role of prophecy. ‘The Room’⁴ is a video that I keep re-evaluating, similar to my pre-MFA desire to represent place, in this piece the sense of the room, seemingly quite innocuous, has a thick atmosphere. This was an attempt present an interior space through an aesthetic of melancholy stillness and presenting that has a very potent force.

Satirical Index

The video I made for the MFA exhibition ‘Hiding In Plain Sight’ came directly from three projects I did in autumn 2017. They were about limbo, landscape and language.

‘The Stairwell’⁵ was an audio piece that represented space. The flight of the 5 story staircase in Smith hall was turned into an instrument by connecting the top and bottom with a taught wire, when played the sound is an audio manifestation of the length of the stairs and the space of the stairwell. The desire to do this developed out of the ‘If I Had a Hundred Tongues’ project where I had created several metal speakers, and became the thought ‘what if a building could sing?’

‘Road Signs’⁶: I seem to want to contextualise landscape through language. I had failed to work with signage twice, once for Tom’s public art course and another for Practicing in Public critique. But in 2017 I put some of my own text on road signs, installing them as plaques indoors. The evocation of landscape the road signs created contextualised the phrases. I churn out phrases. It felt like a project that might work as an ongoing practice of its own right when many of my projects feel like one offs.

‘Satirical Index. Episode 01: Journeys’⁷ is about journeys, physical and cultural connection to place. A satirical index is specifically an index in a book that has been written to make comment on the contents of the book. For example, a right wing author might have their index written by a left wing indexer who makes comment in the index contrary to the views of the author. I have adopted this as a title because I felt that it embodied my own method of response through my artwork.

‘Satirical Index Episode 02: Transitions’⁸ is about changing states of matter. This video comes back to my original question: how does video alter what it attempts to represent? Picking up where episode 01 left off (or perhaps is about to start). A shot of a horizon hovers in the distance moving, but it is unclear whether it is coming closer or further away. It is perhaps a perpetual horizon, as all horizons are. This image felt like an appropriate representation of potential, an unrealised form or future or distant past. The mask, as I call it, started as a shape shifting thing, moving in a manner akin to something celestial, only revealed from certain angles and able to disappear from view again. I had been filming objects that I had hoped would read as landscapes on video, this object is more human mask than landscape. I had the desire to recreate a photo I had taken in miniature; the photo was a dilapidated bungalow with a rusting car in the driveway. In my video I wanted the car to melt into the ground and for the house to animate and slowly strip itself back to bare timber structure. After I had shot the bungalow model its implacable, brooding stillness persuaded me to leave it alone. The poem was written like a continuously restarting epic narrative, like a myth that never got retold. It has the freedom to mutate continuously. The potential narrative starting points keep stalling and restarting and the visual imagery, forms and phenomenon state shift, never congealing into a solid, always in limbo. Until the voice seems to hand, slightly threatening, responsibility for the story onto the listener.

Over the following pages I will draw reference to the ideas and themes of my visual work through a group of short stories that give context to my personal history with the idea of limbo, loneliness, fear of loss, memory, death and nostalgia. The first narrative is the poem ‘Satirical Index’ which was written for the piece ‘Satirical Index Episode 02: Transitions’, the next writing ‘The Plain’ is a scene from a reoccurring dream. These two stories introduce the following narratives.

Satirical Index

This is a story about how we forgot ourselves
in the mists of cliché. It is a story of glue
and bondage; of a puddle that seeps through
the limestone crack of a spongy pavement
and saturates the ground.

Softening it into malleable jelly.

Slippery and comical.

This is a story of smooth edges that warp perspective
dancing straight lines into parabolic contortion
and mixing form with substance into a lusty
cocktail of fettered gradients that
slap the taste buds of an exorbitant wader,
and drench the gullet of an infinite neck,
quelling the scorch that chars eternity.

This story will select your modes
and toggle you into standby, and as
its heart rate slows there is a puffy
silence that blankets the horizon,
stretching it with the grief of a click that echoes from

the pissing spouts of last century's milksops.

Only to hiss into a cherished memory.

Let me tell you how I shod clods on a brick-a-brack howl,

the shape and size of an insult. An insult

so rich it nourished the bodies of all

the spawn of twilight. And as they sat mewling

from their aching sides

we ran in circles from the terror.

Truncating the misfortune of our hex.

There is a curse

older than the stone I warm in the hands of others.

It comes alive and simmers gently waiting

for my palm to rise above my chest.

It laps my fingers twitting and chirruping

as though ripening fruit lifted its spirits,

and spreads dissension in the trail of a comet.

I want to tell you about myself.

I lounged in my skeleton painting my crusty bones

with gilding that sang and fizzed; an etching

that woke a blood moon from its dream of release.

A rose dawn welched a saturated sky
into a thickened tar and blundered,
progressively snowballing.

I'm going to tell everyone in my dreams that
you have the stories now!

The Plain

The sun shines the air with singing heat.

The wide open sky is bleached white hot blue and it aches my eyes.

The hard ground crunches underfoot with dusty ochre.

The horizon is far off with crinkly mountains at its edge; a flat plain stretches towards me. As my eyes pierce into hazy distance a crowd of dark smudges shimmer, flickering like dirty candle flames. The shapes are spread wide across the horizon. Like a wave their forms begin to solidify, still ungraspable; reflections in a waterfall. Dry and rasping. Moving towards me with benign malevolence. There is no focus on me, but I feel a threat sprawl across the plain.

As my eyes reach into the distance I begin to pick out individual, slim, dark shapes undulating in the billowing storm swaying from side to side in the meleé. Lashing limbs flick and froth the air, clattering bones in rubbery skin.

I begin to turn away in panic. Looking around, my mother, father, brother and sister all begin to run. As the tide nears I understand that there is nothing I can do; that they will all be swept away in the dust. As I run faster, one by one the wave swallows them up. I expect to hear screams. As the storm dies away, I go back to look for them but nothing is there.

My first narrator was Jack Nicholson

A grey thin carpet lay like loose skin over screwed-down sheets of chipboard. Pinning the carpet to the ground were the awkward legs of a small ornate wooden table. It wasn't awkward because it was ugly; it was awkward like a new born foal. On its back was the angular grey black cube of a television. It was a Sony TV, and it was the same age as me. It twanged into life when you pushed the power switch deep into its face. The light on the screen would fade into existence and when switched off would disappear in a pinch of blue white lightning.

The rain sheeted down outside, twitching the leaves, and water ran through the gravel confluenceing into a gushing river in front of the door. The grey static on the screen mirrored the heavy rain outside. Washing hung limp on the line and the face of a cat was just visible in the shadow of the car. The air felt cold and damp. I tucked my chin into the top of my sweatshirt and my feet beneath me. In front of me were two VHS tapes. Today I am going to watch the animated Just So stories by Rudyard Kipling, read by Jack Nicholson. His voice will drawl with wisdom over the camel getting its hump and the elephant child, the leopard and its spots and how the rhino's smooth skin became so wrinkled, ending each explanation with a slow, deep 'Oh best beloved'.

After the tape ended and I had heard all of the animal mutation myths, Nicholson's voice stayed with me. His 'long, grey, green greasy' voice was so wise...oh best beloved. I don't remember if my mind had a voice before this. Nicholson wasn't my only narrator; Oliver Postgate's voice also filled my head. Inserting my second cassette, I could listen to the revisionist Norse myths of Noggin the Nog. I have had many narrators over the years, all curated into my own voices by my middle-class-BBC-Radio-4-perpetually-playing-in-the-background upbringing.

I am never alone. There is always something or someone with me; I carry the stories and the voices. It is the most intimate thing: to exist as a voice in someone else's head.

Citroën Walkman

It is the summer of 1997 and we are about to set off on a 1000-mile car journey to the Czech Republic.

Me and my brother have each been given a personal cassette player and a set of 5 tapes which have an abridged version of Homer's Iliad on them, read by Tony Robinson. We are sat in the back of the car waiting to leave. The boot is crammed with camping gear and our bags take up our leg room; our seat is cushioned with all the bedding. Our sister sits in the middle, both as a barrier between me and my younger brother and because she gets car sick. She already had a Walkman, and she had two music tapes, Portishead and Skunk Anansie. In the car were a best of Prince and a best of the Rolling Stones album, Kate Bush Hounds of Love and several INXS tapes. The three of us are strapped into the back swaddled in blankets and sweltering in the August sun as we waited for our parents to lock up the house. We were going to the Czech Republic. It sounded very exotic. I don't remember being anxious about it because like every holiday we were going to do the same thing and be with the same people. We were going to a Folk Festival; with the exception of going to see grandparents this was always the destination; another Folk Festival. We would camp on the sports fields of schools across the country, be expected to make paper lanterns in the craft tent and follow a bunch of folk dancers around towns all over England.

But this was the first time we would be going abroad, like the proper holidays that all our school friends had. So with no comprehension of where we were going, it was with excitement that we waited in the car. Being bought a Walkman to listen to had gone a long way to bribing me and my brother into not protesting about this long journey. We had never had any audio equipment of our own before, being close enough in age and size that we were very used to being given the same things, being dressed in the same outfit on occasion. It helped keep the peace if things were fair and equal. After waiting, strapped into the car for what seemed like ages, our parents were finally ready to leave. Dad turned the key to the ignition; the car was a 1989 Citroën BX Diesel in red. The special thing about these cars, when you are a child, is how the suspension goes up and down. When the car has been turned off for a few hours the suspension slumps and the car sags, and appears to lay on the ground like a cow in the rain. But when you turn the key, the engine belches into life and slowly pumps up the suspension. The car is lifted into the air and sits high and proud on its wheels, alive and ready for action, burbling like the lyrical purring of a beast.

The car crunched over the grey gravel drive. The indicator clicking left, we rolled up to the road, over the hump at the gate, and began our descent down the hill towards the main road. But as we wound through the narrow lanes, green hedges flashing on either side I was far away in Ithaca. I had my headphones on and as I stared blank out the window at the scene passing by, I was with Odysseus hunting wild boar on a tiny island off the Greek mainland. He begins his adventure by being gored in the leg when a boar charges at him; by getting sucked into the oath that all of Helen's suitors agree to (that eventually leads to that face launching a 1000 ships); by meeting Helen's maid Penelope and carving their bed in an olive tree which becomes the centre of their home. The end of this phase of the story comes when Menelaus is gathering the men who agreed to the pact, to aid him to retrieve Helen from Paris and Troy. Odysseus disguises himself as a potato

farmer when he is summoned, but the ruse fails and he goes to war leaving his home and family. Despite his clowning wit, Odysseus' narrative is defined by the whim of the fates

By the time we get to Dover and the ferry, it is dark. The hulking boat churns the black water as it pushes away from the port. I take a break from the story and borrow my sister's Portishead tape. The plaintive guitar, eerie synthesizers and siren voice of the music heighten my mood as I walk the steel decks of the ferry. We floated in the black of the night on our blue and white vessel that creaked and shuddered dark with rust, the turbines churning the water. I didn't feel like an adventurer, I felt the aching loneliness of displacement. Distant lights ebbed on the scattered horizon. The wind stung with gentle rain and spray. The ghostly shapes of gulls lit by the glow from cabins hovered in the lee of the ship. And we trudged across the English Channel.

Grimspound and Wistmans wood

The land shifted. A shuddering mat of heavy green that rose, fell, twitched and fluttered in the biting wind that lashed it into motion. I crested a hill and the land broke in front of me; down into a wide valley, before rising up on the other side capped with a foam of shattered rock. The scene is lit by dark rolling clouds. This is Dartmoor. A landscape of windswept moorland, the steppe of the West Country, a bubble of volcanic rock rising above the Devon hills.

Before this place was known for Kitty Jay, The Hairy Hand and the Hound of the Baskerville's, many thousands of years ago it was home to some of the first settlers of England. They created this landscape, shaping it with axes made from deer antler. Their deforestation was slow, taking about a decade to clear a mile, but over millennia they created the landscape of

Britain. What is unique about their effect on the moorland is that forests have never returned; the conditions that created the forests no longer exist. The soil is a thin layer of ancient leaf mulch, called peat, that covers the granite bedrock. At the peaks of many hills across the landscape the soil has eroded away, peeling back to reveal giant granite boulders which the wind harasses, casting the rocks down the hillside. Nestled in the valley below one of these tors is an ancient wood. It is the last surviving example of a forest that used to cover the land, before humans settled. The trees are small, gnarled, dark-grey oaks, the canopy is low and close. Sheltering from the elements in amongst the trees are many varieties of moss and lichen. They coat the bark in grey green fur, and create a thick carpet on the ground.

This is a landscape scattered with natural and human mysteries.

To the north, a road skirts this land mass dipping and weaving across the undulating sea of green. The turbo whines as the car is dropped into 4th gear to overtake a lorry. The revs are pushed high and the engine spools, whirring with renewed energy as the music swells on the radio. I feel myself being pulled deeper into the squashy leather seat as we accelerate up the hill: like an astronaut at take-off. Dad likes to listen to classical music in the car as we drive through the Devon landscape. We are coming back from a job; I am working for him surveying historic houses all over the county. We work for farmers with falling down old barns, young couples who want to extend their small cottage and pubs with fire-damaged thatched roofs. Today I had been climbing around inside a filthy hayloft, measuring the joists and lintels. My task is to draw them up on the computer so the engineers can run stress tests and recommend a plan to reinforce the buildings. But most of my time is spent travelling around the countryside to remote tumble-down houses and trying to interpret wonky old timbers into structural mathematics. The building I then represent on

the computer is fictional. It is a fiction created between the inaccuracy of my measurements, the engineers' specifications and the builder's materials and knowledge.

As we glide through the landscape today we are listening to 'Vaughan Williams: Fantasia On a Theme by Thomas Tallis', a piece for string orchestra that swells and falls mimicking the shape of the road. Dad tells me it is one of the pieces he would like played at his funeral.

The SMS Séance

The bodies move together. In my memory everyone is dressed in black. They are crammed into every room across 3 storeys and spill outside into a fenced area crowding the burger van and smoking. Sweat glistens on their leery chattering faces as they suck on badly rolled cigarettes and the tongues of strangers. A hairy-armed man doles out squashy burger buns doused in ketchup, as drunkards yell their food orders over the drone of both the van's generator and the rhythmic thumping from inside the club. The air was fresh with sea breeze and gulls hovered outside the orange glow of lights.

Stepping inside through the heavy doors was like diving underwater. The air pressure changed, thickened into a soup of vaporised sweat and Jäger-bombs; sickly sweet. Not only was the air thick as I pushed through the warm, wet, throbbing bodies; but walking was an effort, every step was hindered by a thick meniscus of spilt beer and melting vinyl. Lifting my gooey feet and heading to the bar I wait for a long time, crowded by obnoxious conversations. I lean over my watery pint and quench myself, pushing back through the crowds, beams of coloured light cutting clean through the thick air. The music is so loud and I dance myself into isolation.

It hadn't taken long to lose the friends I had arrived with, and after searching the many floors of the club I embraced my solitude. Eventually though I needed fresh air, and as I stepped out onto the street in the dim glow of light, the seagulls watch me stumble along the pavement. I check my phone to text the people I had started the night with. I was in need of company. As I opened my contact list to search, I stopped and stared at the name, 'Cousin Adam'. It was September; Adam's funeral had been in May. I selected his name and spent a long time staring at the blank text field before I softly pressed the orange glowing letter keys to tell him that we all missed him, especially his mother. The message sent, I walked quietly through the town centre with its cavorting couples. Behind some of the raucous clubs a silent spire beckoned me and I climbed the worn stone steps past the church. Weaving my way through the family crypts I came to a stone plinth. The hilltop graveyard overlooked the town; shouts and screams of drunken revelry could be heard above distant music and the blown exhausts of boy racers streaked through the maze of streets. All was blanketed in the sallow glaze of street light. I cracked open the last can I had in my pocket, pouring half into the earth at my feet. I am in the town of Bournemouth, sitting at the grave of Mary Shelley.

Eventually, numb from resting on the cold granite, I walk up through the park, its lawn a bed of cool dew. The air was still. Dark blue clouds hung sleepily in the sky, highlighted by the coming dawn. I rounded the corner to the road I lived on. The street lights buzzed. As I approached my house the buzzing stopped, the street lamp ahead of me had gone out. The greasy orange pavement was a soft blue in the moonlight. I hesitated. Cautiously I stepped from the warmth of the orange light into the blue. My footsteps seemed deadened as I walked through. I carried on down the street. As I got to my gate I turned back. The street light was still off. The gate shut with a clatter behind me and I was through the threshold.

Deckchairs in the Dark

The room is lit by the reflected light from a projection screen, casting a cold grey glow across the gallery audience. I have just stepped into the Hito Steyerl installation, ‘Empire of the Sun’.

There is a specific crowd psychology that enacts itself on audiences in gallery screening spaces. Confusions around the etiquette of this space are created by several factors:

1. The path of light from the projector to the screen creates a large area in the space that, if entered, will erase the image.
2. A screening space in a gallery often occupies two spatial languages at once—that of museum/gallery space and theatre/cinema.

The viewing conventions and social etiquette for each of these spaces conflict, causing audience members to halt when they enter, waiting to see what every one else does. But as most people halt with the preceding person, this action now establishes itself as the social norm.

With this in mind artists and curators will often, especially for a single screen video artwork, allow for the formalities of the space to accommodate the common viewing practices of both cinema/tv and gallery/museum. At the LA MOCA installation of ‘Empire of the Sun’, I have the choice to participate in either or both. I can pass through the back of the room viewing this work for an average 7.6 seconds, or I can take up residence in one of the deckchairs provided. To sit in one of the chairs up front does bring you into the field of view of those spectators behind. You are subsumed into the work itself, your languid form alters the terrain in front of the rear audience. I walk straight up to the front and engage in the odd lounging viewing experience. I

slump deeper and deeper into my deckchair and I try mentally to step outside this experience and analyse it. To use it to sift and filter out its own reference, as though panning for gold with a sieve whilst having an out of body experience or attempting to think the solution to a Rubik's cube.

Aside from the light emitting from the projector, there is another light source in the room though it does little to illuminate. It is a grid of blue lines that define the shape of the dark room, "the grid possesses several structural properties which make it inherently susceptible to vanguard appropriation. One of these is the grid's imperviousness to language." Krauss (158) Once again the grid is called forth by an artist, within which to trap themselves. In this instance, to dissolve the binary opposition of the museum vs theatre space created by the projected image in the gallery, and also to summon the references of an environment not meant for human eyes; an architecture of our jealousy and nostalgia of the future past. It is the grid of pixels on a screen, an aid to proportionally correct drawing, the archaeologist's grid, a biologist's quadrant, a Star Trek holo-deck or the surrounding city blocks.

Wasteland

The sun beat down, parching the air, baking the bricks until they crumbled around the edges. The concrete grid of roadways cracked and blistered, glistened in the heat. We were in the wasteland. A part of town in purgatory. A place where the flotsam of Los Angeles gather and meander amongst the crumbling warehouses. A place of contradiction. Frequented by those dishevelled persons pushing all their belongings in a shopping trolley, and those looking to belong.

The idea of the façade is here turned inside out. The warehouse units have been made redundant from their original purpose. Where they used to fulfil the role of holding pens for the commodities of American industry awaiting transport to retail (superfluous in the face of just-in-time production and a consumer-pulled industry seeking increased efficiency and a drop in overheads), now they play host to an industry where storage is much more likely to be a positive factor in the commodity's exchange value. The shabby exteriors of these crumbling monuments to the twentieth century have the pristine white interiors of contemporary art galleries. Artworks are commodities designed to appreciate through use.

It is a Saturday afternoon and the cool box interiors reverberate with the chatter of the crowds who gather in these rooms. They swarm from venue to venue. The warehouses lined with pristine white, their occupants decked in chic black. These are people who know how to look good. They are here to do it, and they do it oh so well!

Terminal

“... tomorrow, with its violence, has made the colors fade from the stories of yesterday.” Umberto Eco (47)

Thud thud. Thud thud. Thud thud, thud thud; thud thud (thud thud). Thud thud. The dappled light pulsed through the window as our car thudded over the Vincent Thomas Bridge. Suspended over Terminal Island, beneath us the harbour of Los Angeles. Mountains of shipping containers stacked like the Lego bricks of an obsessive child. A subtly shifting landscape, as each ship at port was

simultaneously loaded and unloaded, and one container from the port was swapped for one on the deck of the ship. The mutable crenelated landscape, shaped by cranes and forklifts, received and expelled its goods. As we descended the exit ramp our destination came into view, and although it was dwarfed in scale by some of the container ships, the R.M.S Queen Mary still had a daunting presence.

I had known of this ship since I was very young. Although I read it had come to rest in Long Beach, California, I hadn't understood what meeting this ship would mean to me when I first saw it in the sepia smoggy haze of the hot LA afternoon. As I approached, its flanks rose up from the harbour-side; a dark wall mottled with rivets, a patchwork of iron plating. Seemingly impenetrable, except to my childhood memories.

In my possession as a child, I had a book of illustrations of castles, tanks, helicopters, and each of the illustrations had cutaways. Explosions where the interiors of the subjects were revealed, like structural schematics, giving multiple views of their external form and inner functions. Through the intricate drawings you could explore the rooms, corridors and lift shafts of the Empire State Building, or the inner workings of a steam train boiler. The centrefold of this book opened up to expose the full length of the twentieth century dreadnought, the Cunard Liner ship, The Queen Mary. I would spend hours peering, looking through cabins, engine rooms, dining halls. Picking out miniscule figures eating or enjoying the indoor swimming pool, the captain at the wheel and the workmen stoking the furnaces. But I didn't dare to step inside the real ship, to walk the passages I had known as a child. "The pleasure of imitation, as the ancients knew, is one of the most innate in the human spirit; but here we not only enjoy a perfect imitation, we also enjoy the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it." Umberto Eco (46) wrote about the models and miniatures of Disneyland in *Travels*

in Hyperreality. Where as Eco is on a journey around America discovering and revelling in the copies of European art, funfairs and freak shows in the manner of a semiotician. When confronted with the genuine artefact of my experience, I was choosing whether or not to overwrite my childhood memories. I couldn't have the real Queen Mary exposed to me through an exploration of its various decks or by staying in one of the cabins. To fulfil a real experience of the Queen Mary would be to deliberately erase a memory from my past. The visceral tactile experience of feeling the red soft patterned carpet of the hallways underfoot, and the gripping touch of brass banisters and epoxy lacquered veneers of the staircases and bar tops would replace the sensations of turning the pages of a book lying on my bedroom floor 20 year ago.

Appendices

In the following notes, I hope to tease out themes from each piece of writing as a method of revealing symbols and motifs of my work, as well as thoughts on the context of Art.

‘The Plain’

‘The Plain’ is a description of a reoccurring dream I used to have where a herd of dinosaurs would crush my family.

This piece sets the tone for the writings which stem from childhood memories, comparing my conscious and unconscious imagination. The images in the dream seem to have aesthetic echoes with some of the writing set in Los Angeles (LA), especially because my childhood images of deserts and Palaeolithic beasts originate in LA and its visual industries. The scene I describe is uncannily similar to the LA basin; the teeming mass of dinosaurs described now being dredged up by a flood of mechanical structures. This is not really true, because I think the west coast of USA was underwater during the Cretaceous period but “We are incapable of seeing a series of unfamiliar signs or of hearing a suggestion of unknown words, without at once falsifying the perception from considerations of intelligibility, on the basis of something already known to us.” Freud (23). These are the connections I make for this image; I use my fear of dead lizards as a key to understand Los Angeles, a symbol of the unfocused malevolence of capitalism. On this plain sit all the functions of this global non-human entity. Vascular trade pumped through the heart of the port, fuelled by oil drawn into its system by the osmosis of Just-in-time production, and carried by the great beasts of articulated lorries, shunting trains and leviathan container ships. The city is represented and re-presented by waves of media emanating the sedentary myths of liberalism, channelling every living room into an opium den of “Netflix and chill”, as Marx wouldn’t have

said. And in the valley of oozing silicone, new means of future control splurge forth to augment our bodies in virtual reality and in ‘not-virtual reality’. How could I find my family after such a trampling? A stupid question.

‘My first narrator was Jack Nicholson’

This story is about media, myth and internal dialogue.

Narration and my voice have become important tools in my work. In ‘My first narrator was Jack Nicholson’, I would have loved to have written more about the role of listening to British radio as a connection to home whilst living in the United States, because it is something I emulate in my own narration. But I felt that the memory I recall in the story touches on more subjects, relating to culture and narrative.

The Sagas of Noggin the Nog are a collection of animated stories which could be seen as a revisionist history of the Vikings, not cast as marauders, but as potato farmers and problem solvers. In the stories, Noggin, king of the Nogs, is cast as a kind king who is loved by his people because of his deeds, such as helping homeless dragons, invisible people and giants. The Just So Stories have a complicated contemporary reading. Great children’s’ literature to many, they are symbols of colonialism and cultural appropriation which, although I think is worth acknowledging, both of these canons of literature have contemporary value as a gateway into a discussion around issues of representation and a revision of standard historical/mythological meta narratives.

Without restituting History to other than just the Occident, or more accurately, recognising the universality of the concept of History while perhaps leaving its specific configurations to individual cultures, it is untenable and unrealistic to place such other temporal and ideological concepts as Modernism, Modernity, Contemporaneity, Development, in the arena. If Time is a colony, then nothing is free. Oguibe (1171)

To ignore narratives that oppose one's personal ethics and to consign them to a binary reading of good or bad is to neutralise the agency of the story.

'Citröen Walkman'

Stories, journeys, landscape, transport animism.

In Citröen Walkman I am mapping the conflict I feel about the symbol of the car with my introduction to classical myth. It is about first personal narrative and individual freedom. I tell this as a childhood memory to remove myself from the trappings of an adult who searches for the didactic value in story and symbol. My character vacillates between feeling akin to Odysseus and at the same time alone, unable to comprehend the character's motivations, yet similarly out of control of their destiny. The attempt to make connections between one's own life and that of a fictional character leave me open to building new mental connections in the world around me.

'Grimspound and Wistmans Wood'

Is about the relationship between humans and landscape; the fiction of nature and mathematics as representational models.

I started writing this story about my connection to the landscape I grew up in, as a tool for thinking about ancient people and bridging the gap in time between myself and humans who lived in the past. This is a practice of squashing time; of changing my perception both of a present moment and of history, similar to looking at a film strip; a static object that represents a set passage of time. It was perhaps inevitable that whilst writing about the man-made nature of an ancient landscape I would consider my own contemporary effect on the landscape, through building projects I worked on assisting my father. This revealed a cognitive dissonance between

my actions and effect on the world, and the study of history as a separate discipline. “longing and desire which causes the longing for and seeking of validation through tradition. Vernacular personal narratives of heritage and tradition interest me as much as grand scale narratives of history endorsed by institutions or states.” (Steyerl) In my story, the longing plays out in the fictional mathematical balancing of the engineering projects, but also the mapping of a re-interpreted renaissance Thomas Tallis piece by Vaughn Williams onto an experience of landscape.

‘The SMS Séance’

Modern technology, spirituality and the dead. About being alone in a crowd as a place of solace and listening, perhaps to remember and grieve.

Loneliness of one’s own experience permeates all my work. In ‘The SMS Séance’, at first the reader is isolated from the night-time revellers, experiencing them as a mass, like an ocean or their bodies dissolving into the atmosphere. Even when I join them in dancing it only serves to ground me in my own body. But this lack of communion with the living puts me on a plane with the dead. The mobile phone has been seeping its way into my work as motif, because of its transgressive nature. It is an object of physical engagement with us. Through ergonomics and interface design, it allows us to reach outside our bodies in a way few people comprehend. Our actions are translated to coding languages built from the corpses of tech companies that folded in successive market crashes; a broken semiotic-techno-chain. This is all played out in an electromagnetic ribbon that weaves us all together. It represents the unknown of death.

In this story, I combine two evenings into one. As of this moment, I have been unable to write about the role of Science Fiction as a rhetorical tool for understanding the world. I wanted to reference Mary Shelley because of her place at the intersection between Science Fiction,

Progressive Politics and Romanticism, and pay respect to the themes and ideals of her work. I do not know that an offering of a can of cheap lager was the right way to pay that respect, but my twenty-year-old self thought so. It smacks much more of the Romantic gesture typical of her peers.

‘Deckchairs in the Dark’

Not the white cube and its contexts. Spectator or object.

Deckchairs in the dark is about experiencing video in gallery settings. The first use of the word ‘gallery’ described a long, windowed room often on an upper floor of a grand house, in which the family portraits could be displayed. Along with other developments in the public display of art, the museum presented galleries as spaces for education, espousing the artistic merit of the classics and appropriating the form of ancient temples. With the birth of the middling classes; people who aspired not to be poor and visited the galleries whose still mostly overt role was to display further aspirational scenes of wealth, privilege and heritage. Did it take two World Wars and the white washing of the gallery to change its purpose, or is it still imbued with latent (or overt) class privilege? What happens when you bring the etiquette of this space together with a theatre?

Theatre originated as a multi-faceted public forum; whether chaste or bawdy, its content is story telling. Diverging throughout recent centuries to include Opera, Music Hall, Ballet and Cinema (often the form appropriated by the video artist) adding to the medium of dramatic arts. Combining these two spaces is an overlapping of the static and transitory arts; the gallery is in the theatre and the theatre in the gallery.

Before minimalism, art could be understood as a form of cultural production defined by an investigation and manipulation of two- and three-dimensional forms resulting

in the creation of discrete, autonomous, aesthetic constructions. Over the course of the past thirty years, art has been redefined as the analysis of and intervention on the social relations of which such cultural production - and the symbolic systems of which they are a manifestation - is a transformed and misrecognized expression. (Fraser 37)

The combination of two separate spaces/etiquettes/histories is a work in itself. Moving image artwork is not suited to gallery viewing; it defies the brief encounter of static visual art; it asks you to stand still for longer, to change your ambling promenade through the gallery and be publicly square-eyed and to register your aesthetic appreciation externally; to reveal that you are un-educated in this artwork.

‘The Sun Beat Down’

‘The Sun Beat Down’ continues the focus on ‘The Gallery’, this time questioning the difference between a gallery and the warehouse unit which houses it.

I question why I am drawn to these spaces; what is it about a huge post-industrial space that makes artwork look good? Is it an assertion by art industry professionals that the art market is more stable than other forms of consumer capitalism; that they can survive where regular trade cannot? Do the audience get a thrill from traversing some of the poorest neighbourhoods of cities in order to see and be seen amongst some of the highest end goods? Or are the 19th and 20th century warehouses equivalent to the temple-like aesthetic that art museums adopted? An affirmation that a golden age has passed and a new civilisation is being built on its ashes? I think these questions raise further debates about the difference between art and culture, about the ethical role of artists in the process of gentrification.

‘Terminal’

Memory, vicarious experience and nostalgia: Choosing fiction over reality, or rather fearing the present erasing the past.

Here my stories come back to fulfil the images proffered in “The Plain’ and to consider the pervasive nature of tactile experience. ‘Is there no meaning that can resist the capture with which form threatens us?’” (Barthes, qtd in Conrad) It is an idea that draws my art work to questions of object-hood. Umberto Eco begins the piece with a quote about the effect of hope for the future on the contemporary use of historical narratives, because History is the axis on which representation pivots. It is his exploration of the nuances between literary depictions of physical objects rendered in the imagination, and visual artworks attempting to replicate objects of the imagination that counterpoints Barthes question. Both are about the difference between conjuring (literature) and manifestation (sculpture); concept and form. This is a question that drives my practice, leading me to represent in the medium of video, oscillating between indexical visual image making and rhetorical poetic literary signification. The piece expresses the fear of transitioning between these two states with the idea that the form will overwhelm the concept, crystallising it into something conceptually fragile and disappointing. My inaction is an act of nostalgic preservation which I regret but would repeat without reserve.

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EDUCATION

2015 - Graduate Sculpture Candidate, Syracuse University, NY.

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EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Godforsaken*, Syracuse, NY
Hiding in Plain Sight, SUart Gallery, Syracuse, NY
Hiding in Plain Sight, Art Helix, Brooklyn, NY
- 2017 *Milling*, Shopping Town Mall, Syracuse, NY
In the Presence of too much past, Random Access Gallery, Syracuse, NY
Future Classic, Olive Tjaden Experimental Space, Cornell University
Museum Views, Biblio Gallery, Syracuse, NY
- 2016 *Tumult of Frozen Creatures*, CB1, Los Angeles, CA
On the Map, Angels Gate Cultural Center, San Pedro, CA
Most Manly Sculpture Show, Spark Art Space, Syracuse, NY. Curated.
In the Pines, Spark Art Space, Syracuse, NY
Timeless Fetish, Random Access, Syracuse, NY
Timeless Fetish, Brink Gallery, Missoula, MT
- 2015 *A Few Others Now*, Spark Art Space, Syracuse, NY
- 2013 *Chasing Sputnik*, Quay Arts Centre, Isle of Wight.
- 2012 *Morris Photography*, Cecil Sharp House, London. Curated.
- 2011 *Brink*, The Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London
- 2010 *Shop*, Burlington arcade, Old Christchurch road, Bournemouth
Freak Show, Studio 45 Bournemouth
Inter{Personal} North Light Studio 5, Bournemouth 2009

GRANTS

- 2016 VPA Creative Opportunity Grant, Syracuse University
- 2015 VPA MFA Scholarship, Syracuse University
- 2012 Art South West
- 2010 Arts University Bournemouth Project Grant

RESIDENCIES

2016 LA Turner Semester Residency, Los Angeles
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