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Object Data Memory

An exhibition

The Material Forms of Memory: a creative arts praxis examining family archive materiality and the performance of memory through installation art

An exegesis

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Masters of Arts by Research

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This research investigates how new media has affected family archive materiality and what effect this might have on what and how we remember. Photographs, videos and sentimental objects became of personal interest to me after the death of my father when I was 10 years old, after which, the tangible artefacts of memory became poignant reminders of him. In recent years, I have witnessed my grandmother suffer from Alzheimer’s and watched her memory deteriorate with this disease. These subjective experiences have influenced my relationship with family archives and opened up questions regarding the role technologies provide to supplement, enhance and reinforce our memories. In this exegesis, the research process is critically analysed to map how my creative arts practices have manifested through theoretical frameworks, studio inquiry and exhibiting creative work.

**Aim**

The aim of this creative arts praxis is to investigate the participatory engagement with family archive materiality and how this might affect the performance of memory. It is through creative arts praxis, in conjunction with reflexivity and a multi-method research approach including installation art, photography and new media that I intend to investigate these discourses. The aim is to use installation art to investigate how the inherent materiality of family archives produced from both old and new media influence our bodily engagement and visual experience, which ultimately influences our mnemonic processes.

**Significance**

The significance of my creative arts praxis lies in its potential to generate unique and creative ways of engaging with discourses on family archive materiality and memory through installation art. By integrating subjective, emergent and interdisciplinary approaches to creative research, it highlights the capacity to “generate personally situated knowledge, while at the same time, revealing philosophical, social and cultural contexts for the critical intervention and application of knowledge outcomes” (Barrett, 2009, p.2). Creative arts praxis centralises the role of artists embedded in the research process and art-making
practice—the “main methodology is responsive, driven by the requirements of practice and the creative dynamic of the artwork” (Gray, 1996, p. 15). My research sits within the nexus of creative arts praxis—the critical investigation of studio practices have resulted in the emergence of new methods and art making processes in the form of creative outputs.

These methods emerged as a result of critically analysing both studio practices and theoretical discourses through an on-going reflexive engagement. The implementation of a hybrid, dynamic and transparent studio practice, opens up a space to experiment and produce artistic outcomes that have the capacity to reveal new forms of knowledge and cultural and social experiences (Grey, 1996; Stewart, 2006; Barret & Bolt, 2010). The significance of my research is that it uses a creative arts praxis methodology to reveal theoretical discourses and subjective experiences critical to studio outcomes. The scope of this research is defined through the analysis of my family archives, including photographs, negatives, 35mm slides, videos, audio interviews and personal items. As a result, new and hybrid research methods emerge to include, substantiate and validate the arts practitioner as maintaining a fundamental role to facilitate and interpret the art making process, whilst positioning such analysis alongside, and within theoretical frameworks and academic rigor (Crouch, 2007; Sullivan, 2006; Etherington, 2004; Barrett & Bolt, 2010; 2013). In using my family archives as source materials, they become embedded within the research.

**Research Questions**

The research questions that drive and inform the theoretical framework and studio practices of this creative arts praxis are—

1. How is new media altering traditional notions of family archives and the performance of memory?
2. In what ways might a creative arts praxis use installation art to illuminate the participatory engagement with family archive materiality to mediate our mnemonic processes?

**Chapter Outlines**

This exegesis will first set parameters through existing literature in relevant fields that ultimate defines the scope of this research. The Literature Review has been divided into four
main sections—materiality, memory, family archives and new media. To limit the scope for this research, these four broad themes are further separated into discourses that directly inform my research questions. Integrated throughout this exegesis are works from artists Tacita Dean and Kutluğ Ataman to draw parallels between the literature that frames my research and how these ideas are conceptualised through arts-based research. The next part of this exegesis—Methodologies defines creative arts praxis as the main methodology for this research, in conjunction with reflexivity and a multi-method research approach using photography, new media and installation art.

Chapter One—Emerging from the Darkroom, introduces my creative arts praxis through early studio experimentation and the work exhibited for Becomings (2014). This mode of studio inquiry revealed media that I had not considered using in my research—projectors, digital media and installation. The intention of Chapter Two—Investigating the Participatory Engagement with Family Archives in The Substance of Memory, was to reflexively engage with a series of installations exhibited in January 2015 at Spectrum Project Space, Perth. This chapter is divided into the residency process and then the seven individual works exhibited—A Year in the Life of the Hornums, Displacement, I Forget Now, Behind the Photograph, Online Archives of Family Objects, It’s 10 o’clock in the morning and daddy’s just gotten up to have breakfast, Slide Nights.

In the last chapter, Chapter Three—Illuminating Family Archive Materiality in Multi-media Installation Object Data Memory, I analyse the final exhibition for this Masters of Arts research held in May 2015 at Free Range Gallery, Perth. This installation is comprised of a three-panel projection installation and over 3000 35mm slide sculptures. The concluding section emphasises the conceptual frameworks that underpin this research and intends to draw together pivotal theoretical discourses and to sum up the outcomes of this creative arts praxis.