ACCUMULATING, HIDING AND TRACING
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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
The focus of this thesis is to elucidate the way in which memory attaches itself to objects, especially objects that exist within and around a personal living space like a bedroom or living room. I believe that the reasons for such a simple act as saving are extremely complex. This action has the ability to disinter the more tender portions of the self and one’s history. An object, be it a letter or a piece of furniture, possesses the capacity to act as a proxy for things beyond itself and its seemingly simple material existence. They can subtly disclose elusive, but poignant aspects of someone’s internal life—of the places they have called home, perhaps whom they have loved, and what they have left behind out of necessity or sheer abandonment. I am drawn to the metaphorical nature of these objects—of the traces of life they carry and the simultaneously objective and subjective memory that can be found in the contents of a bureau’s drawers or literally written or scraped on its surface. They exist beyond metaphor. I want the presence of one thing to show the absence of another and understood by the element of trace. I want the work to seem both dead and alive as well as something that comes from our daily reality, but also is derivative of fiction; I want the roles of what is public and private to be reversed. I want to gently point the opposing, but intertwined will to hide, and the desire to be found out.
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Accumulation

“To understand what people are and what they might become, one must understand what goes on between people and things.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*

I am drawn to the human tendency to physically and psychologically accumulate objects. I believe that this habit of accumulation and what we choose to surround ourselves with reveals conscious and unconscious parts of our identity as it relates to memory. Whatever form this accumulation takes, whether from the necessities of life in the form of receipts and bills or in a more abstract form, I consider the reasons for such a simple act of saving to be extremely complex. I think of the rocks I’ve collected from various places I have called home and the letters I have saved, not because of the physicality of that rock or piece of paper, but because of their ability to act as a proxy for people, places, and past events.

I believe that we save and accumulate to remember, to visit our past selves. However, in an abrupt way, these objects alone carry no meaning in and of themselves. They are in fact just objects, surrogates, “an ecology of signs” for something beyond themselves. They materially exist, but we attribute, we give, we construct their meaning and the intricate internal spaces they occupy.

I have kept the most absurd things like a piece of paper with call numbers for books in a friend’s handwriting, a small discolored piece of paper with an Emily Dickinson poem my grandmother hid in the back of her top drawer in an old cigar

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2 Ibid, 17
box, and a single earring without its pair. The seemingly insignificant, inexplicable presence of these objects, be it a saved letter or a receipt, begs the question of value and how value is assigned to an object and exactly what kind of value. Often the most cherished things we cleave to have no societal value. These objects possess an exclusively associative worth not understood and only partially grasped, if at all, by the external world. Intrinsic value born from association is not rooted in objective monetary value, but is created by a subjective experience with that particular object—my memory. In a way, the undisclosed meaning I attach to these objects serve as a tangible, perhaps more stable entity in its intentionally fabricated form than anything that may exist in my reality, in my present moment.

In *J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans (I have more memories than if I was one thousand years old)*, I hope to not only point to the physical act of accumulation, but also to elicit the psychological, internal realm in which such things, like memory, can exist and subsist on the meaning attached to it by their keeper. I want to highlight the personal and, more often than not, esoteric nature of why we choose to keep rather than throw away.

In this installation, as each shelf expands up the wall, becoming less and less accessible to the viewer, I hope to accentuate the reticence of the objects and the discretion employed by their owner in relation to the object, in this case the

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3 Growing up, my mother gave me a hope chest. In effect, this chest was a small box in which I could save important letters and small objects. In this hope chest, I have a torn off piece of paper from a grade school folder with my friend writing that, upon her move, of all her friends she will miss me most; a poem, a letter from my English teacher from 8th grade; a lock of hair; a few stones. It is a little time capsule that catalogues my life from fourth to eighth grade. To the outside world, these tokens are meaningless and without history.

4 In effect, this fabricated construction of an idea, like that of “home,” is an ephemeral, maybe more empty surrogate than any of my nostalgic notions surrounding the objects within my space. Lately, the mere idea of home seems more compelling, rather than the existence of a real one.
envelopes. Why do these objects exist at all? Though the viewer can identify the objects on the upper shelves as envelopes, there is still a latent desire to be able to reach those loftier shelves. Perhaps what is accessible could offer me some information, and I could become privy to some intimate knowledge. The envelopes themselves volunteer no insight. They cannot be opened as a normal envelope could without completely destroying the object and any information that could be gleaned from it. The fragility of the envelopes almost invites such a desperate act, but also begs to be held with the utmost care. For me, this tension speaks of the bifurcated nature of memory, of remembering and forgetting. The envelopes are both rooted in a willingness to remember, to coddle and to protect, as well as the readiness to forget and perhaps destroy it in order to know.

The placement of the shelves on the wall and around the corners serves both a formal and conceptual purpose. In many ways, their placement acts as a composition dealing with balance, asymmetry, density and dispersion within an architectural space. In my choice of the type of shelf, that being akin to an antique mantel with molded edges, I want to conjure a domestic space, albeit a past one. The shelving units that sit in and wrap around the corners are particularly effective in existing within a present architectural space, while conjuring an internal space. The shelves and the way in which they mold to the space of a gallery are fragments of an architectural space. They become one with the space, almost growing off the walls.

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5 Throughout the making, I would refer to a particular scene from *The Labyrinth*, starring David Bowie. In this scene Bowie is singing “Within You” in a labyrinthine space. Flights of stairs lead every direction and gravity seems to have no bearing on the characters who are attempting to navigate the space. Everything is disjointed and not subject to the natural laws of the world. In many ways, I see the disorientation of that space in how these shelves climb up and around the wall.
Perhaps, they are also fragments of memory. For me, it is important to reference a lived space, one that is or has been inhabited.

In this piece, the envelopes act as the metaphorical substitute for the types of objects that come with associative meaning. For me, the envelope embodies the ultimate private space and could perhaps be one of the most intimate types of correspondence, especially given the nature of today’s current electronic condition of emailing and text messaging.

Though the change in communication is startlingly impersonal, with this piece I am not primarily concerned with the dramatic change in communication, but what a letter, a personally sealed and addressed envelope represents to a singular person. It denotes a type of care and awareness. While writing a letter, time is taken to concentrate solely on the person to whom the letter is being written. One is conscious of the language chosen to express one’s self. One edits and rewrites. As a result, within that tiny sliver of space in which a letter is placed and sealed rests the possibility of love, regret, delight, pleasure, seduction, loss—all human emotion. One licks the open flap to seal it with saliva, a suggestive gesture. There are few objects that are placed to one’s mouth in such an intimate manner, never mind using one’s tongue in particular—a cup to drink, a companion’s lips. Then, with its contents safely sealed, it is sent out into the world—in transit for a short or perhaps longer time depending on the destination—and then received. Federal laws prohibit it from being opened by any one other than its intended recipient. The letter and its protective envelope is a definitive, singular object destined for one person. There is intent.
Many people have referred to these envelopes as love letters. For me, they serve as empty icons for such intimacy—perhaps a lost familiarity and certainty that comes with the deliberation of a letter. Though many in number, stacked and sometimes overflowing over onto neighboring shelves, they are shells, voids with no such correspondence sealed within them. They perhaps serve as a longing for such a thing. Only when held up to the light can one see the faint shadow of the ash left by whatever it once held—nothing and everything. The object itself is conceptually full, but the actual object as it exists in the multitudes only whispers at the possibility of such a richness.

These envelopes and their shelves hint at both preservation and purging. Here, the envelopes are safely and perhaps precariously stored away upon their assigned shelves. The shelves, coated with a skin of beeswax, suggest a desire for conservation and saving. As a material, wax carries notions of preservation as well as false life. To me, the word “preservation” carries connotations of keeping something alive as well as being a manner of protection. Formally, the shelves are set apart from the envelopes as a result of this thin layer. They slightly glisten because of the fleshy wax on the porcelain surface, while the envelopes are matte, translucent, and ashen. I think of wax museums with human figures and animals that are created to imitate life, but are not only not dead, but are grimly things that have never lived. Like their waxy counterparts, these shelves are inanimate things, but are responsible for preserving a metaphorical catalogue of memory.

In many ways, I view these shelves and envelopes as a representation for the way the brain could store memory and how I envision the library of my existence and
perception. Though the biological processing of visual perception is more or less understood through the medial temporal cortex, the storage of the memory itself if far less understood. There is no one place in the brain reserved for the storage of memory— it is a nebulous, amorphous thing.\textsuperscript{6} In \textit{J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans} there is an orderly disorder to the manner in which they are stacked or stored. Memory builds upon itself. There is a timeline, though it is a cyclical one that ebbs and flows and folds onto itself, sometimes crushing itself, always recreating itself. Despite the inscrutable sequence of memories, they are easily summoned by their appropriate triggers and then re-shelved in a completely new place.

Storage

\textit{“Even a bureau crammed with souvenirs, old bills, love letters, photographs, receipts, court depositions, locks of hair in plaits, hides fewer secrets than my brain could yield. It’s like a tomb, a corpse-filled Potter’s field, a pyramid where the dead lie down by scores. I am a graveyard that the moon abhors.”}\textsuperscript{7}

Charles Baudelaire, \textit{Spleen} from \textit{Les Fleurs du Mal}

Furniture within a space is a form of protection, a way to not only store one’s accumulated belongings, but also to conceal them. I do not mean concealment as a means to maintain an overall physical cleanliness within a space, though there is an underlying psychological measure of keeping up appearances— that the physical condition of a room is representative of an internal order or disorder. By “conceal,” I want to point to the purpose of storage as not only a means to keep and to save things, but also as a way to hide them and maintain a sense of privacy.


How and why does one need to create the condition of privacy, even when it pertains to seemingly mundane objects like the contents of a bureau? I often consider the line that exists between public and private and how this line can be created by the presence of an object within a space. Why is one thing placed on top of a dresser and others buried within its drawers? What creates this distinction or the need for such a division? I believe that the decision to keep an object uncovers a complex inventory of associations, whether the object is displayed or hidden within a place where only the owner knows it exists. However, if the owner is the only person who knows of its existence, then why is its presence necessary at all?

George Kubler, in *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* wrote of the line that precariously exists between the choice to acquire and keep an object and the choice to discard it. “The decision to discard something is far from being a simple decision…It is a reversal of values. Though the thing once was necessary, discarded it becomes litter or scrap. What was valuable is now worthless; the desirable now offends; the beautiful is now ugly.” My own interest in this differentiation between these two acts chiefly lays in the consciousness that comes with the act of saving and the subsequent line that is drawn between public and private as a result of keeping that chosen object in a given space. I believe that the objects that we purposefully choose to keep, or more importantly the delicate ties that are preserved by the retention of that object help to delineate space. The utter destruction of the object entails the eradication of any personal significance attached

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8 I define privacy as akin to the will to hide and the need to maintain a sense of intimacy with a given object or person. To me, something that is public is common knowledge that is easily ascertained without any auxiliary or privileged explanation.

to it. One must be ready to sever any ties associated with the object once it has been discarded, and perhaps permanently forgotten as a result, though there may be a residual guilt and regret that follows. Conversely, keeping the object, but hiding it rescues the underlying relevance from this ill-fated demise. Whether on display or tucked away, the choice to keep an object indicates a possession tied to a space and ultimately defines my living space as separate from anyone else’s. This, I would argue, is part of what constitutes a space as home.\textsuperscript{10}

**Possession of Space**

“The home place is full of ordinary objects...they are almost part of ourselves, too close to be seen.”\textsuperscript{11}

Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*

The concept of a home and what it means to call a place a home is latent throughout my work. As previously defined, I believe the notion of home is inextricably tied to the objects within a space:

“...One could argue that the home contains the most special objects: those that were selected by the person to attend to regularly (or irregularly) or to have close at hand, that create permanence in the intimate life of a person, and therefore are the most involved in the making up of his or her identity. The objects of the household represent...the endogenous being of the owner.”\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} The idea of the home being a private sphere of an individual or close-knit family is a relatively recent concept. Throughout history, the notion of home has been through various transformations and amalgamations, particularly pertaining to the notion of comfort. “The medieval home was a public, not private space...privacy was an unknown.” [see Rybczynski, Witold. *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. (New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Viking, 1986), 49 and 77. Only “exceptional people” like hermits and scholars were permitted to shut themselves in a room alone. The common area was just that, a common area, often serving as living room, kitchen, and bedroom at different points in the course of the day. There was no separation between spaces; the furniture was as moveable and multi-purposed as the room itself. Intimacy and privacy as a function of the home did not crystallize until the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and was a construction of the rise of the Bourgeois Age.

\textsuperscript{11} Tuan, Yi-fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977)

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p17. This also harks back to the notion of an exterior space indicating an internal state of being. In relation to the appearance of furniture in the home as representative of the development of self-
For me, these “communicative objects” are the things that have traveled with me from place to place. I have often joked about the places I’ve called home as once, twice and three times removed. I often question what the label of “home” signifies or what circumstances enable someone to identify a place as his or hers. In each location I have lived, there were differing degrees to which it was accepted as home. In one locale, I remember refusing to call it as such; there was an inability born from a stubborn rejection of this particular place to call my home.

Do-Ho Suh is an artist that deals with the notion of home in relation to cultural displacement in his work. One particularly poignant piece is The Perfect Home. This piece is an exact replica of his home in New York. Sewn out of diaphanous nylon fabric, this translucent version of his home is a floating ghost of his childhood home. In this form, this home is quite perfect—he can literally fold “home” up in a suitcase and take that familiar space with him where ever he goes. However, it is just a thin shell of home, an eidolon, an image of an ideal. I find Suh’s version of home sad, but undeniably beautiful.

What exactly constitutes the possession of space and how one comes to say “my home?” One way of viewing the possession of space as a conduit to the idea of home is not only through the person that inhabits it, but the objects and furniture within the space as well. Georges Perec in Species of Space writes, “the passage of time (my History) leaves behind a residue that accumulates; photographs, drawings, consciousness, John Lukas in the “Bourgeois Interior” writes, “The interior furniture of houses appeared together with the interior furniture of minds.” So, our personal space could very well inadvertently reveal our internal state of mind. (see Lukas, John, “Bourgeois Interior”, p 622 and Rybczynski, Witold. Home: A Short History of an Idea. (New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Viking, 1986, p 35-36)

the corpses of long since dried-up felt pens, shirts, non-returnable glasses and returnable glasses, cigar wrappers, tins, erasers, postcards, books, dust and knickknacks—this is what I call my fortune.”  

These objects, some useless or used, some acting as proxies for people, places and past events, are the residue of his life. Perhaps, these things are what compose the more intricate connections to the secret spaces of a home.

However, the comforting notion of a space as a home summons the possibility of abandonment. Whether suddenly as a result of catastrophe or incrementally as someone slowly removes him or herself from a space, the idea of an inhabited space being vacated is haunting and heartbreaking. This place, once theirs, is now without tenure or ownership.

I have had the eerie and awkward experience of entering a space in which I used to solely dwell. I had my pre-conceived knowledge, interpretation, and connection to that space, of how it was used and how it sounded and smelled. There was a feeling that it still belonged to me and I felt I needed to defend the space from its new occupants. They had it all wrong. In reality, that space was simply void of me, virtually without a trace that I had even lived there for two years. I had abandoned the space and the space reciprocated by abandoning me.

I talk about the importance of these types of objects and how they exist within and around a space that is specifically identified with a possessive pronoun, “mine,” not “yours.” My attraction and obsession with furniture, especially old furniture, stems from this need to indicate a space as my own—as a permanent space. In past

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work, I focused on the distillation of personal space through the icon of the suitcase. To me, the suitcase was the furniture of an indefinite existence. It spoke of transience and mobility, of a life controlled by caprice or irressible external forces. Furniture: plush couches, built-in shelves, large luxurious beds, and bureaus attend to the opposite condition—consistency and permanence. The presence of these types of furniture in a living room or a bedroom suggests a more stable, enduring existence. I think this could be why I am also attracted to habitual actions that are registered on the surface of certain pieces of furniture. Routine indicates an elapsing of time—you have lived in a space long enough to establish a routine in the first place.

In many ways, I believe the need for privacy stems from the ability to call a space “mine,” the secret possession and a need to protect the intimacy that such a personal ownership creates. “Although we live in physical environments, we create cultural environments within them. We continually personalize and humanize the given environment as a way of both adapting to it and creating order and significance.”\textsuperscript{15} This significance we attach to objects could be a source for the need for privacy.

The need for privacy creates the will to hide. This subsequent need to hide is not always a pragmatic act, but one that is complicated by the owner’s relationship to the thing being hidden. What profound memories are attached to the object that elicits such a strong desire to hide it? What loss is being buried along with the object? What type of shadow quietly hangs from it, causing it to sink so deeply into the caverns of the self? This thing, this weight, both real or symbolic, whether attached to a garment,

\textsuperscript{15} Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. \textit{The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self}. (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995.) 122
a letter, or a dried-up felt pen, is not simply being stored away with the object, it is purposefully being buried out of sight, perhaps from both its owner as well as from the outside world.

This act of hiding an object may be a way to protect the authenticity of a memory that is attached to that particular object or to protect the owner from remembering. Marcel Proust wrote about the fleeting nature of memory. Just as hunger and the satisfaction of eating dissipates with each bit of food, the poignancy and authenticity of a memory dissipates each time that memory is triggered. When something is recalled from the past, the connections between brain cells are actually being reformed, and hence memory becomes a malleable thing that is affected by the present situation in which it is remembered. Every time something is remembered, it is altered and therefore never the same. One actually preserves a memory in its most genuine form by forgetting.¹⁶

Forgetting is not just a symptom of aging, it is a natural function of the brain, a selective recall if you will. George Eliot writes in Middlemarch, “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life— it would be like hearing the grass grow or the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.”¹⁷ If we remembered every tiny bit of discernible sensory information gathered from just the natural world, the type of information from which

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¹⁶ For further reading or similar topics, go to Proust was a Neuroscientist or A La Recherche du Temps Perdue/In Search of Lost Time or watch Eternal Sunshine of A Spotless Mind.
¹⁷ Eliot, George, MiddleMarch,(Gardners Books, 2007)
perception is created and therefore our memory, we would go insane from the magnitude of input.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{To Be Found}

\begin{quote}
“No one sees me changing. But who sees me? I am my own hiding-place.”\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Joë Bousquet, \textit{La neige d’un autre âge}

The act of hiding carries an implicit desire to be found out, to be asked the right questions, to be drawn out from where ever I am hiding. I believe much of what is kept out of sight and to oneself is quite possibly the more striking, seminal portion of someone. In that lays a dangerous beauty, one that needs to be revealed in order to be understood, but also one that carries a heavy consequence if abused.

I believe the furniture and the manner in which something is stored in a personal space is a representation of a more intricate internal life and is as important and evocative as the objects themselves. Gaston Bachlelard writes in \textit{The Poetics of Space}, “…every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination…”\textsuperscript{20} The furniture within a space becomes a landscape for our minds, a veritable mindscape, for our past as well as our future selves.\textsuperscript{21} It becomes a character, an active participant in not just the space, but in the life and meaning of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} There is an interesting portion of Michael Pollan’s \textit{Botany of Desire}, which discusses the cannabinoid receptor system in the brain. The brain has a normal forgetting/editing faculty- “a reducing valve of consciousness” as Aldous Huxley describes in \textit{The Doors of Perception}.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Bousquet, Joë. \textit{La neige d’un autre age.} ([Paris]: Le Cercle du livre, 1952
\item \textsuperscript{20} Bachelard, Gaston, and M. Jolas. \textit{The Poetics of Space.} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008) 136
\item \textsuperscript{21} In neuroscience, imagining and remembering trigger the same parts of the brain. Evidently, we are able to imagine the future only by reconstructing parts of our memory. So without memory, we are incapable of planning or envisioning the future. (See “Conscious and Unconscious Memory, Grey Matters” a series run by UCSD. <http://www.ucsd.tv/search-details.asp?showID=11951>)
\end{itemize}
objects it houses. They provide a deeper, maybe more honest way of knowing beyond a verbal exchange.

I see the bureau as a particularly poignant piece of furniture that can reveal this dual nature of hiding. The bureau carries the ability to simultaneously display and hide. The different levels of the drawers carry a built-in hierarchy, one that could be used to measure the level of privacy attached to the thing being stored. In many cases, the top drawer is the ultimate space of secrets, an accepted place for intimate apparel—over-used cotton underwear, family heirloom jewelry, notes, socks, etc. It is both the practical drawer and the sexy drawer. It would be the first place ransacked in a burglary or a place where one might search for delicate information pertaining to the owner. The bottom drawer is perhaps a more humble drawer, close to the ground, dark and dank and the contents reflect this—jeans, corduroy, more heavy articles of clothing.

In *Wounds Need to Be Taught to Heal Themselves*, this bureau is no longer able to conceal or reveal anything through its hierarchy. It is exposed without its normal armor. The normal mode of storage is frustrated. Everything is laid bare, though there is nothing to be revealed, no full drawers through which to rifle. It both offers itself up to be discovered, but denies that offering. I believe this captures the dichotomous nature of hiding, of what is hidden, and why this need exists in the first place. I want to be found out, but would rather keep to myself all the same. Octavio

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22 So, the top drawer is, after all, perhaps the worst place to store your secrets. Again in *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard talks about false secrets. “The least important secrets are put in the first box, the idea being that they will suffice to satisfy his [the trespasser’s] curiosity, which can also be fed on false secrets.” Bachelard, Gaston, and M. Jolas. *The Poetics of Space*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008) 82
Paz in *Entre Lo Que Veo Y Digo... (Between What I See and What I Say...)* from *Arbol Adentro (A Tree Within)* writes:

*Entre Lo que veo y digo,*
*Entre lo que digo y callo,*
*Entre lo que callo y sueño,*
*Entre lo que sueño y olvido:*
*La poesía...*

Between what I see and what I say,
Between what I say and what I keep silent,
Between what I keep silent and what I dream,
Between what I dream and what I forget:
poetry...  

This excerpt captures the state of being caught between desires, the different levels of secrecy and the minute spaces where someone’s identity could dwell— in between.

For Paz, poetry carries the ability to say everything and say nothing at all. I desire my work to operate within and around these ethereal, intangible spaces, of what is perceived and what is imperceptible.

Throughout the making process, before *Wounds Need to Be Taught to Heal Themselves* had a title, I referred to it as the “skeleton bureau.” It became a flesh-less body, vulnerable, exposed and disembodied. As I wrapped the frame, the more I felt as though I was dressing its wounds, both real and imagined, like I was attending to a damaged body, perhaps even my own. I was covering its imperfections, slowly clothing it with a careful garment. This garment would later become a shell through firing. Any support or protection that was offered by the wrapping is now a hollow offering and perhaps even more fragile than the thing it is supposed to be protecting. In many ways, clothes are simultaneously an outward expression as well as a layer of bodily protection and disguise. A mere frame without drawers and the customary

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ability to be filled, this dresser is wrapped with the clothes it is incapable of protecting. It now needs to be protected.

The physical layering of the wax in *J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans* and the wrapping in *Wounds Need to Be Taught to Heal Themselves*, serves as both as a way to formally separate but also a veiling and shrouding of what lays beneath. The stark contrast between the deep umber of the chocolate clay and the whiteness of the vitreous white clay in *Wounds Need to Be Taught to Heal Themselves* points to the possibility of another life below all those layers. There is something being healed beneath.

**Role Reversal**

“*Mais au-dedans, plus de frontiers. But within, no more boundaries*”

Jean Tardieu, *Les Témoins Invisibles*²⁴

In *Wounds Need to Be Taught to Heal Themselves* and *Between What I Say and What I Keep Silent*, I am concerned with a reversal of roles—like when you are about to fall asleep, when the subconscious rises to the surface while the conscious falls. In doing this, what lays beneath the conscious mind takes over in a dream state. I see the dream state of these two pieces laying between reality and fiction, between something recognizable and otherworldly.

Specifically, in *Between What I Say and What I Keep Silent*, I hope to subtly reverse the roles of public and private. I hope to gently point to the limen of privacy and the opposing, but intertwined will to hide and desire to be found out. Here are the

contents of the bureau without the casing of the piece of furniture. Tucked within the disorganized clothes are black porcelain envelopes, representative of confidentiality and recondite information. In stark contrast to the white of the porcelain clothes, they are disturbing and slightly sinister in nature. What dark and unyielding secrets are held within their folds? Why are they saved and diligently tucked away? By openly rendering publicly what is normally private, I hope not to trespass into private space in an aggressive action of exposé, but to disclose what I see as a richer, perhaps more honest parts of life.

Similar types of role reversals present themselves in each piece in the form of tensions between dualities. I want the work to hover in between reality and fiction, approaching the surreal. I want the presence of something to be shown by its absence and understood by the element of trace. In many ways, I require my work to draw on the tensions between these complementary, but opposing things.

**The Element of Trace**

“The surface marks that linger in the finish…are archetypal to most old furniture…dust, cobwebs, chewing gum, and uneven screw heads, mute indicators of [its] hidden history.”

Charlotte Mullins, Rachel *Whiteread: RW*

The element of trace is an intricate notion that presents itself in many stages of my work. For me, trace emphasizes the presence of an absent thing. “In Platonic theory…*eikon* places the emphasis on the phenomenon of the presence of an absent thing, the reference to past time remaining implicit…it speaks of the present

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representation of an absent thing...”  

This “absent thing” cannot be rendered into physical form itself, but is made tangible through a residue or displacement of another substance, like footsteps in the snow.

A trace acts as a subtle sign—it is fragile and delicate and often unseen because of its quiet presence. It is a stand in for an actual thing or past action. A trace is evidence of something that is past tense, but is suddenly brought into the present by something peripheral. It is akin to memory.

Rachel Whiteread is one influential artist who deals with this element of trace in her own work. Whiteread, often referred to as the “geographer of hidden space,” physically manifests unknown or often ignored spaces and objects. The space under the floorboards becomes material form or the interior space of an entire house is coated with cement, the house is taken away, leaving a materialized space. What was once just space, becomes tangible. She reverses our understanding of the interdependent relationship of space and object by offering the viewer the negative space to describe the absent object. For me, her use of negative space as positive space, captures the memory surrounding an object or space.

There is a subtle distinction in the different qualities of trace, between a permanent and impermanent indication of a past presence. There is a temporary trace like dust that has accumulated and settled around an object, but could easily be erased or blown away by a simple breath. It is there and then it vanishes. Conversely, there is

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26 Ricoeur, Paul, Memory, History, Forgetting, (The University of Chicago Press, London 2004) 6-7
the permanent trace, like a footprint in a cement sidewalk or a scar left from a deep wound. This type of mark is enduring.\footnote{Then there is the trace that exists between the permanent and impermanent, like a refinished piece of antique furniture. On such a piece of furniture, one can recognize that it is old and an antique, but all the “imperfections” the scrapes and indentations that once seemed permanent, have been sanded or polished away and sealed with a varnish. It hovers somewhere between the two types of trace.}

Clare Twomey, a British ceramic artist, utilizes these elements of trace in her work. In a recent piece, titled \textit{Witness}, she coated a ghostly still life of a table setting in a film of pale blue dust made from ground Wedgewood ceramic ware. In doing this, she confounds this notion of trace and temporality. By using finely ground ceramic dust, she makes dust permanent in the physical and the historical sense. The ephemeral becomes eternal. However, this permanent trace is still easily lost by a slight of hand and thus still rendered impermanent.

My work incorporates both varieties of trace, though the work seen in this exhibition is more about the transformation of an impermanent trace into a permanent one. Clay, as a material, innately lends itself to such a transformation. Before firing, it is able to be reconstituted time and time again. You wedge a lump of clay, make an imprint of your hand, re-wedge it or let it dry and slake it down once more. The trace of that action is gone and that piece of clay has the ability to become something else entirely. After a firing, however, clay is no longer earth, but now stone—calcified and unyielding, though a fragility and an ability to be broken remains. This ability for clay to be both permanent, yet breakable is yet another duality I employ in making. Take the imprint of your hand, or in my case of a piece of furniture or an article of clothing and fire it. That trace is now immutable and preserves the moment in which
it was created. It is an instant frozen in time, made tenuous by its ability to be destroyed by gravity or a slight misstep.

I use clay for its elemental and transformative properties. The raw whiteness of the porcelain in my work is an anonymous color, blank and unassuming. It holds a delicate beauty. The whiteness of porcelain adds another level of complexity to the element of trace as well. Blanched, the clothes are only a vestige and their texture and only hints at the color and life they once possessed. Seemingly drained of color, the texture and fluidity of the clothes and the scratches found on the pieces of furniture, provide a trace of life, a visual imprint of memory that is simultaneously dead and full of life, past and present. Acting much like black and white photography, this work seems frozen in time. Though seemingly real, the absence of color brings the work closer to an indexical past, only alluding to a distant history.

Capturing the various types of trace begins with the selection of a primary object. Much of my work begins with a second-hand object, be it a piece of furniture or clothes, because of this element of trace that is found on their surfaces. I am drawn to these used objects because they come with an embedded history of their own that is separate from mine. There is the indication of a life lived in and around these objects—scrapes from a book being repeatedly taken on and off a shelf, rings of water stains, writing in crayon on a table leg. These blemishes indicate habitual action, of a space that is navigated and understood by the routines that occur in that lived space. Each piece of furniture carries a hidden narrative.

The processes that I employ help purvey this minute detail and element of trace. Much of my work is slip cast made from plaster molds from old pieces of
furniture, others are made by dipping objects in slip, firing them in a kiln and burning the original object out. Casting serves a duplicitous role. Plaster is capable of capturing the smallest detail that can bring an artifice of reality found in the form and its surface. This reality makes the object recognizable and situates it within our everyday experience. Plaster preserves the tiniest scratches and the natural grain of the wood. This brings it closer to reality, but also separates it from the real object because it is merely a transformed representation of the real. The object is one step removed from its original self.

The cast object acts as another form of trace; it is not the actual object, but a ghostly version of it. As a result of our daily experience with our own pieces of furniture similar to types of furniture I use in my work, there is a bodily connection that makes the object familiar and readable. I rely on this visceral connection to the recognizable pieces of furniture and the clothes we wear. The transformation of these familiar objects into a trace object carries notions of the uncanny.\(^\text{28}\)

The transference of the real into a ghostly, deconstructed representation obfuscates this bodily connection. The fiction, which borders the surreal, lays in the transformation of material and the removal of the normal ways in which we would encounter these objects—the bureau is unable to store anything without its drawers, the contents of a bureau are exposed, hovering in space without the protection and privacy that a bureau would provide, piles of envelopes are saved and piled without

\(^{28}\) Sigmund Freud classified the notion of “the uncanny” as “…an aesthetic property that can make the familiar appear frightening or strange.”\(^{28}\) Freud’s “uncanny,” or “unheimlich” deals with the change of a familiar space, specifically the home, in a mysterious, uncomfortable, supernatural way. In the opening sentences of The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely, Anthony Vidler talks about the house as particularly proficient space for what he called “uncanny disturbances” in literary fantasy because of the “domesticity [and] its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion of alien spirits.”
order or obvious reason. There is a vulnerability that can only be created by such an ambiguous condition of existence.

Similarly, dipping clothes in slip and burning them out employs another kind of trace, one that is rooted in the rather unmistakable destruction of the original. Like slip casting, I begin with an initial object that carries its own set of careful details of a life lived— tears, patches, pit stains. The slip creates a shell encasing the object, entombing it for the firing. During the firing, the material burns out, leaving a void where the material once was and bequeaths its life to the shell of clay as the trace of its existence. This may evoke a literal and a metaphorical sense of loss. To the eye we see a sweater, a pair of pants, or an envelope on a shelf— I know the object. In reality, the actual, primary object is no longer in existence; all that remains is a hollow, frail representation of it. For me this creates empathy for the object as well as a sense of disappointment and longing for the real thing. The garment is rendered into a timeless, enduring material, but as a result of the thinness of the porcelain shell, the object is even more vulnerable to harm than before.

In both processes, there is the knowledge of the actual object existing apart from the work. Slip casting and burn-outs detach the piece of furniture or article of clothing from their original contexts and everyday meanings. For me, this causes a necessary tension between reality and fiction. The division and fusion of reality and fiction allows the work to exist in both realms simultaneously as well as the interim in between the two. This allows the work to stay in an emotional, metaphorical realm— one that is separate by still rooted in the literal world as well.
Language and Process

“The work of writing is always done in relation to something that no longer exists, which may be fixed for a moment in writing, like a trace, but which has vanished.”

Georges Perec, The Work of Memory, from Je suis né, Species of Space

I am captivated by the subtle nuances in language. All of the titles of my work for this exhibition are taken directly from poetry and other texts. Wounds Need to Be Taught to Heal Themselves is taken from Jeannette Winterson’s Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery; Between What I Say and What I Keep Silent is taken from a collection of the Octavio Paz’s poetry, The Tree Within; J’ai plus de souvenirs que si J’avais mille ans is taken from Charles Baudelaire’s poem Spleen.

Language and literature are important portions to process. In many ways, an idea for a piece will begin and end with a phrase or a single word, like “eikon,” “palimpsest” or the “phobia of forgetting.” For me, like the act of making, reading is a place of solitude and reflection. It is a time when I am lost in my thoughts and enveloped in an internal dialogue with myself. It is where the first inklings of a visual interpretation take root and then slowly take form.

When I am in my studio, I find that the search and discovery of the next piece happens as I am making its predecessor. Sketching and drawing has taken a prominent role in my studio practice; they have become more than just tools and are integral part of the work itself. I will cycle through many different versions of a piece on paper before the physical making of the three dimensional piece begins. These drawings help me visualize what I will set out to make. This visualization is

extremely important for me in order to proceed with a piece. If I do not have clear image of it in my mind, I often have a difficult time beginning. In many ways, intuition and intellectual pragmatism are often at odds. My tendency to plan and my need to instinctively make something must be in balance.

After the making begins, there are moments when I am lost in an algorithm of making and my body takes over. My mind is free to wander and create, while my body works. Quite often, this is when I find I am most happy in the studio; the search for the idea has ended and it begins to take form. This makes room for the next idea.

I feel that each poem or phrase I choose as sources for these titles captures the core of the piece. The phrase “…wounds need to be taught to heal themselves” resonated with me as a direct result of the making process and how I felt as I wrapped the piece. The self-sufficiency that comes with being able to heal oneself masks the vulnerability that comes with being wounded. The fact that you can take care of yourself does not cancel out the existence of a wound. I feel that Winterson’s phrase captured the dualism of this type of autonomy— that the connotation of strength is celebratory, but also undeniably sad.

*Between What I Say and What I Keep Silent*, coming from Paz’s poem *Between What I See and What I Say...* captures the state of being in between, of having something to say, but keeping it silent. The recognizable clothes are what is said, while the black envelopes are what is kept silent. Here, the oppositions found within the piece— light and dark, public and private— are equal. The piece itself hovers in space. What is tucked away in the drawers of the bureau is open for all to

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However, the clothes and envelopes cannot be unfolded or opened. As a result, the piece also hovers between accessibility and discretion.

“J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans…” can translate to “I have more memories than if I was one thousand years old” or “More memories, mine, than from a thousand years,” as translated from the text Les Fleurs des Mal. I choose this specific line from Baudelaire’s Spleen because there are times when I feel overwhelmed by the poignancy of memory. The stacking of the envelopes represents this ever-accumulating library of experience and perception. Being extremely thin, the envelopes were sometimes crushed under their own weight. I feel this captures the weariness I feel from in Baudelaire’s articulation of memory—one that if we were to be aged by our memories—we would all be much older.

Together, these three pieces are concerned with accumulation, hiding and trace in varying degrees. J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans mainly highlights the accumulation of memory through the stacking of envelopes and arrangement of shelves throughout the space. Between What I Say and What I Keep Silent focuses on the act of hiding and the reversal of roles through revealing what is normally kept secret in the drawers of a bureau. Wounds Need to Be Taught to Heal Themselves predominantly talks about trace through its vacant drawers and its bandages of clothes. The presence and effects of memory on ourselves as human beings are profound. It attaches itself to the places in which we dwell and to the objects we choose to keep or discard. One of my intentions with this work is to make

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32 A thought on clothes—while in the bureau, the clothes are private, neatly or messily tucked away. However, when we wear them they become public, save for our under garments.

the viewer pause and consider their hiding places, their objects, and whatever memory may be attached to them.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

Reading list:

*Baron of the Trees*, Italo Calvino  
*Botany of Desire*, Michael Pollan  
*Bury Me Standing*, Isabel Fonseca  
*Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, Aldous Huxley  
*Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, Michael Sheringham  
*If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, Italo Calvino  
*In Defense of Food*, Michael Pollan  
*In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust  
*JanFamily: Plans for Other Days*, www.janfamily.com, Jan Family  
*Life: A User’s Manuel*, Georges Perec  
*Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder*, Lawrence Weschler  
*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickenson*, Emily Dickenson  
*The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym  
*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera  
*The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michael de Certeau  
*The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre  
*The Road*, Cormic McCarthy  
*The Time Traveler’s Wife*, Audrey Niffengger  
*W, or the Memory of Childhood*, Georges Perec

Film list:

Conscious and Unconscious Memory: Systems of the Mammalian Brain; Grey Matters, University of California, San Diego TV  
*Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind*, Michel Gondry  
*Slipstream*, Anthony Hokins  
*The Good Night*, Jake Paltrow  
*The Labyrinth*, Jim Henson

Influential Artists:

Lesley Dill  
Do-Ho Suh  
Eva Hesse  
Clare Twomey  
Jae Won Lee  
Rachel Whiteread  
Sarah Lindley  
Gillian Lowndes  
Doris Salcedo
Spleen
By Charles Baudelaire

J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans

Un gross meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans,
De vers, de billets doux, de procès, de romances,
Avec de lourds cheveux roulés dans des quittances,
Cache moins de secrets que mon triste cerveau.
C'est une pyramide, un immense caveau,
Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse commune.
-Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune,
Où, comme des remords, se traînent de longs vers
Qui s’acharnent toujours sur mes morts les plus chers.
Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées,
Où git tout un fouillis de modes surannées,
Où les pastels plaintifs et les pales Boucher,
Seuls, respirent l’odeur d’un flacon débouché.

Rien n’égale en longueur les boîteuses journées,
Quand sous les lourds flocons des neigeuses années
L’ennui, fruit de la morne incuriosité,
Prend les proportions de l’immortalité.
--Désormais tu n’es plus ô matière vivante!
Qu’un granit entouré d’une vague épouvante,
Assoupi dans las fond d’un Sharah brumeux;
Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux,
Oublié sur la carte, et dont l’humeur farouche
Ne chante qu’aux rayons du soleil qui se couche.

More memories, mine, than from a thousand years.

One of those huge and cluttered chiffoniers,
Drawers stuffed with verses, lawsuits, balance sheets,
Love letters, locks of hair rolled in receipts
Hides fewer secrets than my woeful brain.
Vast cavern, pyramid…Its walls contain
More corpses than the paupers’ burial ditch,
I am a graveyard, moon-abhorred, in which,
Like litany of dolorous regret,
Long worms, in slithering crawl, aswarm, beset
My dearest dead. An old boudoir am I,
Strewn round with faded roses, and where lie
Yesteryear’s bygone fashions; where, pell-mell,
Pallid Bouchers and many sad pastel
Are left, abandoned and alone, to quaff
The lingering scent from an uncorked carafe.

Nothing can match endless, crippled days
When, blizzard-blown, chill winter overlays
Ennui with heavy snows: drear apathy,
Taking the shape of immortality.
Henceforth, O living flesh, you are a mere
Gigantic mass, enwrapped in some vague fear,
Drowsing on some Sahara’s distant sand,
Like an old sphinx, unmapped, in some lost land;
And whose splenetic humors, through the haze,
Sing only to sunset’s dying rays.

Entre Lo Que Veo Y Digo... (Between What I See and What I Say...)
From Arbol Adentro (A Tree Within)
By Octavio Paz

1
Entre Lo que veo y digo,
Entre lo que digo y callo,
Entre lo que callo y sueño,
Entre lo que sueño y olvido:
La poesía
    Se desliza
tenre el sí y el no:
      dice
lo que callo,
      calla
lo que digo,
      sueña
lo que olvido.
    No es un decir:
    es un hacer.
    Es un hacer
que es un decir.
    La poesía
se dice y se oye:
    es real.
Y apenas digo
    es real,
se disipa.
    ¿Así es más real?

2
Idea palpable,
palabra
impalpable: la poesía
va y viene
entre lo que es
y lo que no es. Teje reflejos
y los desteje. La poesía
siembra ojos en las páginas
siembra palabras en los ojos.
Los ojos hablan
las palabras miran,
las miradas piensan.
Oír
los pensamientos,
ver
lo que decimos
tocar
el cuerpo de la idea.
Los ojos
se cierran,
las palabras se abren.

Between what I see and what I say,
Between what I say and what I keep silent,
Between what I keep silent and what I dream,
Between what I dream and what I forget:
poetry
It slips
between yes and no,
says
what I keep silent,
keeps silent
what I say,
dreams
what I forget.
It is not speech:
it is an act.
It is an act
of speech.
Poetry
speaks and listens:
it is real. And as soon as I say
\[\textit{it is real}\]
it vanishes. Is it then more real?

2
Tangible idea, intangible word:
poetry comes and goes between what it and what is not. It weaves and unweaves reflections.

Poetry scatters eyes on a page scatters words on our eyes. Eyes speak, words look, looks think. To hear thoughts, See what we say, touch the body of an idea.

Eyes close, the words open.

Jeannette Winterson, \textit{Art [Objects]: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery}, page 156-57

“ The healing power of art is not a rhetorical fantasy. Fighting to keep language, language became my sanity and my strength. It still is, and I know of no pain that art cannot assuage. For some, music, for some, pictures, for me, primarily poetry, whether found in poems or in prose, cuts through noise and hurt, opens the wound to clean it, and then gradually teaches it to heal itself. Wounds need to be taught to heal themselves.

The psyche and the spirit do not share the instinct of the damaged body. Healing is not automatically triggered nor is danger usually avoided. Since we put ourselves in the way of hurt it seems logical to put ourselves in the way of healing. Art has more work to do than ever before but it can do that work. In a self-destructive society like our own, it is unsurprising that art as a healing force is despised.”