

**Dr. Martina Cleary – Extract from PhD Dissertation  
The Photograph As A Site of Mnemonic Return (2017) (pages 50-70)**

**CHAPTER 3 – PHASE II / POSTCARDS FROM A LIFE**

Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I haunt.

(Breton 1999, p.11)

**Starting Points Phase II**

The work created in Phase II of this research responds to André Breton's novel *Nadja* (1928), which includes forty photographic plates by photographer Jacques André Boiffard. I chose this text as a starting point for the next stage of the project for a number of reasons. Firstly, the memory of Breton's novel had directly influenced the chain of autobiographical events referred to in Phase I above. Having discovered Breton's work as a young artist in my early twenties, I began at that time to question Surrealist ideas of the muse as a conduit to the personal subconscious. Influenced by theories of the gaze emerging from first and second wave feminist discourse e.g. Pollock (1988), Mulvey (1989), Parker (1995) and Berger (2008), I also questioned the possibility of reversing its traditionally male position. I was interested in developing a female expression of journeying into the subconscious, and wondered if a male muse would have the same impact. In her work on women in the Surrealist movement, Whitney Chadwick (1991) describes this phenomenon of the muse or femme enfant, which for the male Surrealists drew back the veil to threshold states. Real-life examples cited by Chadwick include Germaine Berton, a young anarchist and revolutionary, Gisele Prasinosa a 14-year-old poet, Gala Dali, Leonora Carrington, and of course Nadja. Literary heroines or rather anti-heroines included Sade's *Justine*. But of all these figures, it is Nadja who has become, according to Hester Albach (2009), the heroine of Surrealism, perhaps due to her tragic fate. Chadwick also maintains that female Surrealists such as Leonora Carrington, Leonora Fini and Dorothea Tanning, rather than using a muse as a doorway, mirror or projection ground for their own unconscious desires, inhabited their work with archetypal or symbolic animals to refer to aspects of the unconscious self, perhaps as a means to access the elemental, or lost matriarchal traditions. Referring to the journals of Leonora Carrington for example, Chadwick (1998 p 13) notes,

Carrington was not alone in projecting aspects of the self as animal surrogates...Many women, including Carrington, Fini, and Varo, adopted strategies that more recently have been referred to as 'self-othering'. Identifying with moments prior to historical time and/or outside the 'civilised' cultural spaces identified with patriarchy, they sought the sources of the 'feminine' and 'woman' in epochs and places in which women were believed to have exercised spiritual and psychic powers later repressed under patriarchy.

While Carrington's paintings are often populated by hybrid animal forms, Fini of course also used androgynous figures where the male, as well as the female body are the object of her gaze. However, I felt that Chadwick's consignment of female desire to an almost twilight world, of obliquely alluded to symbolic scenarios, was another form of censorship and perhaps of its time. I knew quite early in my own practice that as a female artist, I occupied a position of both the viewer and viewed. I was the speaking subject and also the object of the gaze in traditional ideas of who looks and who is seen. In

reading Breton's story of encounter with Nadja, while I identified with him as the artist, I also identified somewhat with Nadja as a woman, and I wondered whether a male version of Nadja were even possible, and if so, how could I give this kind of encounter expressive form. The work of film director Leo Carax in the early 1990's, in particular *Les Aimants Du Pont Neuf* (1991), which reverses the gender roles in a story of encounter between a female artist and her muse, would have also been influential here. The film follows a young woman as she wanders Paris at night. Unfolding on the *Pont Neuf*, a location very close to *Place Dauphine*, and several of the sites of Breton's novel, this female protagonist who is threatened with impending blindness, begins to question everything about her life. She drifts out into the city at the night, and in this nocturnal world encounters a male vagabond. Experiencing varying states of altered consciousness, often verging on surreal hallucination or madness, it is sometimes unclear if this male companion is real or imagined. He gradually leads her towards her own nature, and freedom from past events. These cultural influences directly impacted upon my lived experience in the 1990's in Helsinki, when I eventually did meet the subject and inspiration for the works created in Phase I, *Remember To Forget*. Where I once judged Breton for leaving Nadja on the doorstep of the asylum, I now realise the complexities of what such an encounter can involve, and the fact that sometimes there is no other choice. It's a matter of self-preservation, with art being a way to reconcile the self to the tragic, or traumatic, by transformative means that make sense from chaos or insanity. In this light Breton's reflections on his own autobiographical recollections, in the third part of his novel, including his sense of being haunted by Nadja, are very familiar. The practice-based work created during Phase I of this research, was my first attempt to put these autobiographical events into expressive form using the novel which inspired them in real terms, as a means, map or armature to also journey back, initially through memory, but then through real psychogeographical wanderings in Paris. While the speaking voice in Phase I - *Remember To Forget* is from one subject position, my own, as I directly remember and address the subject of memory. In Phase II - *Postcards From A Life*, the speaking voice changes and oscillates between becoming the object and subject of the text. Sometimes I am Nadja addressing Breton, at other times I am myself remembering my own life and what it is to inhabit the position of the artist, and ultimately the survivor who remembers and creatively reconstructs the story of events. The method being used here was also inspired by the theories of Pierre Yves Jacopin, which will be outlined in greater detail shortly. Given these deeper autobiographical links and significant influence of Breton upon my life and memory, it was very important to bring this particular novel to the fore, as I moved into Phase II of the research.

A second reason for the appropriateness of using Breton's text, is that it transgresses certain genre boundaries, including obscuring distinctions between autobiography and novel, real and surreal, fact and fiction. This blurring of boundaries, between the real and imagined, true memory and a creative reconstruction allowed me to conceptually reconcile two directions within my visual production, which incorporates both documentary and tableaux vivant approaches to photography. The former method I associate with external objective representations of events, the latter with their mnemonic reconstruction. Thirdly, having experienced the very powerful connection between memory, the photograph and place in Phase I of the project, I wanted to investigate this further. I felt the certain

methods borrowed from psychogeography would allow me to do this. Breton's text is identified as a classic example of psychogeographical writing, and is based in Paris, a city which is most associated with this conceptual method. By using this source, in the same way I had used my own album images in Phase I, I also hoped to move beyond the autobiographical towards more culturally engaged collectively relevant content. I decided to use Breton's novel, and the photographs by Boiffard, as a map, mnemonic resonating ground and conversational partner, to bridge the gap between the autobiographical primary sources of Phase I, and broader, collectively relevant questions on photography and memory, as I moved into Phase II. To support the research, I undertook two journeys to Paris, visiting the Charcot archives, the archives of the Centre Pompidou, and the first retrospective of Boiffard's work held in Paris in January 2015. I used Breton's text and Boiffard's images to trace my own journey of mnemonic return in the process. I visited the same places mentioned by Breton, searching for material traces of what remained, prompted by details within the photographs and references from the text.

Suddenly, perhaps still ten feet away, I saw a young poorly dressed woman walking toward me, she had noticed me too, or perhaps had been watching me for several moments. She carried her head high, unlike everyone else on the sidewalk. And she looked so delicate she scarcely seemed to touch the ground as she walked.

(Breton 1999, p.64)

This is the moment that Breton, while idly wandering from the Humanitie bookstore on Rue Lafayette on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1926, suddenly spots Nadja for the first time. We are introduced to her as evening is about to fall, as an almost spectral presence, a waif, surrounded by an aura of the uncanny or unearthly, suggested not only by the fact she almost floats above the ground, but because of her detachment from the rest of the evening crowd. Despite initial misgivings, Breton approaches her on impulse. Nadja, as if expecting this, willingly accompanies him to a nearby Café near the Gare du Nord. And so, almost in an instant a course of events, surreal in every sense, are set in motion. The suddenness of this encounter and the almost instantaneous unfettered intimacy between Breton and Nadja, conform to the conventions of the marvellous encounter, a trope consistent within early Surrealist literature. Breton even references this during his third meeting with Nadja, citing an article *L'esprit Nouveau*, from his work *Les Pas Perdus*, which Nadja is reading. Here he describes how Louis Aragon, Andre Derain and himself had all met, only minutes apart a marvellously strange woman, a 'veritable sphinx' as they made their way along the streets of Paris. For Breton and his fellow Surrealists, the marvellous was that which could rupture the mundane, the routine and the pedestrian forms of thought, and they were ever vigilant to its sudden emergence. There was something of this, or what Walter Benjamin (2005, p.209) described as a 'profane illumination' in Breton's encounter with Nadja. Transfixed by her fern-green eyes, and a 'certain luminous pride' in her demeanor, Breton immediately recognised something significant in the event.

In reality, Nadja was Leona Camille Ghislaine D., twenty-four years of age, and from the rural town of Lille. Having given birth to an illegitimate daughter when only eighteen, she was exiled by her family and sent to live under the patronage of an older sponsor in Paris. Struck by what he saw as her other-worldly detachment and visionary quality, Breton pursued her for ten days through the streets of Paris.

Nadja's mystery lay in her inexplicable, almost clairvoyant capacity to move lucidly between regular and alternative states of consciousness. She was for that very brief period of time the embodiment of the archetypal muse. As in the writing of contemporaries such as Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* (1926), Philippe Soupault's *Last Nights of Paris* (1928) and Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (1927-40), Breton's story is that of the Flâneur; the wanderer or entranced somnambulist on the threshold of the uncanny, who seeks and finds in the object of desire, not only a door to the subconscious, but ultimately the answer to the riddle of his own identity. Breton's infatuation with Nadja, though short-lived, drew him towards a dark undertow, a psychological voyeurism into states verging on insanity. On 24th March 1927 in the spring following their brief affair, Nadja was admitted for psychiatric care to the Perray-Vaucluse Hospital, and from there transported to a hospital near her home town of Lille, where she died in 1941 at the age of thirty-nine. Breton never saw her again in person beyond that initial ten-day encounter, but her spectral presence lingered on, resulting in his 1928 novel, and her enduring legacy as one of the great Surrealist muses. The manuscript of his novel is divided into three parts: the first contains a reflexive autobiographical narrative, setting out certain philosophical and artistic principles of Surrealism. The second part presents a sequential diaristic account of his time spent with Nadja, recording their ten-day encounter. In the last section of the book we find Breton's reflections on events, and his attempt to reconcile himself with Nadja's fate, and his own part in it. Aware that history would perhaps judge him, his eventual publication also includes a condemnation of the profession of psychiatry. He notes that all that saved himself and his fellow Surrealists from a similar destiny was "the gift of that instinct for self-preservation which permits my friends and myself, for instance to behave ourselves when a flag goes past" (1999, p. 143).

*Nadja* is essentially a story of the haunting quality of memory. Breton chose forty-four photographic plates to accompany his text, the majority by the photographer Jacques-André Boiffard (Fig. 14), whom he commissioned to record certain places related to the story. The clinical gaze of the camera, with its power to document detail, combined with the speed and fragmentary nature the imagery produced, held great potential for early Surrealists. The camera could reveal, in its unnatural precision, like a surgical instrument cutting into the fabric of the real the extraordinary nature of things when they are examined closely. Surrealism necessitated a shift in consciousness, a lucidity of perception, openness to waking dream and hallucination, where ordinary things were allowed to metamorphosize. In the process, the truly Surrealist photograph had to simultaneously look both outward and inward, finding in the external environment moments, forms, encounters which though actual, were also totemic. In this approach the photograph had to function as both evidence and subconscious trigger. Many of the early photographers working with the Surrealist group, including Boiffard, Brassai, Atget and Lotar, used similar strategies to Surrealist writers. Like Breton, Soupault and Aragon, in the traditions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Flâneur, Surrealist photographers wandered the streets, the flea markets and the outskirts of Paris, in search of the marvellous in the everyday. This was an external event which ultimately revealed the true nature of the subject to himself. Photography in this context was about the everyday reimagined as revelatory, epic, even mythic. The Surrealists became visual anthropologists of the everyday made magical, and certain places were the preferred sites of expedition. Boiffard

followed Breton's trail to the flea market of St. Ouen. As Ian Walker (2002, p.115) notes, the flea market, the abattoir, the zones at the edges of the city, frequented by gypsies, vagabonds and itinerants, were hybrid spaces offering escape and transformation.

Therese Lichtenstein in *Twilight Visions, Surrealism and Paris* (2010) identifies a number of Surrealist photographers who were also using certain aesthetic strategies to communicate a more dreamlike, ethereal and haunted vision of Paris. The expressive quality of these works would perhaps have been more appropriate than the documentary approach used by Boiffard, for the novel, a fact reflected in Breton's eventual dissatisfaction with what was produced. Photographers such as Brassai, Kertesz, Ilse Bing, Man Ray, Germaine Krull, as well as Maurice Tabard, Lee Miller and Roger Parry created classically Surrealist photographs, in which the ordinary is seen through a Surrealist lens. Lichtenstein comments that they shared a kind of twilight sensibility, using unusual lighting, disorientating camera angles, attention to unusual details, montage, doubling and fragmentation to communicate a more subjective, internalized and spectral vision of the city, to produce psychologically compelling images, which are both document and enigma, evidence and evocation.

From November 2014 to January 2015 the Centre Pompidou in Paris opened the first comprehensive retrospective of the work of Jacques-André Boiffard, including many of the original images commissioned by Breton. These photographs are primarily documentary shots of several of the key locations described in the novel, and taken according to careful instructions from Breton. However, it was the very evidential or indexical nature of the images, something the Surrealists believed would make photography the perfect medium to demonstrate the Surreal within the real, that Breton found so disappointing in this work. In his effort to provide manifest visual evidence of the sites of the story, it seemed Boiffard failed to communicate any of its psychological complexity or atmosphere. Ian Walker in his discussion of the 'voluntary banality' of Boiffard's work for *Nadja*, is of a different opinion, regarding these images as important examples of the true Surrealist vision. Walker (2002, p. 61) describes these images as being infused with what Annette Michelson (1979) terms, "a sense of imminence, of occurrences past or still to come", generated through bringing together the highly introspective vision of the text of the novel, with the potential of the photographic image to function as evidence. Michelson claims, that for Walter Benjamin these photographs "evoked, in their vacant stillness, the scene of a crime", they were in their ordinary, non-eventfulness, the silent stage set where all actions and events transpired. The photographs were added to lend veracity to the story, serving to illustrate exact places to prove and counterbalance the Surreal nature of events described. In Man Ray's image *Terrain Vague* (Fig. 15) and Atget's *Villa d'un Chiffonier* (Fig.16), we have powerful examples of what Walker describes as the meeting of the surreal with the real, in a form of documentary surreal. It is the absence within Man Ray's image that takes on a weight of foreboding. Here is evidence of a space at the edge of the world, a photograph of the disappearance of the real. As Walker describes it:

We have come to a land where even the surfaces suffer from ellipse, where culture would never be seen as more than a trace...Form was rendered obtuse, thick, blank.

(Walker 2012, p.117)

Walker's writings on the ability of Surrealist works to operate "between index and construct", have been particularly insightful during this research, and have allowed me to reconcile previously disjointed approaches within my studio practice. His observations about the Surrealists' understanding, use and application of a documentary approach, to capture the surreal within the real was of real benefit when I began to navigate the streets of Paris myself, during Phase II. It provided me with a new conceptual approach to synthesise the theories informing the practice with the aesthetic and practical realisation of the work. As Walker notes,

The Surrealists...valued photography for the same reason, since, much as they prized the imaginative power of the human mind to write poems or paint pictures, there was a worrying flaw in such activity, which could indeed be easily dismissed as 'just' imagination. However, if the power of the camera could be harnessed to record, not only the stolid surface of reality, but also the more obscure relationships that connect within it, the results could be worth more than any number of imagined scenarios. Photography could anchor the surreal in the real, and our common belief in the actuality of the image exploited to convince us that this surreality was also irrefutable.

(Walker 2012, p.11)

This surreality is evident in the documentary images of for example Eli Lotar (Fig. 17) and Brassai, (Fig.18&19) where an uncanny, eerie and foreboding atmosphere pervades, with little intervention beyond perception and sensitivity to such phenomena, on the part of the photographer. In search of the totemic, the magical and the revolutionary power of the subconscious to rupture the real, the Surrealists also often appropriated photographic materials from anthropological surveys, including in particular the images of Marcel Griaule, which were often published in the Surrealist magazine *Minotaure*. They often turned this anthropological gaze to re-contextualize the ordinary within the everyday, within their own culture, and city, as if seeing things for the first time, as though in a foreign land. Drifting to the edge of the city, of night, of everyday life on the margins of society to find the unexpected, was a method common to both Surrealism and European traditions of the Flâneur.

### **Finding a Conceptual and Aesthetic Form for Memory – Practice Based Research in Phase II**

As mentioned previously, my choice of Breton's novel as the starting point for Phase II, was due to not only its personal mnemonic significance, but also its richness as a literary source, anchored in an artistic movement which has been of great influence on my studio practice. In addition to this, by using Breton's work as a conversational partner, I hoped to move the research from the autobiographic towards more collectively, and culturally relevant material. I aimed to also discover ways of reconciling two divergent threads underpinning how I approach photography. What Walker described as the Documentary Surreal offered a ground to synthesize both the more objective and poetic strands within my practice. I began by applying the studio methods identified in the conclusion to Phase I above. Boiffard's images became the *pre-existing archive of photographic materials* and Breton became a *conversational partner*. I used his day by day account to determine not only my own route through the city, but also the structure and content of both the visual and textual response I would create, in generating new work. I researched the true background and autobiography of Nadja (Leona Camille Ghislaine D.) to gain further insights into her life. In a narrative style similar to his, I used a semi-autobiographical account, written in the first person, to respond to his description of events. In doing this my intention was to

explore the mnemonic potential of both text and image, giving voice to Nadja's perspective on events. I drew upon personal memory to give the text life and contemporary relevance, using Breton's text as the resonating ground or conduit. As I wandered through the actual places described in the book, I also allowed my own memory to weave in and around Breton's descriptions of events and psychological states. I employed Surrealist techniques of chance and synchronistic encounter to prompt new iterations and interpretations of the story. I also visited the flea market of St. Ouen, in search of chance finds which could be integrated into the material construction of the work. For example, on the floor of one of the warehouses, I found a collection of discarded postcards, photographs and personal letters, tracing the life of a single woman wandering through various locations in Europe. Dates on the photographs ranged from 1938 to 1968. They became materials to imagine an alternative destiny for Nadja, one where she wasn't incarcerated for the rest of her life. These were digitally scanned and integrated into the new archive I was building.

I also visited several of the places described in Breton's novel, even booking myself into the Hotel Henri IV on Ile de la Cité, in December 2014, and stayed there for ten days into January 2015. My intention was to inhabit as closely as possible the rooms and spaces where Nadja had once lived. The Hotel Henri IV is located at Place Dauphine, and is the site of one of the most dramatic scenes in the book. My intention was to enter into the psychological and mnemonic spaces of the novel, to gain insights into its context, location and atmosphere, to inspire voice and memory for what was absent, silenced, lost or erased. In doing this I was also drawing upon a method learned from cultural anthropologist Pierre Yves Jacopin, through a workshop I had taken at the Aalto University of Art Design & Architecture (2001), during previous postgraduate research. Trained by Lévi-Strauss, Jacopin uses what he terms a generative approach to analyzing the narratives (or myths) used to create personal and collective cultural meaning. His technique involves identifying, claiming and retelling key stories already in collective circulation. By altering certain details, these narratives can be reinvented as a means of claiming active personal agency. As noted previously the events in Breton's novel influenced my own autobiography. By reconnecting to Breton's text in the second stage of the project, I was going deeper into the artistic and cultural sources which had so profoundly influenced me as a young artist, and also in no small way caused events touched upon in Phase I. The memory of Breton's story and a subsequent iteration of this, through the more contemporary work of Leo Carax, altered the course of my life. It was therefore a logical step for me to return to this point of reference, and to use it to find connections where the personal becomes enmeshed in the web of social, cultural, and artistic memory, that link the individual to what can be collectively shared, experienced and remembered.

In addition to selected theories of memory, and philosophies on the relationship between the photograph and memory, it is important at this point to now also identify certain reoccurring aesthetic and conceptual approaches I have used throughout this project. My studio processes have been influenced by a number of key visual artists and works. In discussing practice based research in Phase II, I will include these influences thorough an aesthetic analysis of what I consider the most important characteristics of certain works by these artists, evident in my studio outcomes. For the sake of clarity

and brevity, I have identified a number of categories I consider important here. My intention is to outline reoccurring and useful visual strategies in addressing my research topic within studio outcomes, which I can also use moving forward in my practice.

### ***Images within Images***

As noted previously, memory has often been described or conceived of as being linked to spatial and material inscription. As Foster (2009, p. 6) observes, in the ancient Greek world memory was allegorically described as being like an aviary, filled with brightly coloured but ever moving forms. Whitehead elaborates upon the lineage and evolution of this link between memory, inscription and spatiality, observing of the memory place system of antiquity that,

This tradition consciously builds on Aristotle's notion of recollection, to develop a system of memorizing that involves the methodical ordering of memory images and a search based on the principle of association.  
(Whitehead 2009, p. 33)

Here information to be remembered is imaginatively placed within architectural forms in the mind's eye. By re-navigating the space the subject can retrieve what is to be recollected, using spatially located visual cues. Frances Yates (1966, p.136), describes how the art of memory was transformed during the Renaissance by figures such as Giulio Camillo into miniature architectural structures. Camillo's Memory Theatres consisted of wooden models, large enough to physically enter, and filled with boxes, images, figures, ornaments and papers, which the viewer could use to prompt the recollection of details. The complexity of the symbolic meaning of materials placed in these theatres were astoundingly ambitious. They operated as codices to preserve ancient hermetic teachings on the origins of man, divinity and the universe, through a labyrinthine web of mnemonic triggers. As Yates notes,

Camillo brings the art of memory into line with the new currents now running through the Renaissance. His Memory Theatre houses Ficino and Pico, Magia and Cabala, the Hermetism and Cabalism implicit in Renaissance so-called Neoplatonism. He turns the art of memory into an occult art.  
(Yates 1966, p. 154)

In visual form, these early theatres of memory were very similar to what would become in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Wunderkammer, or cabinet of curiosity, which would in turn lay the foundations for the modern museum. In her discussion of the cabinet as instrument, Barbara Maria Stafford (2001) describes how Samuel Quicchelberg's invention of 1565, evolved to become a device, ranging in scale from that of a miniature piece of furniture, to sprawling collections of artefacts spanning several rooms. According to Stafford the cabinet of curiosity served many functions including the activation of all the senses, through a form of synesthesia. As the viewer engaged with the material presented within the cabinet, new links, associations and knowledge could be constructed through imaginative, ludic, reconfiguration. In the process, memory could also be re-navigated as an active territory of potential reconstruction. Stafford also presents the work of Joseph Cornell as a recent example of how the cabinet has been used within the context of contemporary artistic practice. She comments that,

Cornell's 'assemblages of potent fragments – drawn from the detritus of popular culture – gain their identity through ever-changing linkages and multiple orientations, thus sharing a family resemblance stretching back to the nineteenth-century shadow box and early modern poetic armoire.



(Stafford 2001, p.18)

Throughout his career Cornell created several hundred mixed-media sculptural objects that reference the aesthetic form of the wunderkammer. He uses photography in many of these as a means to relate complex, appropriated, compartmentalized and variant visual information. Images are frequently repeated, juxtaposed, collaged or effaced, to evoke alternating mnemonic associations and multiple readings. In his review of Cornell's recent exhibition at the RCA, Colin Martin (2015) describes how the artist was inspired by the early Surrealist collages of Max Ernst. However, Martin distinguishes between the true reliance on chance, which was the *modus operandi* of the Surrealist method, and Cornell's precisely calculated constructions. While Cornell, like the Surrealists used found and appropriated materials gathered from second hand stores and flea markets including: books, old engravings, prints, photographs, keepsakes and travel ephemera, drawn from both high and low culture, his work is more playful, even light hearted, in comparison to the darker thematic content of true Surrealism. As Martin notes (*ibid.*, p. 84), "He contrasted in his works' 'white magic', aimed at reigniting the innocent wonder of childhood, with the overly erotic Surrealist 'black magic'." This lighthearted playfulness is evident, I would argue in Cornell's careful editing of his primary source materials. These frequently include images taken from nature, travel, astronomy and science. His works are often flights of fancy, imaginative journeys to places he never visited in life, with his art becoming a sort of vicarious form of *Flânerie*. In the works *Naples 1942* (Fig. 20) and *Untitled (Celestial Navigation) 1956-58* (Fig. 21) for example, we have the suggestion of travel ephemera from the micro to the macrocosm. These 3D montages combine photographs, photographic objects, mirrors and the fragments of artefacts, creating images within images. His use of repetition, variations in scale, colour overlays, cropping, inversion, simultaneously elicit and obscure the associative and indexical readings of the photographic sources used. There is also the suggestion of traditions of reliquary in Cornell's works. Pieces such as *Untitled Object (Mona Lisa)* (Fig. 22) resemble locket, or what Geoffrey Batchen (2004, p. 32) classifies as a form of photographic practice that combines several images into one object, as a form of "sensory consummation of sight and touch". As Batchen notes (*ibid.*, p. 39), where fragments of fabric, personal effects or keepsakes are preserved with images, the result, "underscores the symbolic and abstract qualities of memory, without forsaking the proof of 'what has been' provided by the medium of photography." This combination of artefact with image, along with the sense of complex layering within the work effectively evoke associative reconstructions. Individual objects, images and components within such pieces seem to operate as evidence, or loci of residual memory traces, which are open to multiple interpretations by the viewer.

This inter-relationship between the photograph and material artefacts or objects, became more conscious within my studio process during Phase II. Inspired by the work of Cornell, and more recent contemporary artists using the memory box or cabinet of curiosity as a conceptual construct, such as Mark Dion, Stuart Lantry and Maissa Toulet. I wanted to incorporate found materials alongside my own photographs. These included artefacts gathered during my journeys through Paris, (antique postcards, letters, maps, items of clothing) were all used and appropriated to build a fictional archive for Nadja. Some of these were then dipped or cast in plaster, others were scanned and digitally embedded into

collage pieces. As Phase II progressed, I became more interested in embedding images within images, to create a more complex visual field, more like a memory cabinet or grid. I felt that this disrupted narrative sequence, and promoted the building of associative links between visual elements within each work. This layering process which was an extension of the collage method used in Phase I, was especially appropriate to memory work. In placing several images, or image objects within the same visual plane, there was potential to trigger the sense of a journey into and through the piece, inducing recollection. I regard the aesthetic as very similar to memory boxes, or cabinets of curiosity, where several often disconnected elements are compartmentalized, but form the overall web of meaning, made possible through encountering the work. The art of Annette Messenger, e.g. pieces such as *Maman*, *Histoires de Sa Robe Verte*, and *Mes Vox* (Fig. 23 and 24) were important influences here. Messenger's use of multiple photographic sources and references, juxtaposed in a non-linear matrix was a visual and conceptual device which I felt reflected something of the way memory operates. The structure of these works were important in influencing my decision to find alternative narrative forms, in the construction of studio outcomes in Phase I. As Phase II progressed, I began to concentrate more on this issue of narrative sequence, particularly within the relationship between text and photographic image. All preliminary 3D artefacts were finally removed and displayed separately, in three memory boxes, one for each phase of the project (Fig. 25). This allowed me to concentrate on the photographic again, and also to develop the content of narrative texts.

### ***Temporal Disruptions***

The first iteration of this new direction within the practice was *Postcards From A Life*, a work consisting of ten diptychs, one for each day of my journey through Paris, in the footsteps of Nadja and Breton. Each work includes a map juxtaposing my route with that of Breton's, a constructed conversation between two speaking subjects, and finally a series of twelve photographic images, each the size of a postcard, arranged in a grid (Fig. 26 & 27). I deliberately used aesthetic conventions of photography from different eras, to skew temporal reading within these pieces. Using my own photographs, combined with archival and found sources, textual fragments and, my intention was to suggest evidence of a life and an autobiography, to give Nadja's experience voice and interiority. The work is a constructed archive for Nadja, a materialization of traces and memories from a life that has been otherwise erased. The maps traced my routes through Paris, in the footsteps of Breton and included extracts from the original text, along with some of my own experiences and memories. I used double exposure in camera during several journeys to play with the Surrealist idea of chance, and also continuing the idea of approaching things from different mnemonic moments or perspectives, as begun in Phase I (Fig. 28).

Beneath each map was a second panel, containing the textual response to Breton (Fig. 29). I planned my journeys to mirror Breton's route through the city, writing and re-photographing as I went. While I used the novel to guide my direction for each day, I also allowed chance, free association and of course memory to inspire what emerged. I reduced the tonal range in the final map, to emphasize certain

information. The most mysterious, haunting and poetic sequence of events in Breton's novel occur at Place Dauphine, on Ile de la Cité. Breton describes it as follows,

There must be a certain confusion in her mind, for she has driven not to the Ile Saint-Louis, as she supposes, but to the Place Dauphine...The Place Dauphine is certainly one of the most profoundly secluded places I know of, one of the worst wastelands in Paris. Whenever I happen to be there, I feel the desire to go somewhere else gradually ebbing out of me, I have to struggle against myself to get free from a gentle, over-insistent, and, finally crushing embrace.

(Breton 1999, p.80)

It is here that Nadja's reason also gives way to a form of irrational terror. She believes that there are subaltern tunnels beneath her feet, and wanders manically in search of a doorway from which "everything begins". She is haunted, even possessed by the past at this location, grabbing hold of railings at the Conciergerie, refusing to be physically moved. She refers to a blue wind passing through the square, leaving her in dread of death. Her visions culminate in seeing a flaming hand above the river, an omen of a future catastrophe she cannot explain. In his discussion of sadness and sanity in Surrealist photography, David Bates (2004) introduces Margaret Cohen's theories on Breton's work. Cohen maintains that this novel contains more complex, multilayered references to the history of Paris, than is initially apparent. The sites most troubling to Nadja, particularly that of Place Dauphine, are where some of the most violent events in Parisian history transpired. As Bates notes,

Nadja's hallucinations, far from arbitrary, have a historical accuracy and we can begin to sense that Breton's playful writing is more of a 'docu-drama' than at first imagined.

(Bates 2004, p.97)

Her vision of the flaming hand over the Seine, has a precursor in Gerard de Nerval's story, *La Main Enchantée*, situated in Place Dauphine. This was inspired by T. A. Hoffmann's *The Enchanted Hand*. The motif of demonic possession of a hand, central to this tale also appears in Dali and Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou*. Simone de Beauvoir has also connected the work of Nerval with Nadja, in particular his final novel, *Aurelia, (Ou le Reve et la Vie)*, (1855). Identified as a Gothic work, this is an autobiographical account of the writer's descent into madness, before his own suicide. Nerval was of such importance to Surrealism, Breton had initially considered naming his movement the Supernaturalists rather than the Surrealists. In discussing the nature of Nadja's madness, Bates also maintains that the psychosis from which Nadja suffers involves a "hole, rent, a gap, with respect to external reality," which is then filled by the projection of a repressed thing, a psychic process linked to the subject's relationship to the father, paternity, and patriarchal law. Her madness is therefore symptomatic of an inability to reconcile herself to the law of the father and the symbolic order. Nadja also refers to herself as Melusine in Breton's account, a mythic archetype and alchemical figure, visually a half woman, half-serpent, also evident in drawings preserved in Breton's personal Archives. In *Psychology and Alchemy* (1993) C.J. Jung describes how Melusine is equated in the neo-Christian traditions with the anima mundi, the feminine in nature. She signifies the unconscious, but also evil and matter combined, so her destiny is to be cast out, he comments,

The experience of the unconscious is a personal secret communicable only to a very few, and that with difficulty; hence the isolating effect we noted above. But isolation brings about a compensatory animation of the psychic atmosphere which strikes us as uncanny. The figures that appear in the dream are feminine, thus pointing to the feminine nature of the unconscious. They are fairies or fascinating sirens and lamias,

who infatuate the lonely wanderer and lead him astray...and the Melusina of Paracelsus is another such figure.

(Jung 1993, p.52)

There is no doubt that Breton viewed Nadja as a “veritable Sphinx”, a form of dark muse and a conduit to access the subconscious. She is after all taken to be one of the most iconic of such figures in the Surrealist tradition. It could be argued also that Nadja was driven insane by her inability to reconcile herself with a system which demanded so much of her. Gradually overwhelmed by her visions of Breton, as an overpowering God-like figure who can completely nullify her existence and also his projection of darkness onto her, his final abandonment leaves her completely bereft. She fully collapses into madness like an imploding star. Bates describes this psychodynamic as follows,

Breton remains on the side of the symbolic order, he is the neurotic witness to his own unconscious conflicts, while Nadja is given to signify the unconscious and can no longer bear witness to her own thoughts. Nadja transgresses the symbolic order and pays the price of incarceration.

(Bates 2004, p.110)

There was undoubtedly an exploitative even cavalier attitude in Breton’s behaviour towards Nadja, evident in the overall Surrealist indifference to the vulnerability of those suffering from mental illness. In 1928, (the very year Nadja was published) photographs of Charcot’s famous psychiatric patient Augustine (Fig. 30) were used to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hysteria. Didi-Huberman (1982, p.148) describes how Surrealism regarded this malady, suffered predominantly by young women, as “the greatest poetic discovery of the nineteenth century,” proclaiming “We love nothing better than these young hysterics, of whom the perfect type is provided by the observation of the delicious X.L. (Augustine).” As noted earlier, it was Breuer and Freud who had first proposed that hysteria was in fact, the reoccurrence of suppressed memory. In the case of Augustine, the most famous hysteric in Charcot’s studies, this was the memory of a traumatic rape, buried in the body, and repeated through psychotic gesture as a split-off disassociated component of the psyche. For the Surrealist artist it seems, Augustine was to be used to expand consciousness like a psychotropic drug. The photographic plates created by Régnard for Charcot, present the first visual taxonomy of the associated psychosomatic phenomena of hysteria; female subjects (though there were also male hysterics – suffering from what we understand today to be PTSD), are captured prostrate, frozen, catatonic and in many instances seemingly possessed or overwhelmed by an invisible presence. Like Nadja, Augustine looks to the air, transfixed by hallucination. In Régenard’s *Les maladies épidémiques de l’esprit*, there are also some interesting visualizations of pre-psychoanalytic beliefs that the symptoms of hysteria resembled demonic possession. Subjects, mainly women are here depicted as falling victim to an infernal presence, which is expelled on the air, like an exhalation of foul breath. However rather than a supernatural presence interfering with the subject, what we are witnessing is a re-enactment of traumatic memory, trapped in the contorted gesticulations of flesh and bone. In this context, the Surrealist fascination with the psychological illness of these young women is predatory and troubling. Like Augustine, Nadja is celebrated by Breton for her unusual visionary qualities. Although Breton finally describes her as mad, he is loath to draw distinctions between the irrational and rational mind. Nadja in the end underwent a final redemptive transformation, becoming the one born to transgress all rules as a beacon of revolutionary emancipation. Breton concluded she,

.... was born to serve it (freedom), if only by demonstrating that around himself each individual must foment a private conspiracy, which exists not only in his imagination...by thrusting one's head, then an arm, out of the jail - thus shattered - of logic, that is, out of the most hateful of prisons.

(Breton 1928, p. 143)

This is easily said in the hindsight of literary reflection, and the privilege of justifying actions according to the dictates of an artistic manifesto. The events of this story raise many questions regarding power relations determined by class, gender and artistic ethics. I was very conscious of these issues during the research, and also of the possibility that Nadja's mental illness may have been a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. Breton's descriptions of her episodes of psychosis, and their haunting quality resemble accounts from Freud, Breuer and Charcot's early studies into memory and its maladies. Nadja is depicted by Breton as a figure cast adrift, spectral and detached from regular life. Her perceptions are frequently distorted by fears of the past or future. Her subjectivity at times seems to collapse, as her identity is interchanged or overwhelmed by her thoughts of Breton, or figures from history and myth. I wanted to communicate a sense of this temporal and identity disruption within the aesthetic form of the studio work. This is reflected in the written texts through the interchangeability of speaking voices, which weave in and out of each other, and also the skewing of the temporal register of the photographic styles combined within the accompanying images.

The images for each diptych are gathered from a number of sources. I re-photographed several of Boiffard's sites, including my own images of chance encounters on location. The collection of personal photographs and letters from a mysterious anonymous woman, dating from 1907 to 1968, which I found at the market of St. Ouen became the locus of a constructed visual autobiography. This unknown figure, who is pictured travelling, often entirely alone around various locations in Europe, became the signifier of an alternative destiny for Nadja. I scanned this material, using the tonal range and material style of the photographs to digitally alter contemporary digital shots. While in Paris I also gathered several archival sources to integrate into the work.

At the archives of the Centre Georges Pompidou, I viewed the collaborative psychogeographical artist book *Memories* by Asger Jorn and Guy Debord (Fig. 31). The random juxtapositions and playfulness of their approach helped me understand the often arbitrary, haphazard and illogical way memory operates, and the poetic licence allowed the artist to express this. I also used drawing along with the slower technical process of solar plate and photo etching, to think into the ideas of the work and synthesize some of the archival resources I was finding. In the drawing series *The Blue Wind*, (Fig. 32, 33 & 34) this thinking through drawing and more material visual forms, that combine photographs, text and alternative ways of working the surface of the image are more apparent. I chose the form of a postcard as a means to integrate all of these visual research sources, because as an artefact of visual material culture, it is used for the preservation of everyday memory. Sending postcards has also been described as a female occupation, and as such postcards are regarded as disposable, sentimental and forgettable. I felt this format was particularly fitting to resurrect the forgotten life of Nadja. From the flea markets in Paris I also bought a selection of second-hand postcards, choosing dates and images roughly corresponding to the locations and dates in Breton's novel. I digitally integrated original

handwriting from what remains of Nadja's letters and drawings to Breton. In the absence of autobiographical traces of Nadja's existence, I was generating my own to create the content from often anonymous sources, alongside my own documentary images of the time spent wandering in search of these traces in Paris.

The American conceptual artist Susan Hiller, in particular her work *Dedicated To The Unknown Artists*, (1972- 1976) (Fig. 35), was a key influence at this stage of my project. Hiller's piece consists of 300 found postcards, all of rough seas around the coast of Britain. These have been systematically organised into grids, according to a typology devised by Hiller based on their textual references. Accompanying these postcards, Hiller has also included a map of their points of reference, along with empirical data charts based on an analysis of the linguistic and visual traits of each. The final work is presented on fourteen framed panels, and as a book and dossier.

Trained in both art and anthropology, Hiller defines her work as "paraconceptual", a term describing how she integrates influences from both conceptualism and paranormal investigation. The interplay between factual and fictional, recollection and fantasy, empirical and absurd data, are characteristic and deliberate within her approach. In the accompanying publication to Hiller's exhibition at the Tate London, Ellen Gallagher notes that anthropological methodology and systems of taxonomic classification underpin Hiller's production. In her archival piece *From the Freud Museum* (Fig. 36), this is evident in how she gathers, sorts, classifies and transforms, found or appropriated materials, to construct what Gallagher describes as micro museums whereby,

This curious anthology of oddities, collected by the artist for their personal associations, have been meticulously arranged, annotated and indexed to provide the viewer with an array of tantalizing fragments of cultural memory from which to form their own associations and meanings.

(Gallagher 2011, p. 16)

In her collection of selected talks and texts, *The Provincial Texture of Reality*, Hiller describes how she,

declassified and reclassified objects of no value, in an overt cultural archaeology...(an) elusive double perspective of the dreamer, who simultaneously grasps reality as well as what reality hides.

(Hiller 2008, p. 28)

Here the dreamer is both the artist and the viewer, who must lucidly traverse states of consciousness and subconscious perception in order to construct meaning in fragmentary material traces of what remains. Using images, texts and photographs, collected and divided into new taxonomies, the re-mounted, like precious historical artefacts in archival brown boxes Hiller proves that even within the museum of the father of psychoanalysis memory is always a space for revision. Knowledge and memory are to be contested. Two vials of water, one labelled Lethe the other Mnemosyne, appear in this work, referencing the Greek belief that after death the soul on its journey through the underworld can choose to drink from the river of forgetful oblivion or remembrance (Fig. 37). In the context of this work, Hiller draws the viewers' attention to the deep time and memory within history, and the agency required in choosing when and what to remember, and of course the legacy of psychoanalysis, as the modern art of memory. Her use of images within image, meaning layered upon meaning, in meta-textual

compositions, creates a work functioning like memory itself, built upon shifting levels of association, prompted by unexpected links and temporal shifts. The conceptual approach and aesthetic form I chose for my own series *Postcards From A Life*, owes much to Hiller. However, where Hiller used exclusively found postcards to generate taxonomies, I have created my own to construct a fictional archive. The photographic images here were used as environments of mnemonic return to generate new insight, knowledge, and potential reading for Breton's memory of events. The process was also about returning to create a different future for Nadja, and women like her.

The diptych pieces in *Postcards From A Life* were my first attempt to synthesize research for Phase II, and were successful to the extent that it allowed me to integrate complex content. In adopting certain archival and anthropological aesthetic methods, I could bring order, structure and form to the memory processes informing the thought behind the studio outcomes.

### ***Narrative Drift - Inscribing and Un-inscribing the Image***

Sometimes it doesn't add up, there are holes, ellipses, elisions, gaps, erasures, disappearances in what is left. Maria Devereaux Herbeck, in her description of what she terms "narrative drift" in recent French literature and film, including Breton's *Najda*, has described a process whereby certain subjects, particularly certain women, succeed in escaping the all-encompassing, usually male gaze of a centralized narrative authority. This authoritative position is often reinforced with the aid of ideological systems, including those of anthropology, ethnography and psychoanalysis. However, where the subject moves beyond the scopic abilities of the narrator, the narrative drifts, doubles back upon itself and the narrator, rather than the object becomes visible. In Breton's case, these are the moments in his story, where he can only speculate upon Nadja's existence, as she vanishes into the city and the unknown. Breton is then forced to contemplate his own life and intentions. In these moments, where the protagonist literally walks away, the narrator must also drift from observation to reflection, from claims to truth, to speculative, poetic and imaginative dreaming, influenced by personal memory. As Devereaux remarks, when the "screen of authority" invested in the narrative agent or voice is destabilising, so too is the reader and viewer's faith in the power of the larger ontological constructions it upholds. James Clifford commenting on ethnographic Surrealism, maintains that where,

Reality is no longer a given, a natural, familiar environment, the self, cut loose from its attachments, must discover meaning where it may, a predicament which destabilises the self, threatening at its most nihilistic complete erasure of identity.

(Clifford 1981, p.543)

But in Devereaux's analysis, this cutting loose and drifting out, is not about alienation, rather it is a freedom through detachment from the conventions of a prescribed social reality. The decision however risky, to wander, becomes an individualistic politics of claiming agency. As Devereaux notes, characters such as Mona in Agnes Varda's film *Vagabond* (1985), are examples of a female wanderer, who chooses to drift rather than live within social conventions, particularly those imposed upon a female subject.

This concept of narrative drift is one I found appropriate and useful in understanding my intention, methods and results during the research. In physically wandering through psychogeographical spaces of Breton's novel, I gravitated towards those spaces where Nadja seemed most elusive. Where, as Devereaux describes it, the female subject disappears from view and is freest to determine her own identity. In these absences I found the most potential for speculating upon, discovering or suggesting what the missing mnemonic content might contain. I would also equate these drifts, silences and disappearances within textual narrative, with certain unusual phenomena in the visual field. These can occur both within the perception of the subject described, and also at the level of signification of the photograph, as document of psychological states where memory interrupts, ruptures and distorts perception. In this sense Nadja's visionary hallucinations, can be understood as mnemonic interferences. Didi-Huberman (1982, p.129) also draws attention to Charcot's studies of the "ocular symptoms" of hysteria, which he maintained included, micropsia, macropsia, concentric shrinking of the visual field, dyschromatopsia, dissymmetry, reduction of visual ability on the right side, and interestingly achromatopsia, which caused the subject to see the world as a photograph. As discussed in chapter 2 (above), Didi-Huberman describes an "overhang of affect" in certain documentary photographs from Charcot's Iconography of hysteria. The spaces of absence take on an ominous quality, and become a projection ground for the viewer to imagine what emptiness might contain. This is also what Ulrich Baer has described as "spectral evidence", where absence and erasure can inversely become the most psychologically charged element in a place or scene (Baer 2005).

At this point in the project, realising how problematic memory disrupts the psychological functioning of perception, vision, and inscription, I decided that this should also become apparent in how I treated images about this phenomenon. In the final edition of practice-based research outcomes for Phase II, the digitally altered photographic series *The Blue Wind* (Fig. 38 & 39) this began to happen. Consisting of 10 digital photographic prints, in which extracts from the textual narrative written for *Postcards From a Life*, have been inserted into the digital code of selected images, my intention was to discover how the memories contained in the narrative drift of the text, could interfere with and disrupt the visual field. In each image I inserted text, up to the point where the photograph still remained intact. The visual glitching was unpredictable, open to chance, and in direct relation to the textual interference with the digital code. In effect, I was inscribing and also un-inscribing the image, opening up spaces of disappearance prompted by an unpredictable impact of mnemonic content on the visual field. In two larger pieces *Hypermaps #1 & 2* (Fig. 40 & 41) an overload of memory caused the breaking down of the image on a digital level. Technically I loaded so many visual moments from one psychogeographical journey through Paris into the same visual field, the computer was unable to process the information. The digital disintegration of the image became an interesting aesthetic to speak of the fragility of the new photographic surface, which is really a screen interface.

Additional conceptual and aesthetic influences at this stage included artists who have also incorporated text, and the simultaneous erasure of text into the construction of photographic work. Here the work of Finnish photographer Niina Vatanen was important, for how she writes and unwrites images, and also



in how she inverts the surface of photographic images to address themes of memory, loss and erasure. In *A Room's Memory* the first comprehensive catalogue on Vatanen (2013, p. 12), Pari Stave introduces her work as having, "a disquieting sense of absence, void, and latency". Pessi Rautio (ibid, p.23) describes a reoccurring "blocking of the gaze" within her images. Vatanen frequently uses accidental technical mistakes, erosion and loss of context to open appropriated archival photographs as mnemonic projection grounds. She isn't particularly interested in the indexical register of these images, rather she uses their vernacular familiarity to explore the point at which the index is infused with associative resonance, evoked by memory. Tears, chemical stains, scratches, light leaks; evidence of the history of the photograph as a material artefact, reveal a hidden affective latency within the visible field, allowing for this imaginative projection. Exposed spaces between frames, elude to what is hidden, the time between things, the agency of unique and particular decisions which were once taken. In *Reverse View* (2010) (Fig. 42) an instant of light and shadow, the essence of photographic inscription at its purest, seems to have permeated the back surface of the image and hover unfixed above its surface, like a chimera threatening to fade. In another piece the series *A Rooms Memory* (2010), *The Collector* (Fig. 43), an archival gloved hand pins butterflies onto a cloth in a shaft of light casting long shadows into the background. Both pieces offer brilliant insight into what we demand of the photograph, in its purest auratic function, this is the photographer as magician or alchemist, who with a slight of hand seems to have trapped light to suggest the fragility of memory. Vatanen's work, *The Red Letter, And Other Confessions* (2006) (Fig. 44) was also relevant. Here she has photographed a series of autobiographical letters, where the text has been rendered illegible. It is simultaneously present and absent, the photographic document of an erasure of mnemonic content. The motif also reoccurs in a later beautifully ethereal series, *A Seamstress's Notes* (2010) (Fig. 45) in which the intimacy of personal letters, postcards and photographs are sewn through with various threads, suggesting memento-mori. This work recalls that of Maria Lai, for example, *Lenzuolo* (2007) (Fig. 46), an influence in Phase I of the project. Here the simultaneous writing and un-writing of language, as suggested by the presence and absence in the threaded texts suggests both revelation and erasure.

### ***The Photobook as a Mnemonic Environment***

A final influence I will mention here is that of artist Mariana Castillo Deball, as her work also uses the Artist Book as an immersive environment to address the deconstruction, erasure and reinvention of memory. In the aesthetic and material construction of her work, usually presented as large installations, Deball allows for spaces of ambiguity to emerge, to deconstruct the provenance, presentation and indexical register of visual cultural materials, to reimagine history, not as a closed narrative, but a site for excavation and alternatives. In her recent article for the exhibition catalogue accompanying *Parergon*, at the Hamburger Bahnhof (2015, p. 319), Kirsty Bell comments that the artist has described herself as "a parasite in the archaeological and anthropological collection of the museum". Using performative lectures, film, nomadic sculptural configurations and relational publication projects, Deball allows for both narrative and interpretative drift within her work. As Bell notes, the artist consistently obfuscates her own voice and position within the fragmented materials presented, to introduce what

she terms “discursive vectors”, informed by what is excavated, secondary research and the contribution of several invited participants. Multiplicity of subject positions, chance encounters of association, tangential constructions of meaning, encourage what Bell terms an “immanence of revelation” (ibid., p.232). One of Deball’s main strategies is to abandon dialectical subject/object relations. In *Uncomfortable Objects* (2008/09) she creates a process whereby inanimate things assume voice and agency, through the invention of a new memory narrative for each. Deball uses a method similar to the Surrealist use of automatic writing, where haunted things speak, and their chance encounters become revelations. For example, in *El Donde Estoy va Desapareciendo* (2014) (Fig. 47) an animated film, the *Codex Borgia*, a pre-Columbian document tells its own history saying,

Thus began my voyage/I wandered over land and sea/the voices became more and more strange/no one opened my pages to repeat their histories/I began to forget where I came from/my shapes went mute.  
(Deball, 2014)

In Deball’s work the absent, the dead, the silenced, the negated in traditional Eurocentric anthropological and ethnographic discourses, assumes new agency, as salvaged fragments of material culture speak their memory. As Bell (2015, p. 321) notes, we are presented with, “Instead of a human subject moving through a system of objects, the object proceeds through the system of people”. However, Hal Foster (1996) in his critique of the ethnographic turn in contemporary art practice, describes a risk of re-inscribing alterity in any unquestioning neo-romantic equating of the creativity with ideas of unconscious primitivism, something endemic to the Surrealist legacy. He recommended instead, a “complex imbrication” to move beyond simple oppositions, particularly postcolonial notions of the primitive outsider, the irrational, emotive and silent. For Deball, who often begins with artefacts referencing her own cultural origins, now stored in European museum collections, this problem is particularly relevant. Spaces of emptiness, of erasures and forgotten subjectivities can in Deball’s work become spaces of imaginative intercession. To play with the evidence means to be able to creatively reinvent memory, a process of taking back power, agency and interiority through the creation of alternative mnemonic narratives. Deball has also consistently used the book as a site of intervention. In *Do ut Des*, (Fig. 48) an on-going piece, she presents a collection of books designed by Eugenio Hirsch as an overview of the collections of various world museums. These catalogues published in the 1970’s were created to assist visitors navigate the history and collections of these institutions. Appropriated in a contemporary context, they provide Deball with an atlas for institutional critique. By literally cutting holes in these books, including their photographic evidence, she points towards layers of absence, spaces of extrusion within colonial memories of the past. In *Uncomfortable Objects* (2012) (Fig.49), photographic material from disparate ethnographic sources, are collaged, overlaid, distorted and stretched into thin skins on asymmetrical sculptural forms, that extended through space, like organic thoughts, finding their own route around the architecture of the museum. In a commissioned essay for Deball’s publication, *Uncomfortable Objects* (2012), Jimena Canales (pp.37- 47), charts the historical, philosophical and scientific progress of an idea as a form, that from even the smallest of gestures, or petites causes, can cause the greatest of effects. The implication here being that even the slightest deviation in variables within knowledge, can reinvent the world. Deball’s work is political, in that she sets the stage for such deviations in traditions of collective institutionalised remembrance to

occur. She uses the evidentiary power of museum aesthetic, to expose hidden political trajectories within systems of collective memory. The ruin, the trace, the mute decontextualised object, like a photographic slice of time, become props forever shifting within contingent notions of reality. At the core of Deball's practice, as with Hillers, I would argue that there is a similar form of conceptual and narrative drift. Each wanders, if not physically, then through the halls and collections of western knowledge. Like thieves, vagabonds and rag pickers, these artists choose what to borrow, what is needed to tell a different kind of story. In this form of work, memory is fluid, interchangeable, mutable. Deball consistently uses the book as a form which can be reinvented to speak new narratives. The artist book is an aesthetic form I have also used in each stage of the research. It has been a means to explore the inter-relationship between the photographic and textual contents of studio outcomes, while also testing the limits of each in communicating the complexities of memory. This form allowed me to synthesize and consolidate each cycle of the work and create immersive mnemonic sequences for the viewer.

In concluding this section on finding an aesthetics for memory, I will say that all of the artists presented here, which have influenced the visual and conceptual development of my studio experiments, share similar approaches to the treatment of the photograph as a site of mnemonic return. Each in their own way test the documentary limits of the image to the point where it yields to a form of lucid reconfiguration. Images that are unquestionably snatched from their original function as documentary evidence, become harbingers of memory, often through the evocation of presence within absence. In borrowing strategies from both Surrealism and ethnography, each of these artists also uses chance as an active method of unconsciously accessing buried mnemonic content. However, unlike their Surrealist predecessors, this is not a search for marvellous encounter, with a primitive, absurd, subconscious projected into the silenced field of the other. Instead chance is the moment where the authority of institutional ontologies and the photograph itself, are treated as negotiable. Agency is handed back to the viewer as an invitation to enter a different form of relation. Use of the photograph as a site of memory, whether archival, anthropological, vernacular or constructed, becomes a means to renegotiate the limits of identity.

## **Conclusions for Phase II**

By the completion of Phase II, I could identify consistent conceptual and formal aesthetic strategies within core artistic influences, and my own studio application of these to enhance the potential of my photographs to operate as environments of mnemonic return. As discussed above, these include:

### **1. *Images within images***

The final resolution of this strategy is evident in the series *The Blue Wind* (Fig. 39) and *Hypermap 1 & 2* (Fig. 40&41). This is the final edition of the Paris cycle of work. By inscribing mnemonic texts at the level of the code of the image, and also within its visual plane, I was aiming to express repetitions, echoes, re-occurrences within the visual field of psychologically influenced background content. I pushed this to the point where digital memory began to collapse, and used the visual

breakdown as part of the aesthetic of the image. The result is images within images, moments within moments, memories within memories, up to the point where the capacity to retain information begins to disintegrate, because memory is overwhelmed. This is something I anticipate I will use further, by integrating multi-layered presentation platforms, and also moving image within future work.

## **2. Use of Temporal Disruptions**

As discussed above, problems in memory functioning, particularly in instances of trauma, can result in ruptures, gaps, erasures, repetitions, and general disruptions within the usual linear sequencing of events remembered. I have visually referred to this through deliberately skewing the temporal register within the aesthetic of several images in Phase II. This includes scanning and appropriating archival photographs, and integrating their style, form, and technique with my own work, shot with a variety of cameras, from medium format film to iPhone snapshots. This is most evident in how I synthesised materials in compiling *Postcards From a Life*, where the sources include found, appropriated, archival and new materials. I would like to pursue this further in the construction of impossible narratives, based on the temporal impossibility thereby playing with the vulnerability of memory further.

## **3. Narrative Drift - Inscribing and Un-inscribing the Image**

Inspired by Van Der Kolk's descriptions of lesions and ellipses, where trauma is entombed as absences in memory pathways, I have been searching for visual means to express this. I would identify the actual holes in the books of Mariana Castillo Deball, or the blacked out texts in work by Niina Vatanen, or Maria Lai's simultaneous writing and un-writing within her threaded books, as examples of a dual signification: of absence and presence, inscription and un-inscription in the same gesture. This simultaneous utterance and masking of utterance, was something important to me in Phase I, as a deliberate means to both reveal and conceal traumatic autobiographical memory. In Phase II, I allowed chance to enter the process more consciously. By inscribing memories within code of the image, I was simultaneously un-inscribing the visual field, allowing memory to unpredictably erase what would visually remain.

## **4. Use of The Artist Book As A Memory Environment**

By the end of Phase I, I had created four handmade artist books. For Phase II, I returned to the photobook format as a means to digitally produce a layout which allowed me to quickly alter visual and textual sequences, to edit and restructure emerging memory narratives. I felt that the book format, provided a perfect self-contained environment, which also included a beginning and end point, with potential to offer closure. As a material, aesthetic and conceptual form, it provided the perfect means to collate the diverse sources within the work into one platform. Three prototype Photobooks have been created for the project, and my aim is to have these published once the PhD is completed

