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# Framing Traces

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# Abstract

*Framing Traces* explores the way in which the physical object of the picture frame, in combination with site, becomes an object through which an individual could experience the past. This is achieved by playing with the relationship and balance between presence and absence. Visual cues from site, geographical location and the picture frame itself form conditions for viewer reflections. These are what make up the conditions of engagement. As the viewer selects, analyses and categorises aspects of these cues in the context of their own experiences, biases and emotions they are able to attach an idiomatic meaning to the picture frame. Through the writing component, the analysis of picture frames is located within a material culture framework. The personal and cultural layering within one's own interpretation and the coexistence of the two alongside place creation is considered in the authorship of the work.

# Introduction

*Framing Traces* concerns a body of creative research focused on the installation of picture frames in response to histories and spatial conditions of specific sites. These installations explore various ways that an individual might perceive and experience the past and the present. This exegesis reflects on four different installations of locally sourced picture frames installed within the Dominion Museum Building and The Engine Room, two locations saturated with layers of history.<sup>1</sup> The memory related process of mental transference onto object-site relations and the creation of familial 'place' is presented to demonstrate the role of the viewer in these cognitive artworks.

Chapter One, *Object*, discusses the importance of person-object relationships. Connotations of the readymade object are considered against the recontextualisation of picture frames. The effect of each is looked at in relation to the viewer's ability to understand and interpret objects in context. The power of presence and absence of the object is examined against Rachel Whiteread's *House* and Christian Boltanski's *Missing House*. Finally, the discussion is contextualised in light of *Untitled 1 (frames)*<sup>2</sup>, a site-specific installation of picture frames in the Dominion Museum Building.

Chapter Two, *Place*, looks at site-specificity and the creation of *place*. Drawing from early 20th century philosopher Edward S. Casey's writings on place and Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, place is defined and considered in relation to art-space and installation. This chapter includes insights into the familial object and place as well as architectural space and its effect on place creation. Concluding the chapter, *Untitled 3 (Stack of frames)* demonstrates place creation and the poetics of the Dominion Museum Building space. The effect of the latter is discussed in relation to the picture frame in an installation that refuses traditional functionality of the frame, dividing sculptural form from practical application.

Chapter Three, *Cognition*, brings together object and place to demonstrate mental transference leading to individual perception. Casey's definitions of imagination and memory are used to clarify the borders in what could otherwise be an extremely expansive topic. The influence of the picture frame over space and recognition of the specific site use is discussed. A third installation, *Untitled 2 (frames)*, is used to bring together the aforementioned elements and demonstrate the application of viewer perception of the picture frame installations. Finally, an independent yet somewhat 'fourth' work demonstrates the cognitive process of the viewer in action.

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<sup>1</sup> The Dominion Museum is a historical building and site and The Engine Room is an art gallery.

<sup>2</sup> Each installation in this research is intentionally titled *Untitled* followed by the a number and a short description in brackets for identification. *Untitled* is referring to something obsolete, in other words, the installation having no title or the title having no right to rule. This is due to the installations being entirely perceptual, a title would create a form of limitation or explanation. By giving the work a name, the viewer can be influenced or directed in a thought process which is purposely removed for this reason.

# Object

## *Introduction*

In the following chapter, the meaning behind the picture frame is discussed as the chosen object of focus in *Framing Traces*. The material culture<sup>3</sup> related to picture frames is used to help define the associative meanings attached to them and the material elements of the frame are considered in terms of a readymade object available for recontextualisation. The affect and effect of present and absent objects within a site, on the viewer and site respectively, is discussed and exemplified against Rachel Whiteread's *House* and Christian Boltanski *Missing House*. Rounding off the chapter, *Untitled 1 (frames)* demonstrates the application of picture frames using presence and absence in the Wellington Dominion Museum Building to communicate historical presence and to encourage recollection and reflection on the past from the viewer.

## *Picture Frames*

In this research, the picture frame is presented as a domestic object of metonymy (an entity that stands for another associated entity). The picture frame can represent memory, the familial relationship, presence, absence, aesthetic and stylistic value, past, present, encasement and protection.<sup>4</sup> Picture frames are domestically and publicly found objects which enter into our lives on a regular basis. Inside and outside the home, visual art (paintings, prints and photographs) is commonly coupled with a frame, which is, to some extent, drawn into the associative value of the image. In their original conditions, these framed images can have aesthetic value but also, just as prominently, refer to important life events, memories and familial attachments. When separating the frame from its image does the frame play a large enough role in these values to carry the associations with it when displayed empty or in another context? Or will the malleable nature of the frame drop its last contextual application and take on other associative narratives for the viewer and site?

## *Readymade*

Readymades, as defined in the artwork of Marcel Duchamp, are everyday mass-produced objects that are recontextualised as art. The object becomes a 'readymade' when the objects and their appropriate cultural places are played with by *de-* and *re-*contextualising everyday objects to twist their meanings.<sup>5</sup> For example, Duchamp's *Fountain (1917)*, a mass-produced white porcelain urinal displayed in a gallery (a site considered outside of typical context<sup>6</sup>) rotated 90 degrees on its axis and signed "R.Mutt 1917". The urinal becomes an object of 'art' simply by treatment and positioning of it as an art piece. The recontextualisation of the picture frame, from its practical origin to the central focus of an

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<sup>3</sup> Within material culture studies there are several different approaches to thinking about objects that are relative to this project. This research aligns, in particular, with the cultural and symbolic approach to objects.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*. (London: SAGE, 2007), 146.

<sup>5</sup> Woodward, 78.

<sup>6</sup> Woodward, 104.

artspace, brings with it these connotations of the readymade. The picture frame can be considered as a banal object, especially those sold at recycling or second-hand stores. The picture frames in the presented works are a mixture of commercially mass-produced and locally handcrafted (however still carrying a mass-production-like, non-individualistic quality to them).

However, unlike Duchamp's *Fountain*, the picture frames are pre-owned. The frames carry with them varying signs of wear and tear and suggestions of life emerge through traces of this use. This, in effect, creates a biography of the picture frames. Such traces of the frame's use, ownership, and occupation suggest a life trajectory, time duration and age are notable material aspects of the picture frame. Realisation of this durational development from new (youthful) to aged (mature) to eventual decommission (death) resembles the lifespan of an individual.<sup>7</sup>

While connection and assumptions can be made about the frame's previous 'life', the application of the picture frame and the site (as performed by the artist) is what activates the two, bringing the object into a state of agency,<sup>8</sup> "the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power; a person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved."<sup>9</sup> Some theorists such as anthropologist Alfred Gell and sociologist Anthony Giddens, agree that objects are imbued with agency, or at least an ability to evoke some sort of change or response in individual people, by an agent who creates them. However, the argument varies greatly and each theorist has an individual interpretation of the meaning of agency and the capacity of the object to have a *life* or *personality* of its own.<sup>10</sup> In this research the removal of the picture frame, from its original purpose, transitions it into a state of anonymity. This is where the frame is at its most malleable. The frames remain in this transitional state for an agent (artist or new possessor) to activate it. Then a cognitive connection can be rebuilt by the viewer or consumer of these readymade commodities.

### *Re-cognition*

The picture frames, in the case of this research, are sourced from the Wellington Recycling Centre, Wellington region charity stores and secondhand goods stores. This narrow area of source also limits the picture frames starting context. While there may be some exceptions, the majority of the frames presumably will have been donated by residents within the local area. Removed from walls or storage, the picture frames are taken from the context of the home, workplace or institution and their possessive rights handed over to one of the above distributors. This change in context opens the object's representation up for re-cognition in relation to physical, social and cultural context.

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<sup>7</sup> Janet Hoskins, "Agency, Biography and Objects," in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley, Webb Kaene, Susanne Kuchler, Mike Rowlands and Patricia Spyer (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 81.

<sup>8</sup> Hoskins, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Agency," Accessed October 14, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agency>.

<sup>10</sup> For a clear comparison in thinking amongst a handful of theorist see: Janet Hoskins, "Agency, Biography and Objects," 74-84. As used above.

Throughout the following text, the term “re-cognition” is used as a noun for the reconsideration of an understanding attached to an object or context. This understanding is formulated through the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge through thought, experience, and the senses. Re-cognition is distinct from the more common noun “recognition”. American sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander’s discussions on whether or not art can provide a window into social life has strong emphasis on the physical object and its interpretation through the eyes of the viewer. Alexander states that “the artist tells the truth about an object by using surface form as a device to draw us deeper, into what might be called iconic meaning. If this is successful, the specifics of the object and its production fall away. [...] The aesthetic object becomes a symbol, not a specific referent for some specific thing but a signifier that points to all ‘such things’.”<sup>11</sup>

Alexander goes on to explain this further, touching on the mental process we go through to create a level of understanding: “In the course of everyday life, we are drawn into the experience of meaning and emotionality by surface forms. We experience these forms in a tactile way. They have an expressive texture that we ‘feel’ in our unconscious minds and associate with other ideas and things.”<sup>12</sup> For the picture frame, surface form is limited to what materiality is remaining of the typical picture frame set up, that is the glass, matting, mounting board or simply the frame. Simple materialities of wood type or hanging style provide the base from which iconic meaning can be built.

Size and scale are also contributing factors in the interpretation of the following picture frame works. For their practical purpose, most frames are created to suit the size of the picture they are framing. This can be in custom or standard sizes. There are standardised paper sizes and therefore standardised frame sizes to suit them. Frames falling into this standard size category can easily be overlooked as generic. The presented selection of frames displays a range of generic to strangely irregular sizing (within the limitations of availability). Overly large or specifically shaped frames (particularly when in the typical modern ‘gallery’ style of plain white painted wood or the traditional style of ornate gold leaf) can carry indications that one is looking at an artwork picture frame as opposed to a certificate or family photo picture frame. Scale can play a significant role in the re-cognition of the picture frame even when recontextualised. Scale of the installations in relation to the human body and occupying space is also considered against the demand for the viewer’s engagement. For example, the larger and more dominant the work, the more noticeable it becomes and therefore, there is a higher demand for engagement. Viewer engagement (conscious or unconscious) with the object/s is key to the duration of the work.

Installation is another intervention into the material culture of the picture frame. The hanging or positioning of the frame has the ability to influence the reading of an object - amplifying, inhibiting or distracting from it. The choice of presentation of the picture frame, in particular, is suggestive of its application. For example, orientation of the frame could be indicative of portraiture or landscape subjects. Hanging methods and height positioning on the wall or in

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Iconic Experience in Art and Life - Surface/Depth Beginning with Giacometti's Standing Woman," *Theory Culture & Society* 25, no. 5 (2008): 6, EBSCOhost, doi:10.1177/0263276408095213.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, 6.

relation to other frames could indicate different hanging eras such as the salon-style popular in the eighteenth century or the Victorian picture rail hanging style.

The display method of framing an image has a long historical application that focuses on the image as the viewing point. However “framing” as a term is not limited to decorative edging around a picture or photograph. The word *frame* or *framing* is a homonym. First there is the physical object that holds an image. Secondly, *frame* can also be a verb for the action of putting the image inside of the frame-object. Or *frame* can refer to the formulation of a concept or plan. *Frame* is also the word for the supporting structure of something as well as the act of constructing it. Finally *frame* can mean to falsely incriminate. In this way, the surface form of the word as well as the surface form of the object come together to help define what the viewer is perceiving. The multiple meanings of the word are considered in the recontextualisation of the picture frame in an artspace.<sup>13</sup> While the physical nature and common application of the frame will still feed into re-cognition of its purpose, the ideology and symbolism behind the frame through an understanding of the word can be re-created and re-built.

### *Absence and presence*

Together, absence and presence combine to tell a story to the viewer about site, object and personal history. Combinations of markings, objects and emptiness are left open for individual interpretation influenced by the viewer’s own experiences.

This interplay between absence and presence (or positive and negative) is something that contemporary English artist Rachel Whiteread brings into all of her casting works. Whiteread casts the physical evidence of object histories by casting the space in and around domestic objects. Through her play between positive and negative spaces she forces the viewer to think about one thing in relation to another such as a mattress to a bed base. This causes the viewer to fill the blanks with their imagination in order to reach a level of understanding of what they are looking at, for example, the bed frame that has since been removed from the cast of the space under it. Whiteread cultivates our ability to understand by choosing to cast domestic objects that are familiar to almost everyone such as a chair or a room.

With site playing such an influential role in her work, Whiteread considers the character of the site in her treatment of each sculpture. This is an important part of public installation as historical record due to individual perception related to site, particularly in combination with an object. Retention of the site’s character is required to inspire thought of the previous inhabitation of the site. It is for this reason that the presented picture frame works use site to dictate the installation with the site retaining much of its original condition.

Whiteread’s work titled *House* (1993) is a monumental concrete cast of the interior spaces of a Victorian house. All of the marks and traces left behind by previous occupants are made visible on the building’s new exterior which is (what was once) the interior walls. The sculpture creates a tension between inhabited and uninhabitable spaces where the mind

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<sup>13</sup> The artspace being the *place* created through intervention of installation in built spaces. For example the Hallway in *Untitled 1 (frames)* as discussed below.

continues to conjure thoughts of experience inside of a space that is now no longer physically accessible.

By bearing all of the private interior of a home for anyone to see, it is almost as though you are reading the home's personal diary. With the exterior stripped away and the internal space recorded, the viewer becomes the wall, watching the interior and unable to inhabit. This creates a sense of discomfort that we can only begin to understand when we start to consider how the original object is or was a comfort to begin with.

A house encompasses an array of different materials, [...] collectively creating a dwelling experience that is greater than the sum of its parts. For these are more than mere 'things', they are a collection of appropriated materials, invested with meaning and memory, a material testament of who we are, where we have been, and perhaps even where we are heading.[...] They bind our past with our present and our possible futures, thereby framing and reflecting our sense of self.<sup>14</sup>

Found picture frames are a symbol of these private memories and appropriated materials to which we attach meaning. The removal of them from the space of the home (or the home itself in the case of Whiteread) is a removal of an identification of self as the domestic picture frame falls within the realm of gathered domestic objects used to communicate and articulate self.<sup>15</sup> In most cases, this removal is due to growth in identification and removal of items that no longer reflect their sense of self. In some cases, however this removal can result in a loss of sense of self. Representation of this removed item in the public sphere distorts private relationships to the object. For one viewer, this could result in no personal attachment to the object and, for another, a discomfort in seeing it in this context. Our sense of discomfort is the mourning over the loss of object-related memory, even when it is not our own, it is the thought of displacement from losing one's own possessions and therefore one's own *place*.

This sense of displacement through object relationships is exemplified in Christian Boltanski's Holocaust installations. However, Boltanski reintroduces an object instead of taking it away to indicate absence or loss. In his work *Missing House*, plaques are installed at the site of a demolished house displaying the names and dates of the past tenants that lived there. This creates a sense of presence within the space even though the house that was occupied has been removed. The visual break in the line of the row of townhouses and the structural markings of where the house attached to the neighbouring ones provides traces like scars of the missing house's history.

Boltanski's *Missing House* also includes an installation of records found relating to the site, which provide evidence that these people actually lived there and a few hints at what they might have done during their occupation. These records were presented away from the

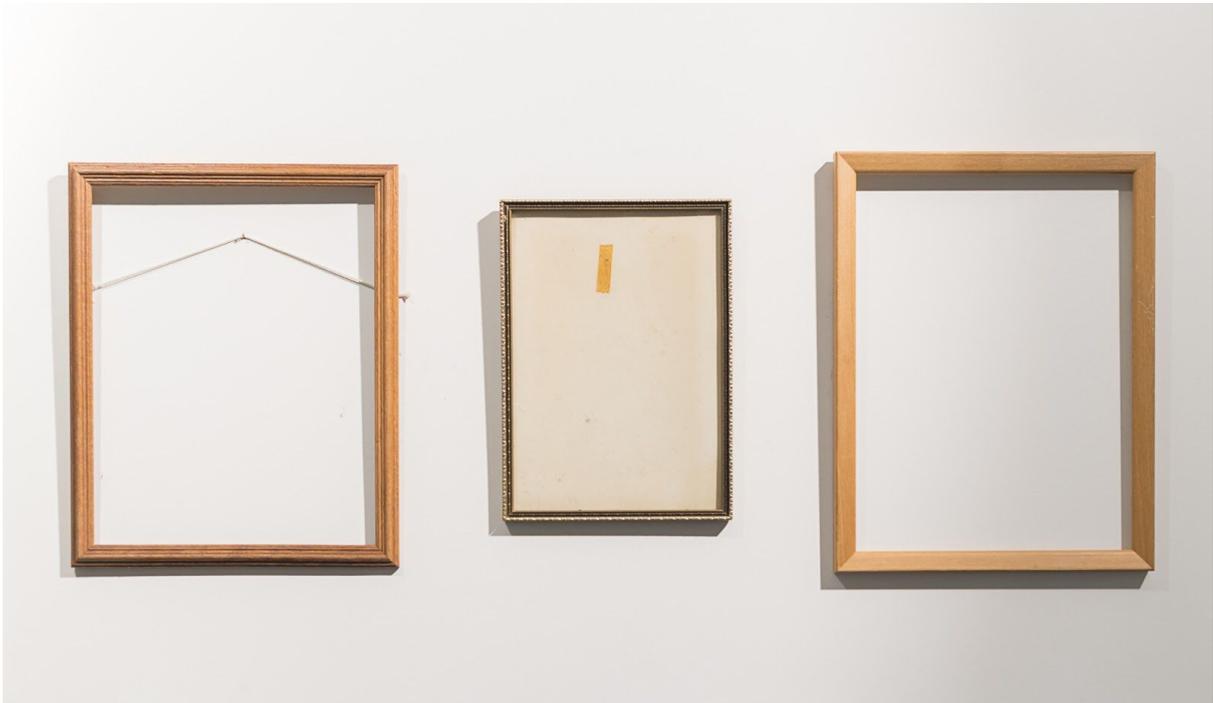
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<sup>14</sup> Anat Hecht, "Home Sweet Home: Tangible Memories of an Uprooted Childhood," in *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*. Ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: Berg, 2001), 123.

<sup>15</sup> Anat Hecht states that "to lose a home is to lose a private museum of memory, identity and creative appropriation". This is because "objects have the ability to *stand for other things* - or establish social meanings - on behalf of, or more precisely *along with* people." Anat Hecht, 123.

house site which allowed the sense of absence to be experienced in three different ways: through the trace of the site, through the minimal but particular records or through the journey between the sites and the subsequent engagement with both the house and the records. *Trace of the site*, recollection through the *records (memories)* and reflection through *engagement* are all factors of *Untitled 1 (frames)* from which the viewer might use to build their perception and understanding of the work.

*Untitled 1 (frames)*



*Untitled 1 (frames)* is an installation of thirty five empty frames along one stretch of wall located on the northside of Room 10A51, Block 10, Massey University, Wellington. Block 10 is the location of the former Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery. Prior to that, the Mount Cook Gaol was located on this site.

Because of the location specificity of this installation, the frames are at the heart of the creation of a 'sense of place' a definable location within space that requires presence of the body for orientation and commonly linking back to familial place. Place is a term that will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Two. Small or extensive pieces of site-knowledge that each viewer brings with them to the space play a role in the process of interpretations. While one viewer may recall an experience of attending the National Art Gallery and project thoughts of the images they saw in the gallery on to the frames, another may experience the installation as a gallery space that is still in the process of installation.

Having experience and memory within the space of installation brings an element of relation to past self, to the work. This affects not only the mental space of recollection but also the physical nature of being in place and directionality of present-object to present-body to recalled-object or recalled-body. Recalling of a prior experience in the space may also include a recalling of spatial location. For some, this could present itself in the form of a mental projection of their body in the space and the overlaying of the past place that their mental body exists in. For example, one might imagine a previous conversation that one had in the same space and see the past unfold beside them as they draw associations from that moment to their present.

The empty frames stretch from west to east evenly spaced along a centreline. Hung in portrait orientation the frames fill the length of one wall of the narrow corridor. Dimly lit, the frames cast soft shadows around their edges. The eastern frames hang in a darkened state due to the positioning of the overhead fluorescents. The linear composition of the frames encourages reading of the work from left to right or right to left depending on the viewer's entrance from either end of the corridor.

A variety of hanging means and frame types are displayed in varying conditions. Fingerprints, tape marks and smudges can be seen on the frames and the few remaining pieces of glass. The portrait orientation of the picture frames implies that the removed images could in fact be pictures of people, each frame representing another person. Looking at the frames in this way, the materiality of each picture frame can be interrogated as a representation of a person. There are two identical frames hanging side by side. Considering the frames as portraits of people, were these images of the same person or were they perhaps twins? If each picture frame represents a person, what is their relationship with one another for them to be presented together? Finally, what is the relationship of these 'people' to the site they are in? Are they the past inhabitants of this space? For example, the museum or art gallery staff.

The patched, dented and marked wall is 'captured' inside some of the frames with disregarded hooks and nail holes littering the surface above. Absence, created by the loss of

image content, draws attention to these smaller details and others, such as positioning, materiality and treatment. Instead of examining a picture, the wall, string and fixings become a part of the materiality of the frames. Marks on the wall that would otherwise be disregarded become a part of the work, making the previously installed, exhibited and de-installed works in this space a part of the creation process behind making the installation.

This recognition of the previous uses of the space draws attention to past inhabitants within the same location. Connections are drawn between the past and the present indicating a cycle of use and re-use. Duration becomes a factor for those who notice this connection and with it, the notion of time<sup>16</sup>. The question of *what* the viewer is perceiving gradually becomes *when* and *where* the viewer is perceiving, both in mental and physical space. The viewer may conceive an idea of time in relation to space and speculate on spatial events ordering them in a successive timeline. Each viewer of the work becomes a part of the work contributing in invisible ways through mental space. This involvement is constantly building and cycling throughout the duration of the work, and even in the future through recollection of the work.<sup>17</sup>

*Untitled 1 (frames)* is created with the intention of triggering recognition of the use, knowledge, experience and importance of this space and time. Not all viewers of the work will recognise the connection of the picture frames to the building's use, or fully appreciate the site's history. Some viewers may be experiencing the space for the first time and some may simply not notice the work at all. For viewers that experienced the building when the museum collection occupied it, they may recall seeing restoration or storage in the surrounding rooms, faces of the people who worked in the site may fill the frames for them. For those who engage with the installation (simply by glancing or by stopping to contemplate), they will each experience something different due to their different cognitive paths.

Exterior-style internal concrete windows, complete with sills, sit opposite the frames, reflecting their shape and the glare of the fluorescent lights. Their gateway into the next room is blocked with metallic silver blinds on stained strings. Between each of the windows hang empty metal picture hooks. These hooks previously existed in the space and are left in their original positions indicating the past installation of images on the opposing wall. The age-worn carpet bares stains of the past. The doors, at each end of the space, differ in style. They speak to the eclectic nature of the found materials also framing their own dirty glass and the empty space beyond. The shapes on the doors reflect the shapes of the picture frames and in turn, the shapes of the windows. The frames hang in this corridor waiting to be filled and repurposed once again by the next unsuspecting participant. The cognition process of the work is in a constant cycle of renewal, changing with each participant or picking up where it left off for repeat visitors.

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<sup>16</sup> *Duration* in this sense being the amount of elapsed time and *time* being locatable points in the past, present and future.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the perception of time in space and place see chapters 1 and 9 in Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Studies in Continental Thought. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993)

Objects in the presented work are chosen for their associative value. Second-hand objects hold traces of human touch which have the effect of resurrection of a past and 'a sense of lived history' as exemplified above. However this doesn't answer the question - can the picture frame display images of our memories? Gaynor Kavanagh argues that "[a]n image can be clear in the mind and memory without having to exist in photographic or physical record"<sup>18</sup>. How we feel, what we know and how we interpret determines the patterns that our minds go through and therefore the end result that helps us to understand exactly what it is we are looking at. Our brains go through a process of projection where we recall memories and moments from the past and project them onto object and site.<sup>19</sup>

### *Chapter Summary*

Returning to the opening questions of this chapter: Does the frame play a large enough role to carry these associative values with it when displayed alone or in another context? Or will the malleable nature of the frame drop its last contextual application and take on other associative narratives for the viewer? The answer is both. How the frame communicates to the viewer is entirely dependent on the associative choices that the viewer applies to the object or objects. In this respect, the viewer becomes as much the author of the work as the artist. However, in order for this to happen, Roland Barthes argues that it requires the "death of the author" because to identify the author "is to impose a limit"<sup>20</sup> on the work. Installation of the physical work with no titling or attempt to explain where and how it came to be, such as in *Untitled 1 (frames)*, leaves the explanation up to the viewers to decide and continue on.

The picture frame has been considered in its role as the object. Connotations of the picture frame as a readymade and its positioning and effect in material culture theory locate it as a culturally and emotionally loaded object. The effect of presence and absence of objects has been discussed in the above chapter to establish the sense of loss that is possible due to domestic objects having a reflection of identity of self. Touching on place and individual cognition as factors in the reading of objects, the ground has been laid for an interrogation into both. *Untitled 1 (frames)*, the first of four installations presented in this research, looked at the treatment, materiality and contextualisation of the picture frame in a site-specific location.

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<sup>18</sup> Gaynor Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*. (New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>19</sup> For a deeper understanding on the cognitive process behind perception of art and objects I suggest reading: Solso, Robert L. *Cognition and the Visual Arts*. MIT Press/Bradford Books Series in Cognitive Psychology. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996). In particular, chapters 5 and 9. Or alternatively, Rudolf Arnheim. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text*. (New York, N.Y.: Noonday Press, 1988), 147.

# Place

## *Introduction*

Chapter two focuses on the definition and creation of *place*. “Familial” in terms of object and space is discussed in relation to artist place creation. Space and time, partners to place, are touched on to help explain the viewer’s role in place creation through spatial location of the body. This leads on to thinking around architectural space, and how the built environment creates definable places within space. Finally, *Untitled 3 (Stack of frames)* brings together the discussion on place applying the theory to a spatially oriented installation of picture frames that engages a conversation around the transitional nature of the objects and the poetic nature of the space.

## *Place*

Edward S. Casey’s research on place, although his definition still remains somewhat ambiguous, explores and considers a range of philosophical discussions on the topic from as far back as Plato up to today. Casey recognises the need for place to co-exist with space but his discussions on place focus on the body or being as a part of place’s creation, movement, existence and differentiation from space:

[...] space forms a twosome, an uneven doublet, with place, its odd and incongruous other. The twoness is not that of *two things*, or even of *two of a kind*, but instead that of two quite variant kinds—which nevertheless coexist in all their disparity and cannot seem to do otherwise. Hence the ongoing saga of the uneasy alliances, the ambivalent togethernesses, of place and space.<sup>21</sup>

Speaking of the difference between space and place, Casey uses a house to define the two explaining as simply as possible that “*Room* is cognate to the German *Raum*, which means ‘space’. But as a space in which you are located, a living room is a particular *place*, a place for living.”<sup>22</sup> Thus place requires a recognition of existing space in order to be created and cannot exist separately from space. Space and place are both mental constructs, but space is infinite whereas place is confined and intimate. Place is what we go to, where we are and where we have been and space is everything in between. However, one can feel out-of-place or displaced, this is loss of the recognition of being in place and of having one’s own place within space.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Edward S. Casey. "Smooth Spaces and Rough-Edged Places: The Hidden History of Place." *The Review of Metaphysics*, no. 2 (1997): 267.

<sup>22</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> For more on emplacement leading to displacement see: Edward S. Casey, “displacement,” in *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Studies in Continental Thought. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 22-39.

## Location

Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas explains that “our thinking is essentially determined by where we are, by the contingencies of our own *location* [...], and what it addresses is essentially given to us in and through the places *in which we find ourselves*.”<sup>24</sup> Physical location is directly related to *place* location as the mind creates it. This is because the *place* in which thinking occurs is the same as the *place* of location of the body. So physical location and cognitive location are equivalent.

This makes the site integral to understanding how one might perceive an installation. Physical location feeds into overall understanding of an object in space. Salcedo’s work is presented in a gallery as opposed to in a house. The representation of her objects is considered in the site of this art institution. Salcedo places objects strategically to inhibit easy circulation around the room-place. This forces the viewer to inhabit the work, positioning them for a particular sensory experience.

Geographical location can play a very important role in our ability to understand and contextualise an artwork. In her writings on Holocaust installations, curator, art historian, and writer, Margaret Ewing states that “site-specific installations signify that ‘this happened *here*’” and that site specificity activates “a visceral perception that operates on a non-linguistic and non-rational level. While visual cues offer the first indication of a site’s significance, it is rather the phenomenological elements of the works - triggered by the visual interventions - that produce the critical psychological operations.”<sup>25</sup> Ewing goes on to consider the impact of site-specific installation on the viewer and the relationship between the viewer’s physical body and site - “in responding to the power of place, this genre of installation art harnesses the particular energy that is located at the site [...] It facilitates the integration of historical awareness into the viewer’s own body through direct perception of the site.”<sup>26</sup>

While Ewing is responding to Holocaust installation art, this consideration of the influence of the site over an art installation is true, to a degree, of all public and private space activated through artist interventions. When considering the subject matter of an event that is the scale of the Holocaust, there is engrained worldwide horror through collective memory into site. The impact of the subject is so widely known and small scale memory art is no comparison to the international level of this collective remembrance. However, these spaces, as with other spaces, are constantly being projected and re-projected onto through visual perception. Layers of the past exist within and are continuously created as invisible individual memories. The recollection and projection of these layers is then encouraged through the artist’s framing of the site. Shifting that framing of the site reconnects the site’s present to its past. As Ewing states in relation to Christian Boltanski’s *The Missing House*,

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<sup>24</sup> Jeff Malpas, *The Intelligence of Place [electronic resource]: Topographies and Poetics*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Ewing, “A disturbance of memory: travel, recollection, and the experience of place” in *Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Visual Form: Sighting Memory*. Routledge Studies in Rhetoric and Communication: 5, ed. Anne Teresa Demo and Vivian Bradford (New York: Routledge, 2012, 2012), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Ewing, 34.

“the viewer’s awareness of history’s proximity becomes the substance of the piece, which is made possible by its site-specific location. Boltanski transforms this otherwise forgettable site into a mnemonic space where private histories re-emerge within the local landscape.”<sup>27</sup>

### *Built Places*

Buildings are essentially “readymade” in terms of place creation. Built place introduces a limitation of spatial size through the use of walls, floor and ceiling. These planes come together creating corners, nooks and angles which are light or dark, intimate or immense as the creator chooses. These spatial choices of the architect or designer not only influence the capacity and use of the spaces but also the psychological happenings within it. Alberto Pérez-Gómez writes that “it [architectural space, or in Casey’s terms, *built place*] encompasses diverse characteristics: it is at once the material building and the space, its ground and its lighting, the truth unveiled by art, and the gap between word and experience. It is a space for both contemplation and participation: a space of recognition.”<sup>28</sup>

Contemplation, participation and recognition are all actions of the body and the implacement of a body is required for the built *space* to become *place*. Casey states that the “body has everything to do with the transformation of a mere *site* into a dwelling *place*. Indeed, *bodies build places*. Such building is not a matter of literal fabrication but occurs through inhabiting and even by traveling between already built places.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Objects in place*

“As objects can stand for recalled events, so can experience be recollected through a return to a place, which becomes a point of entry into a labyrinth of reminiscences”.<sup>30</sup> Creating a ‘sense of place’ is an important element for the work to be experienced at a sensory or intuitive level by the viewer. However, a ‘sense of place’ is also a concept which can be created by the artist out of the intuitive and sensory realm. Material objects are so integral to humans because “people require objects to understand and perform aspects of selfhood”.<sup>31</sup> Because of this we are constantly processing subconscious thought about the objects in our immediate environments and the objects that we expect to see within that environment.<sup>32</sup> Objects can create a sense of familial comfort that means, when the object is removed, our

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<sup>27</sup> Ewing, *A disturbance of memory*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Alberto Pérez-Gómez, “Place and Architectural Space” in *The Intelligence of Place. [Electronic Resource] : Topographies and Poetics*, ed. Jeff Malpas (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 164-165.

<sup>29</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 116. In this quotation Casey defines the dwelling place as a place that is “constructed so as to allow for repeat return.” Such as a permanent structure and also “must possess a certain felt familiarity, which normally arises from the reoccupation itself.”

<sup>30</sup> Rosy Martin, “Curating the Museum of Sources: Stilled Lives, Memory, Mortality and the domestic Space,” in *Stilled: Contemporary Still Life Photography by Women*, ed. Kate Newton and Rolph Christin (England: Ffotogallery, c2006, 2006), 57.

<sup>31</sup> Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*, vi.

<sup>32</sup> Robert L. Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts*. MIT Press/Bradford Books Series in Cognitive Psychology. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 116-117.

feelings and associations with a place are altered. This is a factor in making objects key components in creating a sense of place.<sup>33</sup>

### *Familial place*

Objects, in particular domestic objects, can carry with them a familial sense. As Casey points out, “we rarely pause to consider how frequently people refer back to a certain place of origin as to an exemplar against which all subsequent places are implicitly to be measured: to their birthplace, their childhood home, or any other place that has had a significant influence on their lives”.<sup>34</sup> Being able to reference back to one’s place of origin helps to develop this familial relationship. The essence of this familial sense can be imbedded in household objects and an object can become “the symbolic centre of the house”<sup>35</sup>. These objects help to “preserve a certain consistency and continuity”<sup>36</sup> when the owner moves places. The picture frame is an object that many New Zealanders have inside their homes. The popularity and consistency of this object makes it easily recognisable and relatable in the public environment. Some people will adorn their workplaces with picture frames displaying photographs that help them to connect to their personal familial place. By bringing this symbolic object into a new space the person is recreating and rebuilding it as a familial place.

This connection of the object to the home or familial place is of central importance to sculptural artist Doris Salcedo’s work. *La Casa Viuda* which translates as ‘the widowed house’, is a series of installations that recognise the way that loss becomes ingrained in space from the removal or loss of its inhabitants, or as Don Cameron puts it, the space becomes “a home grieving for its lost occupants”.<sup>37</sup>

To achieve the effect of the home within the non-familial space of a gallery, the way that the domestic object is introduced in the installation site is of key importance. The domesticity of the object then adds further layers, building up a sense of home or room space, transforming the site and creating a sense of the familiar in the unfamiliar, in effect, creating a sense of place.

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<sup>33</sup> For more on the importance of the object in familial place creation and the effect of losing or removing a heavy memory endowed object see: Jean-Sébastien Marcoux, “The Refurbishment of Memory” in *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*. Ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: Berg, 2001), 69-86.

<sup>34</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 74.

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Sébastien Marcoux, “The Refurbishment of Memory” in *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*. Ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: Berg, 2001), 74.

<sup>36</sup> Marcoux, 73.

<sup>37</sup> Don Cameron, cited in Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 60.

*Untitled 3 (Stack of frames)*



*Untitled 3 (Stack of frames)* is a small tower of found picture frames. The frames are piled in relative size order on top of an old metal furniture trolley that has a long silver string tied to one end. The frames are a mixture of materials, styles, sizes and ages. The fluorescent lights cast shadows amongst the stack to emphasise the nooks and holes through the structure. These small and intimate hollows have some quality of secrecy to them. They are small and quiet and tucked away. Some frames sit nestled among each other while others crisscross, building the height quickly with strings or wire held taut to support those on top.

The surrounding space painted two shades of white with a light grey floor bares the recent application of the frames. Nails, hooks, holes and marks litter the surrounding walls suggesting the size and shape of what frame might fit where. Other than the fixings, the rest of the space is left empty and open. Bachelard emphasises the power of leaving space unutilised: "To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than it has objectivity; or better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space."<sup>38</sup> *Untitled 3 (stack of frames)* leaves little to distract the viewer from the effect of being in this particular space. Thus the space becomes a part of the viewer's experience. As one moves around the space, the stack can be seen to sway slightly, its precarious structure threatening to topple if the trolley is pulled.

A landscape painting 'calls out' at the bottom of the pile, strong painterly textures cracking around the edges, its subject obscured under the weight. This landscape begs questioning from the viewer. Why is this seemingly the only frame containing an image? Is the destination in the image the location that these frames have come from? One might also turn to the orientation of the other frames to make sense of their collection. Referring back to the fixing on the wall, orientation of the frames is mixed both in their imaginary wall positions and in the stack. However, the trolley has influenced more of the large frames to sit in portrait orientation emphasising their use as temporal. How has the meaning of the imaginary pictures changed going from the wall to the stack or will it change from stack to wall? Were the images all of landscapes? What difference does it make if they were images of people? As discussed in *Untitled 1 (frames)* coming to the conclusion that the original images were people can lead to looking for representation of each person in the materiality of the frames. If the images were landscapes, one might approach what the imaginary landscapes are by referring to the landscape in the pile or the geographical location that they are situated in. The building they are contained within is on a hill and removal of the built place would result in a view of land-scape or city-scape. Alternatively the viewer might turn to the form of the stack considering its mountain-like structure already built on top of an existing landscape.

The stack sits poised, inhabiting the space. Is it coming or going? The pulling string of the trolley rests abandoned on the ground yet faces into the space not out of it suggesting the trolley has only just arrived. A ghost of activity lingers in the air, the absence of the frame hanger starkly apparent in the silence of the empty building and the bright fluorescent lights against the dark shadow of dusk. The solidity of an encapsulating familial place creation wavers when considered against the emptiness of the surrounding rooms and darkness of outside.

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<sup>38</sup> Gaston Bachelard, and Maria Jolas. *The Poetics of Space*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 202.

### *Chapter Summary*

Using Casey, Malpas and Pérez-Gómez's writings on the subject, *place* has been defined as: requiring the recognition of space; being influenced by implacement of the body and physical location it is being built within; and, relying on relation back to familial place. Familial place creation through the use of objects has been discussed using Doris Salcedo's *La Casa Viuda* as an exemplar for this. *Untitled 3 (Stack of frames)* applied the discussion of place to a spatially oriented picture frame installation, the discourse of which covers the transitional nature of the picture frames and their relation to place.

# Cognition

## *Introduction*

Chapter 3 discusses the viewer's participation in the creation of the picture frame installations through a process of cognition. Starting with a brief overview locating the psychological focus of the chapter, imagination and memory are defined using Edward S. Casey's considerations of literary meanings. The picture frame is examined as an object that has influence over site and cognition of context. The discussion of Untitled 2 (frames) draws connections from the first two chapters to demonstrate the process of mental transference when applied to a site-specific picture frame installation.

## *Psychological phenomena*

There is a clear distinction to be made between artwork that addresses perception in the present (psychological phenomena) and artwork that is fundamentally historiographical (uncovering the truths of the past). The picture frame installation work presented in this exegesis falls into the former category.

Relying on psychological phenomena from the viewer as half of the work requires the artist to recognise specific contextual factors that the viewer may bring with them to the work. "*The state of the person* (for example, their overall health, mood and state of receptiveness), plays an important part in what one notices and the extent to which one attends to it."<sup>39</sup> These contextual factors can be broken into five main elements - personal expectations, place, time, historical context and social context<sup>40</sup>. Place and time as covered in Chapter Two have been identified in their influence. Historical and social context, as touched on in Chapter One (and social below), may or may not be factors in a viewer's perception as this is dependent on their knowledge (and the knowledge of those around them) regarding the history of the site and object. That leaves personal expectations. Expectations can come from past experiences and memories and are completely individual, this is the unpredictable element in the picture frame installations and what make each viewer's experience unique.

The picture frame installations present an approach towards the display of historical moments in public space that proposes all sorts of limitations and variants. For example, the forced connection between picture frames, the Dominion Museum Building. However, intermingling phenomenological object relationships with public space pushes through the social boundaries of sharing opinions, thoughts and private histories to create a localised place for self and collective reflection. This opens up the opportunity in which multiple viewers may share their perceptions with those around them, each in turn influencing one another's perception of the installation. Within the same space, one thing has happened on top of another, on top of another, on top of another. We continue to move through these

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<sup>39</sup> Stephen Patterson, *Seeing Things : Deepening Relations with Visual Artefacts*. (London: SCM Press, 2007), 124.

<sup>40</sup> Patterson, 124.

public or private spaces unknowingly creating collisions between present day life and past life. Each space we interact with on a day to day basis has layers upon layers of spatial memory but very few leaving traces linking to them (such as a scuff mark on the wall, impression left on a surface or a photograph capturing the moment). Typically those moments of habitation leave no trace and are quickly replaced with the next. As mentioned in Chapter One, this cycling of space brings with it connotations of time and the notion of a palimpsest. As a page can have traces of its past use, so can space. In the case of space, place is built out of a palimpsest of prior use and will continue to grow and exist as a palimpsest.

To encourage acknowledgment of this past spatial memory, a noticeable presence or absence is required as an anchor point to capture the imagination of the viewer. Edward S. Casey tells us “non-self-initiated acts of imagining fall into two classes: those which have arisen spontaneously in previous imaginings, and those which have emerged from strictly non-imaginative experiences such as perceiving or remembering.”<sup>41</sup> The key to this work is encouraging active perception from the viewer which leads to spontaneous remembering, memories or imagination.

### *Imagination and memory*

While establishing a line between psychological phenomena and historiographical artwork is key to this project, the definitions of *imagination* and *memory* are important to hold in the mind when considering the interaction that happens between the work and the viewer.

Just as imagination takes us forward into the realm of the purely possible—into what *might be*—so memory brings us back into the domain of the actual and the already elapsed: to what *has been*. Place ushers us into what *already is*: namely, the environing subsoil of our embodiment, the bedrock of our being-in-the-world. If imagination projects us out *beyond* ourselves while memory takes us back *behind* ourselves, place subtends and enfolds us, lying perpetually *under* and *around* us. In imagining and remembering, we go into the ethereal and the thick respectively. By being in place, we find ourselves in what is subsistent and enveloping.<sup>42</sup>

In the above quote Casey explains the connections between imagination, memory and place. He is describing the way that they work together to allow the viewer to perceive a moment in time by using their location, knowledge, past experiences and future expectations. Applying this to the picture frame installations, the importance of the location is becoming more apparent. As discussed in Chapter Two, physical location of the body defines cognitive location directing the viewer’s thought. The re-cognition of the picture frame is directly related to its location creating some directionality in imagination and memory as it becomes anchored to a specific place.

With little recording of spatial habitations, much is left up to the imagination and no one’s imagination is the same. However, this is not a hindrance but a springboard for developing

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<sup>41</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, xv.

<sup>42</sup> Casey, xvi-xvii.

an understanding of habitation, feeling, movement and purpose of each inhabitant while creating yet another layer of spatial memory. "When each of us brings the past to mind, we go through the process of remembering. The extent of recall is enhanced by access to prompts, things which stimulate the senses. Remembering is facilitated by environments or circumstances, in particular those where narrative and reflection are safe or perhaps unavoidable"<sup>43</sup> This is where a 'sense of place' comes into play. Deployment of the frames in relation to site could stimulate or hinder the process of remembering according to the recognisability of the picture frame.

### *Object influence*

Considering photographs, portraiture and still life (a few of the commonly framed images) as a viewing window into the past, the picture frame becomes the window frame separating the past and the present as individual entities. With the image being the main focus consequently the materiality of the frame is neglected. By removing the image, the frame is pulled into the foreground and back into its state of solid mass. In the presented works, the picture frame is considered as a vehicle for thought and memory projection for the viewer that engages imagination, memory and prior knowledge to create an individual experience. The re-cognition of such objects relies on our ability to treat arbitrary items as surrogates for our own interpretations.<sup>44</sup>

Because "people require objects to understand and perform aspects of selfhood"<sup>45</sup>, a single object can influence the reading of a site simply by being present. This opens up the opportunity to tell a story of habitation or history through strategically selected objects. The selection of frames within the three presented works connect to history of the site in different ways. While *Untitled 1 & 2* are located within the Dominion Museum building. *Untitled 3* is located in the Engine Room gallery. *1 & 2* draw references to the history of the National Art Gallery and the Dominion Museum as well as the current use of the rooms for the Master of Fine Arts and any habitations between and before these that can find connection through the frames. These are building locations driven and responsive to their individual room confinements. *Untitled 3* draws reference to the site as well but in a less historically focused way. Built place has a strong dictation on the outcome of the installation and the past habitations that it is referencing are far more temporary by nature and duration. Traces within the Engine Room Gallery are less apparent and requires more depth of thought to recognise. For each installation in the gallery space, the site begins as a *tabula rasa*. The work is installed in the site, showed and later de-installed. During this final stage of the cycle, the art work is removed, fixings or stands taken away or pulled from the walls. Dents and holes are filled, sanded and painted over, returning the gallery back to its original state. The gallery space is constantly cycled through habitations that still exist as spatial memory but are traceless on the visual surface

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<sup>43</sup> Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007), 78.

<sup>45</sup> Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*, vi.

### *The Corner*

Gaston Bachelard, in his book *The Poetics of Space*, discusses the nature of spaces within built place.<sup>46</sup> Bachelard's investigation of intimate space takes an in-depth look at how we experience everything from drawers to the universe. In his discussion, Bachelard describes the corner as a "haven". He claims that the corner as "a symbol of solitude for the imagination"<sup>47</sup>, a place where one can find and be at peace in solitude. *Corner*, as a word, also has a certain level of possession to it, for example, when people talk about their own home-place it is often described as a house that is in 'our corner of the world'.<sup>48</sup> This emphasises the human need to possess within one's own place and find a space of solitude for that to reside in.

Physically, the corner is the indicator of the end of one wall and the start of another. The corner is the limitations of confinement and the edges of built place. This consideration, of how we perceive not only the object and location but also these alongside spatial relation to our bodies (such as corners) articulates another possible influence on individual perception.

Weaving in and out of prose and poetry, Bachelard's book takes the reader on its own phenomenological journey making his words all the more appropriate to help explain the critical psychology of place in the following work. *Untitled 2 (frames)* uses two corners of a gallery space which reflects on positioning of the body in space and a conversation of tension between one corner and another.

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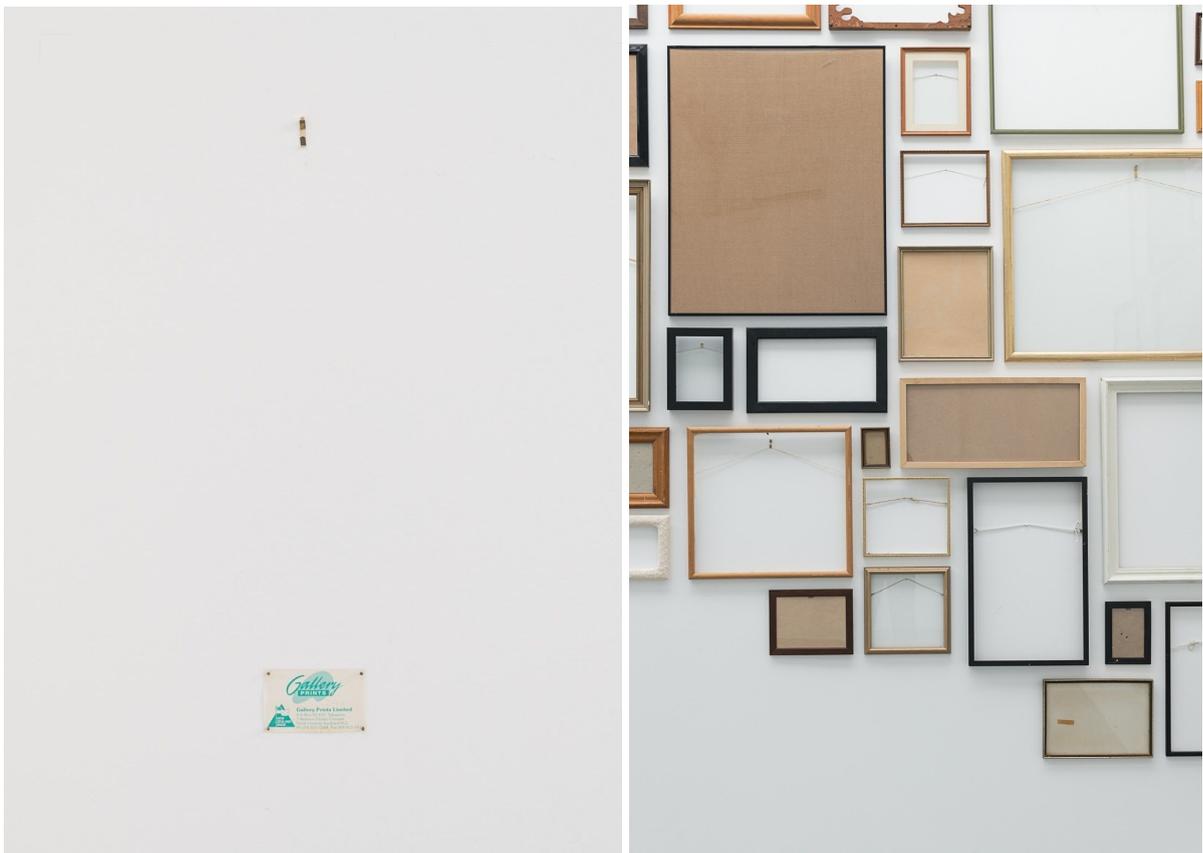
<sup>46</sup> Gaston Bachelard, and Maria Jolas. *The Poetics of Space*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994)

<sup>47</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 136.

<sup>48</sup> Bachelard, 4.

*Untitled 2 (frames)*





*Untitled 2 (frames)* consists of two parts. Part one is an installation of six identical picture hooks in a row, positioned at even distances from one another and at the same heights to the floor, in the corner of a gallery space (three on one wall and three on the other to meet at the corner). Below each hook is a picture framer's sticker nailed to the wall with two or four framing nails. The stickers are positioned as though the hook is hanging a picture in a portrait orientation. Each sticker provides a small amount of information about the framer i.e logo, date, address and each is different. The portrait orientation of each hook and sticker pairing is suggestive that the missing images may be that of the framers' faces themselves. The differing styles of the stickers are also suggestive of eras of painting or photography that the portrait might appear in.

The framers' stickers are treated in such a way which valorises them as though they are the portraits themselves. This switching of hierarchy between image and framers' sticker draws the full gaze of the viewer upon a mere 'addition' to a framed image that would usually be hidden. Changing the treatment of the picture's components questions the value of each and their relationship with one-another.

Through the doorway in the next room is part two of the work and is viewable from the first room. Part two is an eighteenth-century inspired salon-style hang of frames. The installation is mounted in the corner of the room (diagonally opposite part one) with thirty two frames on each wall connecting down the center in the corner of the rectangular space. As previously mentioned Bachelard considers the corner as "a symbol of solitude for the imagination."<sup>49</sup> The installation of frames has a drawing-in quality to it. One can quite happily stand gazing into the corner immobilised by its intimate nature. "Consciousness of being at peace in one's corner produces a sense of immobility, and this, in turn, radiates immobility. An imaginary room rises up around our bodies, which think that they are well hidden when we take refuge in a corner. Already, the shadows are walls, a piece of furniture constitutes a barrier, hangings are a roof. But all of these images are over-imagined. So we have to designate the space of our immobility by making it the space of our being."<sup>50</sup> In contrast to the linear, dynamic form of the straight wall in *Untitled 1 (frames)*, the corner in *Untitled 2 (frames)* responds to the built environment using the display space of the wall in a less conventional way amassing the objects in the corner.

Looking into the corner, the frames are unevenly spaced (however forming a cohesive shape) on the wall that mimics the architectural form of shadows and sunlight as it streams through the upper ceiling windows. Light bounces between the two angles causing the glassed frames to reflect the composition of the other wall. The integration of the artwork into the architectural composition of the site creates a strong relationship for place-creation. "Artworks not only serve as a location for the production and representation of memory but also [...] institutions such as the museum and gallery serve as locations in which already located memory in the form of artworks are often housed."<sup>51</sup>

Sixty three of the sixty four frames do not show images. One frame contains a faded print of a Victorian woman in a long dress sitting at a small table in front of a wall containing an ornately framed painting and a gathered curtain. The Victorian woman<sup>52</sup> commands attention and leads at the forefront on the imagination process. She influences perception of the frames around her and provides colouration to wandering imaginations. "We project our thoughts and feelings on to objects, and by so doing engage in the process of transference.

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<sup>49</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 136.

<sup>50</sup> Bachelard, 137.

<sup>51</sup> Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*, 118.

<sup>52</sup> As the only image remaining in the picture frames the Victorian woman has a level of command and influence over the installation. Her presence in the work is intended to be in a reference to the Academy and the hanging era of the salon-style. Her presence inevitably also brings with it discussion of the female subject such as; confrontation of the female gaze, representation of women in the domestic interior setting and the empowerment of her position. These are all strong and notable points that the viewer may take into consideration during their cognitive processing of the picture frames. However, they are not the primary factor for inclusion of her image in this installation.

[...] As an object cannot 'speak for itself', people project their own speech and meanings on to it."<sup>53</sup> During this process of transference, we make sense of the Victorian woman and create a story in which she is the main character in human or portrait form.

The other frames are an assemblage of various materials and styles from different eras, some seemingly modern and some aged and dust covered. A few frames have glass and some have backing boards, others nothing but hanging string or open to the bare gallery wall. Hooks and fixings are visible as well as holes in the wall from previous hanging. Hanging or positioning the empty frame opens a different window to that of the image. The frame becomes a suggestion of presence but does not supply the viewer with the usual visual cues of a story. This suggestion stimulates a level of affectivity which lays the ground for a more distanced reflection and an active re-cognition of the work in context.

When facing either work; the viewer's back is to the other. Close inspection requires the viewer to cross each room and disregard the other. This separation creates two 'place' entities which sit apparently distinct from one another until the viewer draws phenomenological connections between them to create a singular 'place' within their own perception. The positioning of the two parts balances the space across the two rooms and, while obscured by a wall, effectively 'converse' with one another once the viewer begins to interact with them. The two hanging styles contrast and reflect the size of the spaces they occupy.

The relationship between the two parts transforms the rest of the otherwise empty gallery space into a revolving place of reflection. The light and shadows draw out part two's composition across the gallery space reflecting the geometric shapes and abstracting them which fades in and out with passing clouds creating an oscillation between solidity and transience. Similarly, our thoughts fade in and out as we select and discard information on which to build our perception. This is because we "do not remember things sequentially, unless we rehearse the memories regularly, but literally in episodes hinged to key life events. [...] Each memory in turn gives rise to further memories, like rooms leading from one to another."<sup>54</sup>

The frames and framers' stickers also contain this transitional nature each indicating something which is absent and allowing the viewer to see it in their mind's eye without providing further context. The rest of the works content is brought into the gallery by the viewer. Upon experiencing and interacting with the work, thought and imagery is projected into the space as the viewer searches for meaning behind the presented object-place relationships. Ian Woodward states that "when we project, we put our own feelings, beliefs, or parts of self into another person or object." It is also possible for the viewer to 'introject' which is where "elements of the object are taken into the self" where the object is "used, elaborated, played with and eventually exhausted" to extract particular meanings invested in the object.<sup>55</sup> This is a part of the process of developing a sense of self and, in turn, a sense of self in place.

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<sup>53</sup> Kavanagh, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*, 140.

*Untitled 4 (frame)*



*Untitled 4 (frame)* is an iteration toward the final examination installation. While not intentionally contributing to the focused discussion of the previous three works, *Untitled 4 (frame)* has become the next step in understanding the affect of the picture frame within the Dominion Museum Building. The site specific installation was set inside of a blocked off stairwell in the east entrance of Block 10, opposite 10A20. The lighting is cut off leaving the landing, few remaining stairs and a locked storage cupboard inside the area shrouded in darkness. The installation is of only one picture frame, empty of image and glass, hung in landscape orientation on an ornate gold hook. The frame sits in the centre of the landing wall facing the stairwell. The stairs rise several treads before coming to an abrupt end where a

wall slices off access to the stairs and landing beyond. This work sits in a transitional location that indicates that it may or may not be restored to its former purpose. The installation of the frame itself speaks to past habitation of the space when it was the location of the Dominion Museum, National Art Gallery and the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. This reference back to a time when there was more than one art organisation and also the museum occupying the building creates a questioning and tension between which one the picture frame is referring to. This leads on to how the frame could refer to more than one and potentially its emptiness is speaking to the relationship between the organisations. The frame remains in solitude and darkness awaiting its fate. The cognitive readings of this installation varied greatly amongst a group of viewers and one such viewer spoke of how it made her think of a painting hanging in her grandmother's living room. The absence of the image in the present made her realise that despite seeing that painting on many occasions she had no memory of its content. In her memory of the living room, there is simply an empty picture frame as a placeholder for her loss of detail. The same is true of the installation, the empty picture frame becomes a placeholder for the lost details of the past.

### *Chapter Summary*

The various elements of cognition have been discussed in the above chapter to help clarify the internal workings of the viewer's perception of frame installations in site-specific place. Imagination and memory were identified as the two major partners of place for the re-cognition of picture frames within the presented research. Previous discussions of object and place were brought into the chapter for exemplars of cognitive and perceptive theories. The influence of the poetics of space saw Gaston Bachelard's thinking on intimate spaces lead into a discussion on the corner as a place of solitude for the mind. Examination of the corner lead into the corner orientated installation - *Untitled 2 (frames)*. This picture frame installation brought together cognition, object and place in a revolving work where the space engages in a dialogue between each end of the gallery space that the viewer is forced to inhabit. Finally, *Untitled 4 (frame)* presented an installation in action with an example of one viewer's cognitive experience.

# Summary

In this research the process of viewer perception projection onto object and site has been evaluated and applied in four picture frame orientated installations. Assessment of the picture frame as a readymade and its positioning and effect in material culture theory locates it as a culturally and emotionally loaded object. The theory of place has been discussed and defined as: requiring the recognition of space; being influenced by implacement of the body and physical location it is being built within; and, relying on relation back to familial place. Place discussion lead on to identifying types of place such as familial and built place. Finally, various elements of cognition were discussed using exemplars relating to the picture frame installations. The main topic of cognitive discussion - imagination and memory - was combined with place and object to conclude the overarching discussion on how the viewer perceives objects in space.

The supporting installations incorporated into the research each explored the following;

- *Untitled 1 (frames)* looked at the treatment, materiality and contextualisation of the picture frame in a site-specific location. This applied the picture frame as a readymade object to a historically loaded site full of traces of prior use. In this installation, the orientation of the picture frame was found to be a strong base for developing an understanding of the work.
- *Untitled 3 (Stack of frames)* applied the discussion of place to a spatially oriented picture frame installation. The discourse of which covers the transitional nature of the picture frames and their relation to place. Playing on recontextualising the frame, not just in location, but also in use (or dis-use), this work drew the physicalities of the site and feeling of space and embodying place into the foreground of cognitive reflection.
- *Untitled 2 (frames)* brought together cognition, object and place in a revolving work where the space engages in a dialogue between each end of the space that the viewer is forced to inhabit. This gallery located work relies on psychological phenomena from the viewer, encouraged through the use of scale and positioning within the built-place, to establish a connection between the two parts of the work.
- *Untitled 4 (frame)*, an iteration toward the final examination installation, is created to speak to past habitation of the Dominion Museum/National Art Gallery. The work demonstrated a viewer's cognitive associations to the recontextualised space and is the base from which the final work will be built.

Recognising the viewer as a co-author to the work, one final installation that incorporates elements of each of the four works will be presented within the Dominion Museum Building. Object, place and cognition will come together in a work that recontextualises object and site in a dialogue across the building drawing together two separate places.

*Framing Traces* has explored how the picture frame, when recontextualised in site, can become a transitional object through which a viewer can reflect on personal memory and selfhood. This has been achieved by engaging with the relationship and balance between presence and absence. The scope of this research has identified that visual cues (traces)

from site, geographical location and the object of the picture frame itself form the conditions of engagement for viewer perception creation.

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