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Being storied;
a lived experience of time

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Being storied; a lived experience of time discusses selected aspects of the research and studio practice undertaken in the course of the year 2008. Central to the process has been attending to the mundane acts of everyday life in the rural environment in which I live. It discusses actions such as walking, listening, collecting and documenting as well as experiments with a waste material, used baling plastic that is installed in various ways into the landscape. Parallel to this are investigations with sound and text, which have drawn on my varied musical background. There is an exploration of time - the idea of *durée*, human experience of time, quality of attention through intense focus, and memory as it accumulates over time. Art of the everyday has also been a key area of research. Life changing events have occurred during the course of the year. The death of parents has substantially influenced the work. The practice described is multi-faceted, involving the use of text, sound, photography and film.

Dedicated to the memory of Paul and Gabrielle Day

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Introduction

From the beginning of my studies, art and life have been closely interwoven. An exploration that has taken its own course, my practice has centred on everyday life rather than existing as something separate from it. Attending to the experience of life, here and now, has been my mode of working, alongside reading and research. Art of the Everyday has become a framework for my investigations. The following statement can be taken as a starting point.

In all the arts, we are struck by a general loosening of forms which in the past were relatively closed, strict, and objective, to ones which are more personal, free, random, and open, often suggesting in their seemingly casual formats an endless changefulness and boundlessness. In music, it has led to the use of what was once considered noise; in painting and sculpture, to materials that belong to industry and the wastebasket; in dance, to movements which are not “graceful” but which come from human action nevertheless. There is taking place a gradual widening of the scope of the imagination, and creative people are encompassing in their work what has never before been considered art. – Allan Kaprow, Robert Watts, and George Brecht, “Project in Multiple Dimensions” (Buchloh, B. and Rodenbeck, J., 1999, p. 1).

The environment in which I live has played a central role in my work, as has the fact that I have had many journeys to undertake in the past few years. Living in Wairarapa has meant a two-hour car-train-bus ride to attend Massey University, Wellington, while having elderly parents in Hamilton has meant regular trips north, by car or by air, and occasionally by train. The act of attending to the mundane gathered strength and definition during my undergraduate study so that at the beginning of my Masters year a working method was in place. This involved working sculpturally in space incorporating

video and sound. I continued the research begun in 2007 into standardized time, our culture's obsession with the measurement of time. Henri Bergson, the early twentieth century French philosopher, believed that there was a distinction to be made between the concept of measured time and what he termed *durée*, or the human experience of lived time. One of the ideas incorporated in the concept of *durée* is that "each moment carries within it the entire flow of the past and each is new and unrepeatable" (Kolakowski, 1985, p. 3). My background as a musician, performing on the piano from a young age, had already given me an awareness of the intensity of time within a performance.

Two key events loom large over my present year's work. They are the deaths of my parents – my father in July followed by my mother in September 2008. The processing of these life changing events has heightened my sense of time. I became aware of the importance of the act of making and the quality of attention inherent in attending to this process. While I was looking back at the past, reviewing the lives of my parents and my life with them, my work, with its mundane tasks and processes, anchored me in the present moment, attending to the everyday.

As I write this it is the time of year when tui fly in to feed on nectar. One is perched in a nearby tree, where it proclaims its presence with its three-note melody. It is keeping a close eye on the flax just coming into flower near the studio. Several tui will take up residence here over the next few weeks, hopping from branch to branch, delicately dipping their long beaks into the depth of each flower in turn. After a few weeks, the flowering will be finished until the same time next year. It is now early summer and already some farmers have cut grass which is preserved in the green plastic bales that are appearing in paddocks and along fence lines. Over the course of winter they will gradually disappear as the preserved grass is fed out to stock. The frogs recently arrived in our dam, and their croaking continues day and night over the course of these few weeks,

until their numbers are depleted by the visiting grey herons and kingfishers. So the cycle of life and death continues. I observe this while determining my own place in this small world – by documenting, collecting, photographing, looking, listening, and recording: *paying attention*.

Litter (2007)

Firewood collecting is an ongoing activity on our property, as we rely on a wood stove for heating our water as well as heating the house in the winter months. In our woodlot, we grow eucalypts that can be coppiced. After cutting a large tree some years ago, the small branches and leaves were cut and left to dry out in a pile nearby. I noticed how crunchy they were to walk on and the delicious fragrance that wafted up when the leaves were crushed by my feet. Some of this material was collected into bags and transported to Massey University for my sculpture work in 2007. This activity led to an installation, *Litter (2007)*, in which a studio space was filled with a thick layer of eucalyptus leaves.

Large numbers of hawthorn were cut down when we shifted onto the subdivided three acres. Originally planted many years ago as a hedging plant, it had spread into the gullies and was competing with the small native seedlings we had planted. The birds had built nests in many of these trees, because of the excellent protection offered by their thorny branches. I began to collect the nests that fell out of the branches as the trees were cut down. I was interested not only in the objects themselves but in the sense of abandonment and loss in these empty nests. Gretel Ehrlich describes the nest as “a cup of space, a swinging cradle, an anchored platform, a wedge between boulders, a pocket in bark or dirt, a scrape on rock, a dent in sand. It

represents the still point in a bird's fast-paced life, the place where past and future meet" (Baker-Laporte and Laporte, 2005, p. 47). Occasionally I would discover a nest that had been blown out of a tree. In a blackbird's nest, with its beautifully crafted clay interior, I found two small blue eggs still perfectly intact. Our neighbours collected nests from their own trees and passed them on to me. I collected many nests over the following months that were finally gathered together into a black plastic rubbish bag for the installation, *Litter*.



Figure 1. Catherine Day. *Litter*. 2007. Installation of eucalyptus leaves, macrocarpa branches, recycled planks, plastic rubbish bag, nests.

3200mm x 3300mm.

I had begun collecting green plastic baling material at the beginning of 2008, an activity that grew out of the *Litter* work. In early summer rows of green bales make their annual appearance on the landscape. One farmer arranges his bales in rows three deep, stacked with one on top of another beside his boundary fence, while, down Longbush Road, they are arranged individually in a neat row, running up a fence line for over 300 metres. Once the bales are cut open, the garish green plastic remains piled up in yards and along fence lines, a grim reminder of the fact that it will not decompose. As yet, farmers have no way of recycling this material. So, although the presence of the bales is a visual link to the seasonal cycles of birth, growth and death of farm animals, it also stands in opposition to these cycles of nature.

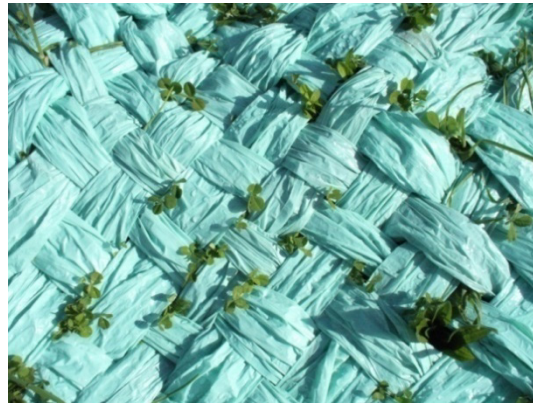


Figure 2. Catherine Day. Mat. 2008. Baling plastic.

(3m x 3m)

I began to experiment with this material when a neighbouring farmer offered me as much as I wanted. In the autumn I loaded up the car boot with a stack of scrunched up, dirty, torn plastic. When I got home I pegged some of it up on the clothes line to allow it to be washed in the autumn rain and dried by the wind. It was filmed and photographed at different times of the day and in different weather from March to July. In April, I laid strips of the plastic on the ground, weaving a mat on the grass. I then allowed the grass to grow through the mat, until now, in the early summer when there is little plastic still visible. How long will it remain? Plastic can take up to two hundred years to break down. As I began experimenting with the plastic, I became interested in the material itself; its surface, its lightness, its ability to transmit light, as well as its resistance to decomposition. Our own bodies are composed of much more fragile material.

Mortality

In April 2008 my mother was admitted to hospital in Hamilton, and shortly afterwards the decision was made to move both my mother and father into care. Having been assessed as having different needs, they were moved into separate rest homes in Auckland (where my two sisters live). My father died three weeks later on 15 July, followed by my mother on 10 September. They were both 91 years of age.

Because of my parents' advanced ages, I had been living with the possibility of their deaths for some years. They had been living in their own home, with the help of paid caregivers, but the past eight years, since my father's illness, were an anxious time for my two sisters, my brother and me. Towards the end of their lives my father was dependent on my mother as a result

of the onset of dementia. At times he was unsure who we were. He became withdrawn, and increasingly agitated. My mother was very frail, but remained in total control of the household, hiring caregivers, cleaners, gardeners, tradesmen and running the household day to day. There was always something going on – breaking in a new caregiver or gardener, rebuilding the bathroom, getting the house painted. Every holiday signalled the planning of a visit to Hamilton. Not that my parents expected it of me. I wanted to see them. They were and will always be important people in my life. This pattern of regular visits to their home in Hamilton continued for years. So when my mother could no longer cope with the situation, and went to hospital, there was a sense of unreality. Surely she would get better and return home and everything would continue as before. But she never returned home. I wrote a story about this event, which later became the basis for my artwork, *When the mother fell back* (2008) (Appendix III). Although I had been preparing myself for their deaths, the abrupt end came as a shock. The suddenness of the events contrasted so much with the slow decline of their last few years.

The death of a parent marks a particular stage in one's own life journey. It serves as a reminder that one has moved a step closer to the end of one's own life. What does this mean? How does this affect the ways in which one lives? For some, it may mean a closer focus on one's own family. In my case it has heightened the particular circumstances of my own situation. I have no children of my own but inherited two stepchildren with my second marriage. Both had already left home so that, apart from occasional visits, we have spent little time together. Our link is tenuous whereas the bond with my parents remained strong. Now that they have gone I perceive a missing link, a sense of loss. Whereas in many cases this gap might be filled by the sense of ongoing life through children and possibly grandchildren, in my own case there is only an empty space. Death is part of a cycle that links to rebirth and renewal, but I sense simultaneously both interruption and finality. I

had thought that I was reconciled to the fact that I have borne no children of my own, but the physical death of my parents has served to remind me that I leave no part of myself on earth when I die. Not in a physical sense anyway.

Archiving memory

As a child of nine or ten I began documenting my family and my surroundings as my own way of 'witnessing myself'. One of my first photographs, taken with our family Box Brownie, records our puppy Jack, not long after my two sisters and I bought him for 30/-. As I took the photograph, I remember thinking that this was a moment that would not come again, and that I was able to capture and preserve it for posterity.



Figure 3. Catherine Day. Jack. 1961. Photograph. 6.5cm x 6.5cm.

After my parents were shifted out of their home I photographed objects and spaces in the house and garden – close up details of some of their pictures, a jar of sixpences, a small bowl with pills in it, some scarves hanging on the back of a door, petals from the *Magnolia stellata* outside their dining room window, books on the shelves in my father's study, the light at the end of the hall way (Appendix I). I found handkerchiefs in pockets, photographs in bathroom cupboards, small signs that they had been here. However most of their possessions lay abandoned on shelves and in cupboards. They were just objects that seemed to have lost their reason for being.

In his book *The creative mind*, Henri Bergson uses several images to illustrate his idea of *durée* or duration. (Bergson, c1946, p. 164). One is of two spools with a thread running between them . While one spool is unrolling (as time does towards the end of a life) at the other end it is growing larger as it gathers memory from the past. In other words, time begins to run out, however, at the same time, memory accumulates and begins to take on weight. I made the DVD works, *Ravelling* and *Unravelling* (2008) to explore this notion. A ball of homespun wool was placed into a wood basket and was filmed as it was wound into a new ball offscreen. The film was then reversed on a computer to show the inverse, a ball of wool gradually growing in size. The two DVDs may be shown simultaneously on monitors side by side. Without the unravelling, there would be no ravelling. However, time remains unaltered on the sound track, so that ambient sound of birds, traffic and other background noise continues unabated. The choice of basket, as a container for the wool, reflects the idea of memory as something woven from different strands of remembered experience. It also makes reference to the Maori concept of three baskets of knowledge, one of which, *kete tuauri*, contains knowledge of ritual, memory and prayer (Knowledge basket, 2008). W. G. Sebald says about memory, "It's a question of specific weight, I think. The older you get, in a sense, the more you

forget... But that which survives in your mind acquires a very considerable degree of density, a very high degree of specific weight.” (Sebald, 2007, p. 54)

In the weeks following the deaths of my parents in 2008, I was involved in the dispersal of all their belongings. A car load full of papers was brought home. I have looked at a few letters and photographs, but I have felt overwhelmed by the volume and the weight of the past contained in these artefacts. It’s almost as if, if I started down that track I could tip myself into what Sebald termed “the vortex” (Ibid, p. 13). It could consume me. So in the meantime, the papers sit on shelves in the studio. Every now and then, I dip tentatively into one of the boxes. In one I discover four envelopes of fair curly baby hair.

John Ruskin kept an extensive collection of rocks, including one small pebble that sat on the chimney piece at his aunt’s house when he was seven. This artefact embodied two kinds of time – his own experience of time, where, as a 57-year-old, he could look back at his 7-year-old self, and the life of the pebble – the mineralogical span of time stretching away for millennia (Lippincott, 1999).

The death of parents signals a particular time in a life, a point from which we may look forward as well as back. Material artefacts that are associated with their memory, are handed on. My mother, who was English, inherited many items from her mother and aunt, and later, her first husband, her sister, and cousin – items such as antique furniture, china, canteens of cutlery, jewellery, books. Although she did not like to dwell in the past, she nevertheless retained a storehouse of material reminders of people and past lives. Many of these belongings had personal histories that related to various family members, and to different periods in her life. She seemed not to want to part with these things, even retaining some of the books and

toys we were given as children, rather than passing them on to us. One of the items I selected from the book shelves in my mother's study, was a family Bible. This belonged in the most recent past to my mother, before that to her sister, and before that to an aunt of theirs, (my great aunt), a sister of the original owner. When I brought it home I had no idea of the small treasures I would find as I began to leaf through its pages – small fragments of cream silk, a leaf, a pressed flower. These had been pressed tightly into the book's pages for so many years that they had imprinted themselves on the paper. The Bible has a number of other smaller relics within it which have revealed themselves upon closer examination – a small insect, a hair. It is as if it has become a small cemetery itself. I documented these small items photographically (Appendix II).

Later on a friend of mine found two tiny strips of newspaper tucked tightly into the pages.

JONES.– June 27, at Fieldside, Epsom, the wife of Charles Payne Collier Jones, of a son.

JONES.-July 5, at Fieldside, Epsom, Eleanor Bertha, wife of Charles Payne Collier Jones, aged 20

The year of these events, I later discovered from family records, was 1893. The Bible had belonged to Nellie (Eleanor Rice) my great aunt, who died, aged 20, a week after giving birth to her son. Was it Nellie that placed the small items into the Bible? It was given to her in March 1881 when she was nine years old, so it is possible that it was indeed her that collected the small leaves and flowers that are pressed into their pages. However these things found their way into the Bible, they remain a potent reminder of someone's everyday – a small scrap of silk, possibly from a wedding gown, or a flower picked on a summer's day in the garden at Cheam Rectory, Surrey, where my grandmother and her sisters grew up.

Nellie's younger sister Alice (who had no children) must have kept the Bible from 1893 until 1934 when she passed it on to her niece Sylvia (my aunt, who also remained childless). My mother inherited it when Sylvia died in 1994. I noted that my mother has added her name and date on the inside cover, which serves to remind me of the cycle of generations to which all people are tied. What is of particular interest to me, is that this item has been handed down from sister to sister, to niece, to sister, to daughter (Appendix II).

Process

My daily life revolves around the land I inhabit with Pat, my husband, at Gladstone. I regularly walk around, looking, pulling grass and weeds from around small natives that have been planted, grubbing thistles out of the pasture, gathering kindling for the fire. We shifted onto the front three acres of a ten acre block a few years ago, and have developed a new dam that fills up with winter rains, and attracts many birds to its waters – ducks with their young in early spring, herons, kingfishers and the occasional shag or hawk during summer when the frogs are plentiful. Sometimes we have small groups of pukeko, especially during a wet spell. We are planning to make a path that will traverse the property, down into the gully, up through a small grove of chestnuts to a plantation of Tasmanian blackwoods leading to the woodlot. It will then pass through the sheep paddock with poplars, past the end of the dam, along the front of the property, past the young almond trees to the group of pine nuts and around to the front gate. From there it will go through the olive grove to the vegetable garden and nearby hen house, then past the studio to the house. Many of the trees were planted when we first arrived on the property in 1992, for

example the eucalypts, blackwoods, poplars, chestnuts and pine nuts. The olives and almonds were planted about six years ago and have not yet produced any quantities of fruit. However last year our small olive crop was added to that of friends nearby, and as a result, we received our first bottles of olive oil.

Quality of attention

At the beginning of 2007 we shifted into a new house that had been built on the subdivided block of land. One day in April of that year I noticed a small strip of sunlight that had appeared high up on a wall inside our entrance hall. As the year progressed towards winter, the sun had begun to slant in through the rectangular window in the north facing wall. This cast a block of light onto the painted yellow surface of the opposite wall. The block of sunlight appeared first as a narrow strip, but each day it grew wider as we headed towards the shortest day. It also moved across the wall in a slightly different pattern each day. I began to document this light pattern, writing about it, noting the times it appeared and disappeared, photographing it and finally filming it. I made a 12 minute DVD of it entitled *Hum* (2007). There was nothing extraordinary about the light entering the house; I was simply showing something that was already there. What became important however was the quality of attention that came about when I watched the light so intently. I would watch for the moment when the strip began to narrow, disintegrate and finally remain as just a tiny pin point of light for a moment before disappearing altogether. As New Zealand artist Joanna Margaret Paul once wrote: “To see the moment is to farewell it” (Trevelyan and Treadwell, 2005, p. 15).

This 'quality of attention' is spoken about by many artists and theorists. Critic Victor Shklovsky (1965, cited in Trevelyan and Treadwell, 2005, p. 14) wrote that "the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known". Jacquelynn Baas says that Marcel Duchamp "changed not only how we experience art, but how we experience life. He helped us see that everything in the world is worthy of our attention, and to understand that this – our attention – is the creative act" (Baas and Jacob, 2004, p. 20). John Cage stated that "our business in living is to become fluent with the life we are living, and art can help this." Christina Barton writes that New Zealand sculptor Pauline Rhodes "demonstrates that art making can (and should) be a mode of thinking and a means of living vitally, an ongoing interrogation of and a profound meditation on the nature of being, here and now" (Barton, 2002, p. 12). American painter, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, made a series of paintings that document the sunlight falling in certain corners of her rooms. In her essay "In pursuit of the knowable" Helen Molesworth describes the artist's process as a "search for incident" in the continuum of everyday reality (Molesworth, 2008, p. 74).

April 21, 2008 (DVD)

In April 2008 I filmed the plastic baling strips over a 12 hour period from dawn until dusk. My digital video camera was set up on a tripod in front of the baling material that had been pegged to the washing line. The light changed through this period of time and there were different sounds captured on the sound track. After this experiment I decided to film from a fixed position, with the camera focussed on a close up shot, so that three pieces of the material filled the entire frame. I began at

6am on 21 April, before dawn, filming three 2-minute sequences in the first hour as the light was changing so rapidly. After that I filmed 2 minutes on the hour each hour until 6pm when I filmed three sequences again. By 7pm, it was dark. The light changed constantly, altering the surface of the plastic. At times in the morning, sunlight hit the surface with patterns of branches and leaves from the nearby vegetation.



Figure 4. Catherine Day. Untitled (baling plastic). 2008. Photograph.

As the day progressed into afternoon and then evening, a wind got up. The sound became dramatic. But what was most interesting to me, was the quality of attention I paid to my surroundings during the course of this day. For a start, I was up earlier than I would normally have been. In my journal I wrote:

The filming process reminds me of a kiln firing. The same sense of anticipation, getting up early, attending to the clock. I've noticed that this morning I've paid much closer attention to things.

I became aware of our small flock of sheep; their methodical grazing leading them from place to place, always as a group. There was a hot air balloon hovering over the ranges in the still early morning air and a pink light on the mountains before sunrise. The heavy dew on the grass made my slippers wet as I set up the camera on the tripod. I noticed with special attention, both at the time, and later when watching the DVD, the sound that was captured – the barking of dogs in the distance, the bellowing of the heifer closer by, the magpies calling, and the song of the resident grey warbler and the flapping of the plastic in the wind. These sounds conjured up a world in themselves, becoming a significant feature of the work.

Bill Viola's *Darker side of dawn* (2005) is a large video work screened onto a wall. In this work, which lasts for around 30 minutes, the camera remains in a fixed position in front of a large tree. Very slowly, and almost imperceptibly, the light changes as the sun comes up and bleaches out the image until it is eventually totally white. Then, gradually the colour begins to emerge from the whiteness until at last the tree is completely realised in full colour once again. At first the projection looks like a painting until one realises that the leaves on the tree are actually moving, having been filmed in real time. If the viewer is willing to spend time with this work, he or she may be rewarded with their own heightened sense of time passing.

In early July the Massey University DVX100 video camera was used to film the plastic strips. The result was a clearer image and deeper, richer colour . Filming took place on a sunny day with crisp clear winter light. Several works emerged from this. For instance *Looking through* (2008) (DVD) depicts a distant landscape filmed through the thin plastic. Features such as trees and hills are barely discernible. Every now and then a corner of the plastic lifts to reveal a glimpse of the landscape beyond. *Green waves* (2008) (DVD) captures the undulating movement of long strips in the wind. *Zephyr* (2008)(DVD) shows the way a small amount of air movement interacts with four plastic strips that have been pegged to the clothes line. Instead of moving them all in the same direction at the same time, each strip is animated individually in a dance-like sequence. This was a revelation to me.



Figure 5. Catherine Day. Untitled (baling plastic). 2008. Photograph.

Walking

Walking is an activity in my life in which attention is focussed on the ordinary and often unnoticed details of a place. I am aware of things such as;

The kind of weather; maybe it's blustery today.

The small objects of rubbish that are left behind on the roadside; pieces of string, sacks, bottles.

Road kill; often there will be birds, possums, hares or rabbits hit by cars.

Oncoming cars; they go so fast on our 100km/hour country road. I wave back to someone who has recognised me. I often wave without knowing who they are.

The sounds of wind, traffic, territorial dogs that bark when I pass their gate, skylarks, magpies and other birds.

I walk often, usually along the road that runs past our house, Te Whiti Road. This road is the eastern route between Masterton and Martinborough, through Gladstone and Longbush. There are a few others in the neighbourhood who walk or run, but they are more purposeful than me. They are usually training for an event such as a triathlon. Or they're walking the dog. Walking, purely for the sake of walking, is unusual.

Rebecca Solnit says "it's the unpredictable incidents between official events that add up to a life, the incalculable that gives it value" (Solnit, 2001, p. 10). We often overlook these mundane moments in our lives as having no intrinsic value, or as being a

waste of time. As I see it, the act of walking enables me to get acquainted with the place I live in, on a physical level. The pattern of footsteps links to the regular heartbeat or the beat in a piece of music. It slows down the thought processes by becoming a kind of meditation. Solnit says she likes walking because “it is slow and I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about 3 miles an hour”. She also says that modern life is “moving faster than the speed of thought or thoughtfulness” (Ibid.).

Walking has been part of the practice of many artists, writers and thinkers. In his masterpiece *Walden*, H.D. Thoreau says: “As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me” (Thoreau, 1974, c1854, p. 129). At around the same time in England, the Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, extolled the virtues of walking. In more recent times walking has again been in vogue among intellectuals. A number of artists and writers attended a symposium at the University of Illinois in 2005, *Walking as knowing as making; a peripatetic investigation of place* (Walking as knowing as making, 2005). One of these artists was Hamish Fulton, who, along with Richard Long, began in the early 1970s to explore the possibilities of making art in the landscape. Fulton began to think that “art could be how you view life” (Ibid.). Walking has become such an intrinsic part of his art work that everything he makes revolves around this act.

Janet Cardiff uses the walk in a different way, recording herself making a walk in a specific location, and later layering that recording with other voices and sounds. The viewer then listens to the soundtrack on headphones, as he or she makes the walk. In this way the artist plays with the idea of *durée*, or lived time. In *Wanås Walk* (1998), for instance, a voice asks “Do you know those moments when the past overlaps with the present, for just an instant?” (Christov-Bakargiev, 2003, p. 24). Instead

of focussing attention solely on the present moment, stories from other times and places can resonate with the viewer's own experience. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev states that "time in Cardiff's work is expressed through the interplay of memory and expectation of anticipation of events. Duration, and the fluctuation in the density of experience (what feels like minutes for one person may feel like hours for another) are subjects of her work" (Ibid., p. 25).

In recent months I have made regular walks to an avenue of thirty-six oak trees, which is a half hour walk from our house, on the main road towards Masterton. Planted as a living monument to the young men of the district who died in the First and Second World Wars, the trees symbolise a break in the natural cycle of the generations here in Gladstone. During the course of twelve months (January 2003 - January 2004) I photographed the trees through the seasons, often walking to the site three or four times a week. Last year I printed one of these photos for my mother's 90th birthday. It hung on the wall above the TV set, and each time she stood up from her armchair, she would lean on her walker, gaining her balance before she took the first step. She told me that she would always look at the photo, and especially the dark shadow where the two rows of trees met far in the distance.

I have recorded the sound of a number of my walks. For instance on 22 October 2008, beginning at 11am, I recorded a walk to the avenue of oaks. I set out on this walk, only to be interrupted by a friend on a bicycle who I ran into only five minutes into the recording. After the initial greeting I switched off the recorder while we exchanged a few pleasantries (haven't seen you for ages, how's Pat, I saw Linda in the paper, nice morning etc) and started it again after we had continued on our separate journeys. The walk continued without further incident until about 40 minutes later on my way home, I saw a neighbour's dog worrying at a mother duck with ducklings. "Hey!" says my voice on the tape, trying not to be too loud and strident. This

time I let the recorder keep running while I scared off the dog and told it to “Go home”. These two incidents showed me that no two walks would ever be exactly the same, moreover, that these two incidents link that walk to a particular time of year (when the ducklings make their appearance) and a particular time of friendship.

The Everyday

In the work described above I am showing something about my everyday life. Annette Messenger (2006, cited in Johnstone, 2008, p. 12) has the following to say about this kind of work:

Mostly, I believe an artist doesn't create something, but is there to sort through, to show, to point out what already exists, to put it into form and sometimes reformulate it. That's the spirit in which I gathered all the press clippings and photos of women, their postures, their gestures – their hands stirring sauce or putting on a bandage. It's a language in itself, which is why we don't pay any attention to it. I didn't invent anything, I indicated.

In a similar fashion New Zealand artist Darcy Lange documented the actions that are performed in a working life. During the 1970s he recorded countless hours of video tape of ordinary people at their work – cutting timber, on the chain in the freezing works, teachers and pupils in schools, and so on. His *Work Studies*, were filmed in England, Spain and New Zealand. Lange focuses on the worker in each case. For instance, when filming a shearer, he follows closely the repetitive pattern and economy of movement learned over years of experience. As Mark Amery points out, Lange “strove to capture the rhythm and

movement of labour as a performance” (Amery, 2007). When viewing this footage today, it becomes apparent that ways of doing ordinary tasks change. The way people speak, the clothes they wear alter over time. Looking back from a distance of forty years, these changes are brought into sharp focus. Lange’s work, although unspectacular at the time it was made, has gained importance through the passing of years and is now gaining recognition in the art world.

In 1998 the Sydney Biennale devoted an entire show to art of the everyday, with exhibiting artists from many different countries. In his catalogue essay “Every Day”, Jonathan Watkins says that “small repetitive gestures” often characterise this kind of art making (Every day, 1998, p. 18). Sculptor Rosalie Gascoigne’s practice fitted into this category. Her process involved driving around Canberra and surrounding countryside, collecting old materials from rubbish dumps, the roadside, wherever she could find things. She preferred old, weathered material to new - sheets of iron, soft drink boxes, road signs. She also collected material from the natural world – sticks, feathers, shells. Foraging was an integral part of the art making, along with sorting and rearranging. Interestingly, when she was offered new materials with which to make her work, she declined them, realising that the journey of discovery was intrinsic to her process. Gregory O’Brien says that “the sourcing, in a sense, had to be a part of a working process which was autobiographical in design” (Gascoigne, 2004, p. 49). Sylvia Plimack Mangold says that “process is a reality I can know for sure. Making something about the process of making something has a built in dynamic within which I can witness myself” (Molesworth, 2008, p. 78).

Text works

Most days I write an entry in my journal. It is a way of paying attention to my daily life just as playing the piano has been since early childhood. Often I copy out quotations from artists and writers who describe their own processes of making art, such as Robert Irwin, Bill Viola and Annie Dillard. Early in 2008 I began working on a sound piece, *Interior babble*, in which I recited excerpts from these writers. A song kept going through my head at the time. Entitled *You'll never be the sun*, it featured on a CD my husband had bought several years ago, a compilation called *Celtic Tapestry*. I discovered that it was written by Donagh Long, Irish singer/songwriter and it is performed by the Irish vocalist Delores Keane. "You'll never be the sun, turning in the sky, and you won't be the moon above us, on a moonlit night ..." (Long, 1996). I recorded myself singing and humming it in that kind of absent minded way that you sing when you're carrying out a mundane task. I played notes and chords on the piano, beginning simply with the single note A (below middle C). I had experimented with the length of the note, allowing its sound to fade away in its own time. In a similar way to the strip of light in *Hum* (2007) I was interested in the moment of 'no light' or 'no sound'. I found that, because I was recording this at home, of course there was never true silence anyway. There was a sense of warm interior space, where, at times, the sound of the exterior world seeps in. Within the house the clock was ticking nearby, at one stage a door was closed and there were gentle footsteps. Sounds from outside include bird song, the gentle swish of a car going past on the main road outside and even the far off distant sound of country music on the neighbour's radio fifty metres away. As John Cage discovered in his investigations, total silence does not exist. He once visited an anechoic chamber at Harvard University, a room designed to screen out all noise. When he emerged, he described to the engineer the two sounds he could hear, one high and one low. He was told that the high sound was his

nervous system and the low sound was his blood circulation (Cage, 1957). In his work 4'33" (1952) he uses silence within a specified time frame and in a particular way. During the performance of this piece noise of one kind or another will occur, for instance a siren outside, or coughing, or shuffling in the audience. The 'music' becomes about the arrangement of this ambient sound and the intense focus brought to bear by an entire concert audience listening at the same time. Each performance of this work is unique.

I once attended a Quaker funeral which was held in a Catholic church. The service began with a fifteen to twenty minute silence. The silence ended with music. Bach's *Jesu joy of man's desiring* was played on the piano. I have never listened so intently to a piece of music. The experience of sitting in silence with a large group of people was compelling. What I discovered was that silence is multi layered. There were waves of silence, moments when all the gentle sounds of shuffling and moving ceased and the deep underlying silence revealed itself. Even then, if I had been listening acutely, I would have picked up sounds from outside the church. There may be few places where one can experience true silence in the world today.

In my work *Interior babble* (2008) the piece progresses from the initial note A to include other single notes and note clusters. The note A remains the 'home' note around which the piano and the singing revolve. Arvo Pärt, a composer of exquisitely simple music, once said: "I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note ... or a moment of silence comforts me." (Pärt, 1994). One of his works, *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978), consists of long sustained notes played on a violin, accompanied by broken chords on the piano. The CD notes also mention that this melody line also returns to the note A. Alongside the piano sounds I read excerpts from Annie Dillard's *The writing life* and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. In

the latter, the author keeps a journal of daily happenings in her world as well as discussing ideas she comes across in her reading. She talks about the creative process: “All I can do is try to gag the commentator, to hush the noise of useless interior babble that keeps me from seeing just as surely as a newspaper dangled before my eyes.” (Dillard, 1990, p. 38) Piano, singing, and spoken voice were woven together to create *Interior babble* (2008), the duration of which is 5 minutes 22 seconds. Its critique presentation on headphones allowed the listener to enter the work individually, without distraction. As I have never lived in a house without a piano or many books, this work indicates my everyday world. Any practice of the everyday is an investigation of not only the commonplace but also the particular.

A major influence upon *Interior babble* (2008) is a video work I encountered in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2005. Entitled *Solar breath (Northern Caryatids)* (2002) by Canadian artist Michael Snow, the work features a simple image – a window with a curtain gently billowing in and out, with the breeze, and in the background, sounds of human habitation – talking, movement, things being picked up and put down.

The simplicity of this work has stayed with me. Nothing startling happened, but this work seemed to capture a sense of an ordinary moment in a life lived. It also showed, in a direct way, that external forces are at work in our lives. As the curtain lifts we have the occasional glimpse of what lies beyond the window. This sets up a dialogue between the world of the private interior and the public exterior.



Figure 6. Michael Snow. *Solar breath (Northern Caryatids)*. 2002. DVD.

One of the comments received with *Interior babble* (2008) was that I hadn't written the text myself. With this in mind, I began to write a story about the day my mother went to hospital. When I showed the writing to a friend, Michael Harlow, who is a writer and Jungian analyst, he suggested the use of repetitive phrases and words in a kind of 'rondel'. His prose poem *Today is the piano's birthday* (Harlow, 1981, p. 9) exploits this technique. The resulting work was *When the mother fell back* (2008) (Appendix III). Its use of repetition parallels the repetitive nature of the daily pattern of two elderly people. Alongside the story I wrote three separate voice parts that also employ repetitive language in a mantra-like fashion. These voice parts were recorded onto cassette tapes, using a small voice recorder that was among my parents' possessions. Three small cassette players were then used to play the recorded voice parts which I had previously recorded using my own voice. The intentional

use of this anachronistic technology seemed altogether appropriate for this work. Cassette recorders and players have been used extensively for oral histories as the spoken word reproduces well on these small machines. Their use in this work lends a hint of nostalgia to the work, with the satisfyingly crisp click of the play/stop buttons.

For the critique presentation of this work in August 2008, I read the story aloud from my workbook. The combination of live performance and recorded voices set up a dialogue between past and present. There were silences in the recorded voice parts allowing them to intersect at different times. The performance of this work took place in a test space in the Second Year studios at Massey University. I allowed the audience to enter the space first, a clinical space with concrete floor and windows that look out onto the main studio area. An air conditioning shaft provides both a draught of cool air and a whooshing background sound. It seemed an appropriately cool environment that in addition clearly referenced the institutional ambience of hospital. The small cassette recorders were placed onto a small shelf at one end of the space. I began the performance by carefully pressing the 'play' button on each machine in turn, then, returning to the other end of the space, I picked up my book, put on my glasses and began reading the story. Gradually the voices began speaking at the other end of the space. When I finished the story I took off my glasses, put the book back on the floor, and walked to the machines, and, in reverse order, after waiting for a suitable gap in each monologue, I pressed the 'stop' button on each in turn.

Capturing sound

As I write this, in late December, my husband is making kindling for next winter's fires. Small branches of poplar, cut for firewood, have been gathered beside the wood shed at the end of the studio. He has begun cutting the branches into small lengths, either by breaking them against his knee, or if they are larger, using the axe to chop them on a chopping block nearby. I have set up a small cassette recorder to tape record the sounds as he breaks the wood and tosses it into the kindling box.

Collecting/gathering activities form a major part of daily tasks on a small block of land. With this in mind I have added another collecting activity, that of recording sound from the environment where I live. During the nest gathering, I discovered several nests still positioned in various trees. One was in a small hawthorn growing on the fence line by the main road. I filmed this nest at dusk, capturing footage of car headlights, and the roar of the engine as it approached at speed, passed by and faded into the distance. When I watched the footage later, I discovered other sounds that I hadn't noticed at the time. For instance there were gunshots (or perhaps a bird scarer) in the distance. This experiment, and the filming of the plastic baling strips, heightened my awareness of the complexity of sound that surrounds me in the place where I live. There is no such thing as private space when it comes to sound. It filters in from the road nearby, where traffic passes by at all times of the day and night, or from small aircraft that fly over occasionally, or from the neighbour's ride-on mower, and so on. The external world is constantly impinging on the private world. I began to record sounds at different times of the day and in different locations. This has been an ongoing project through 2008 and into the beginning of 2009.

The choice of low-tech recording simplifies the process. It becomes simply a matter of putting a blank 60-minute cassette into the small machine, attaching a microphone, placing the two into a basket, and taking the basket to the source of the sound. Usually I leave the tape recording until that side of the tape is full, and then will turn the tape over to record another 30 minutes at a different time of day. The sound captured on cassette is raw and unmixed. I have found that the sound quality, using this recorder, with a microphone attached, has been much clearer for long distance sounds, than the small, cheap digital voice recorder I used earlier in the year.

I have recorded segments of everyday life at my home at Gladstone - walks, preparing meals, the sound of the

metronome, our answer phone, as well as outdoor sounds – frogs, birds, traffic. One tui has a distinctive set of notes that I've recorded on a number of occasions.

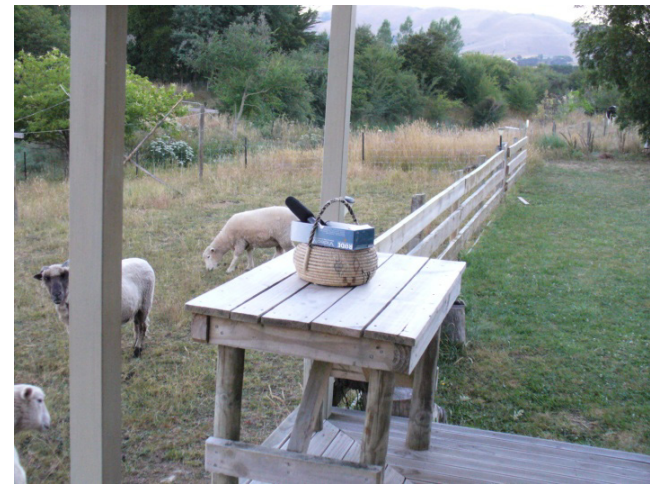


Figure 7. Catherine Day. Untitled (sound recording). 2008.

Photograph

This morning I read a story Bill Viola tells in his collected writings, *Reasons for knocking at an empty house*, a story that parallels my own recent recording activity and the quandary of a growing stack of cassette tapes and what to do with them.

Once, a friend of mine gave me a shopping bag full of used audio cassette tapes that he had retrieved from the garbage at his office. Thrilled at the prospect of unlimited free recording time, I got an idea to set up a tape recorder right in the center of activity in my house, the kitchen, and to try and record everything that went on. My idea was to have an ongoing, almost continuous, record of all sonic activity in that space. When played back, it would create a sort of stream-of-consciousness parallel world to the present, but displaced in time. I kept the recorder loaded with tapes all the time I was at home, which then being my summer vacation was practically all the time. By the end of the week, when I had accumulated well over 24 hours of tape, I suddenly realized a distressing thought. I would need 24 hours, exactly the time it took to record, to play all this stuff back. Furthermore, if I kept this up, say, for a year, I would have to stop after six months to begin playing back, and if I got really ambitious and made it my life's work, I would have to stop my life when it was only half over to sit down and listen to all the material for the rest of my life, plus a little additional time for rewinding all the cassettes. It was a horrible thought, so I took down my tape recorder and immediately stopped the project. (Viola, 1995, p. 59)

Unlike Bill Viola, I have not attempted to record long sequences. I have been content to tape thirty-minute "slices of time". Already there are several piles of cassette tapes with dates and times written on them. As a resource they provide a snapshot of life now, in a similar way to the recordings Darcy Lange created. They may provide raw material for artworks in the future.

Conclusion

Poet Lauris Edmond writes; “a single hour can grow huge and quiet, full of reflections like an old river, its slow-turning eddies and whirls showing you every face of your life in a fluid design” (Edmond, 1996, p. 11).

The year’s work has centred on processes that are carried out regularly in the form of writing, reading, sound recording, photographing, listening, walking, looking and sometimes filming. Sculptural investigations have taken place using a waste material, baling plastic. Works have been made using sound, text and video. Bergson’s concept of *durée*, the lived experience of time, has been central to my research. More specifically I have investigated notions of memory and its accumulated weight, as well as ‘quality of attention’ that comes with intense focus. The death of both my parents has heightened the sense of my own mortality and with it, a growing awareness of time. I have the sense that, although time may be diminishing in terms of days, hours and minutes available to me, that everyday there are new possibilities.

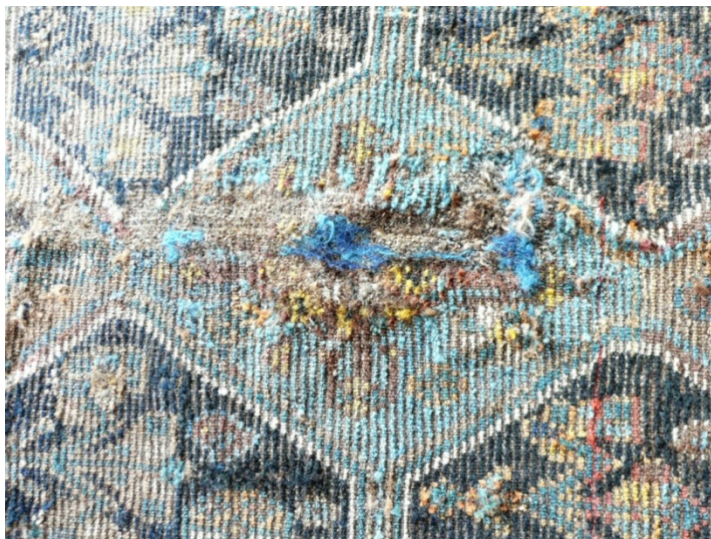
Time passes. Listen. Time passes. (Thomas, 1977, p. 3)

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Appendix I







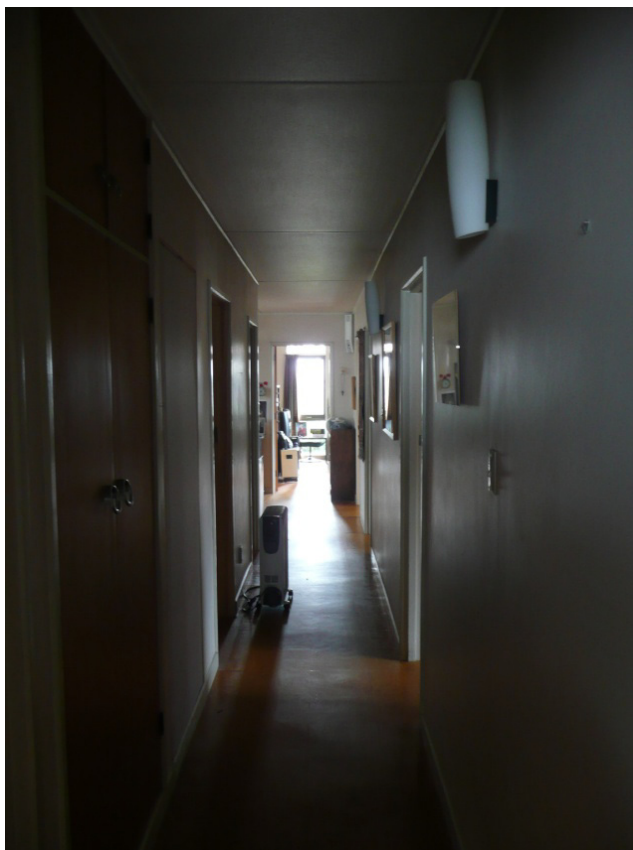




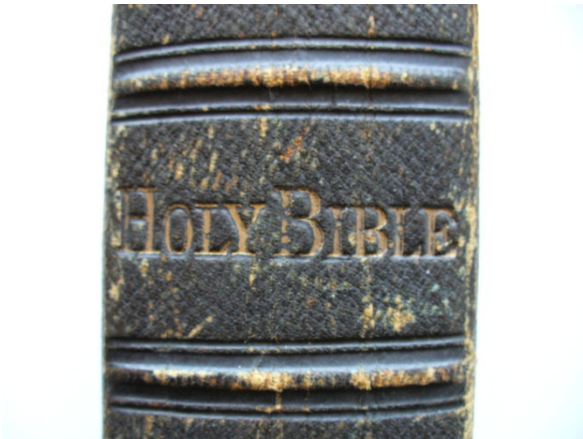






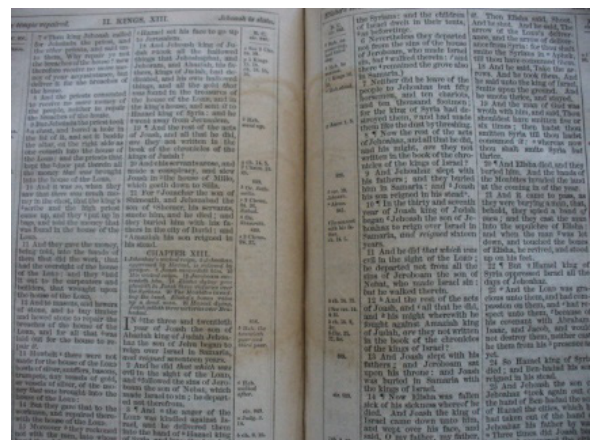


Appendix II



THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT			
	Ch.	Page	
GENESIS	50	5	II. Chronicles
Exodus	40	64	Ezra
Leviticus	27	113	Nehemiah
Numbers	36	149	Esther
Deuteronomy	34	200	Job
Joshua	24	243	Psalms
Judges	21	272	Proverbs
Ruth	4	301	Ecclesiastes
I. Samuel	31	305	The Song of Solomon
II. Samuel	24	343	Isaiah
I. Kings	22	375	Jeremiah
II. Kings	25	412	Lamentations
I. Chronicles	29	447	Ezekiel

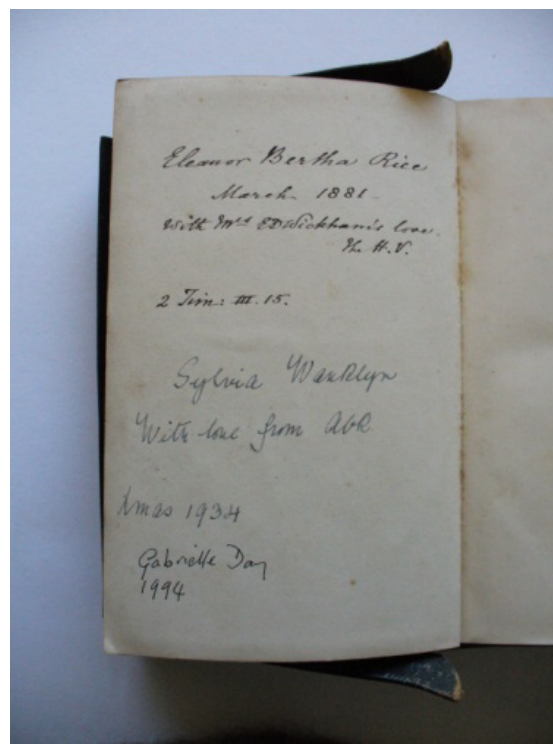












Elmer Bertha Rice
March 1881
with Mrs. Ed. Rickham's loan.
H. H. V.

2 Tons. III. 15.

Sylvia Wadley
With love from Bob

Nov 20 1934

Gabrielle Day
1994

Appendix III: When the mother fell back.

One morning the mother fell back on the bed and had to be taken to the hospital. The ambulance came and the mother was taken away to the hospital. She was taken to the hospital because she had fallen back on the bed.

The father sat in the dining room eating breakfast while the ambulance came and took the mother away. When the ambulance came and took the mother away, the father was eating his porridge. The mother did not speak to the father before the ambulance took her to the hospital because the father was eating his porridge in the dining room.

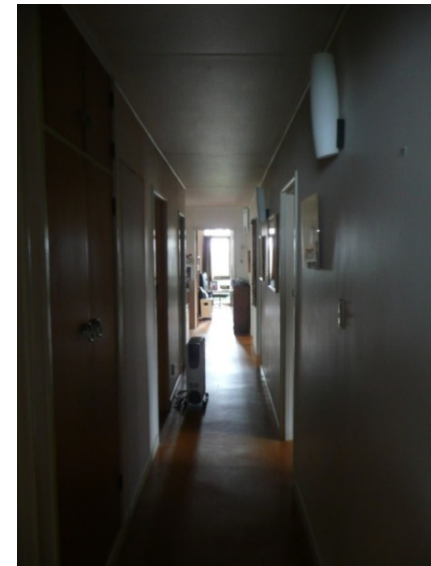
What were the words the mother said to the father, before the father went down the passage to the dining room, before the mother fell back on the bed?

Did the mother wake up in the morning and greet the father saying "Good morning Father"? Did the father wake up in the morning and greet the mother saying "Good morning Mother"?

When the ambulance came and took the mother to the hospital, the father said nothing to the mother, because the father was in the dining room eating breakfast. The mother was taken to the hospital in the ambulance and when they got there the mother had to wait for the doctor to come and see her.

The doctor came to see her and checked her all over but he could find nothing wrong with the mother. The doctor said to the mother "You can go home now". When the doctor told the mother she could go home she said "I am not going home. Under no circumstances am I going back to that house".

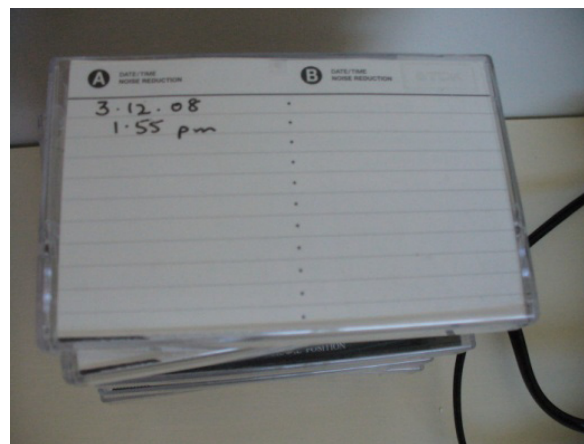
The mother did not want to go home to the father, the dining room and the porridge. The mother did not want to get up out of bed and go down the passage to the dining room to eat her porridge with the father. So instead the mother fell back on the bed.



Appendix IV







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