



## Remains To Be Seen: Recollecting Memory

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*Remains to be Seen: Recollecting Memory*

A Thesis Presented

By.

NATHANAEL L KOOPERKAMP

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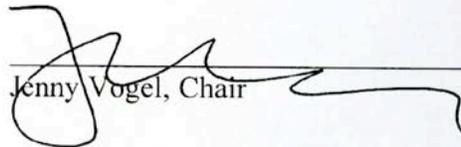
*Remains to be Seen*

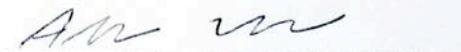
A Thesis Presented

By.

Nathanael L Kooperkamp

Approved as to style and content by:

  
Jenny Vogel, Chair

  
Alexis Kuhr, Member

  
Kimberlee Pérez, Member

  
Young Min Moon, Graduate Program Director  
Department of Art

  
Shona Macdonald, Department Chair  
Department of Art

**ABSTRACT**

**REMAINS TO BE SEEN**

**SEPTEMBER 2018**

**NATHANEL L KOOPERKAMP, B.A. COLLEGE OF WOOSTER**

**M.F.A. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST**

**Directed by: Professor Jenny Vogel**

*Remains to be Seen*, a multi-media installation, provides the opportunity for reconfiguration, re-contextualization and re-remembering of visual memory. Geoffrey Cubit, a historian of memory, has noted that “memory has no fixed, stable, unitary meaning to which we can invariably recur: it has always been, and legitimately, a concept in flux and under review”.<sup>1</sup> My work in this exhibition (and as discussed throughout this paper) addresses the unstable and revisionist nature of memory—both culturally and individually. Additionally, I attempt to address how memory (collective, visual, familial and individual) is implicated in the creation of selfhood, of personal narrative, and of family myth. In this exhibition, I marry traditional print and paper-making techniques with contemporary digital technologies to explore the ways in which memory is created and re-created by and across individuals, families, and social-historical contexts. I use family video footage from 1950’s Kentucky to utilize the nostalgia for another time, confronting and exposing problematic familial and cultural ideology and narratives. While images from the past may evoke sentimentality, the use of moving images over

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Cubit, *History and Memory*, (NYC: Manchester University Press, 2007), 7.

still digital print allows viewers to reflect on narrative interplay among static and mobile images in order to confront, expose and rework this tendency. Rather than portraying a static narrative of the past, I use the moving image to decontextualize the vernacular of the print. The images then function as a catalyst for and invitation to dialogue between the past and the present

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## CHAPTER 1 UNDERSTANDING MEMORY

*If we must regard it [memory] as a thing, we should think of it as a chemical element, never appearing in a pure state, but always mixed up in other thing—in our process of learning and perception, in our sense of identity or selfhood, in our awareness of time or place, in our habits of narration and our capacity for social interaction, in our sense of tradition or our potential for development. But memory’s multifaceted involvement in human life means that any intellectual approach is bound to be a partial one: we gain an analytical point of entry by restricting the focus of our inquiry... Some of these understandings have traditionally viewed memory as something ‘individual’ or ‘personal’, others as something ‘social’; some have focused on inner subjectivity, others on external manifestation. Memory is not, in the end, a thing to be pinned down, like a moth in a cabinet; it is a term whose usefulness lies in being tested and debated. What we need are not immutable definitions, but ways of bringing different understandings of memory into contact with each other, of exploring their frictions and intersections, of comparing their differences and assumptions.<sup>2</sup>*

In order to understand the argument and progression of my thesis, it is necessary for readers to have a deeper understanding of a set of key terms that I will be referring to throughout my work. Specifically, readers must have a general understanding of memory—its multiple and ever-changing definitions—and the way in which memory is understood as having an indeterminable impact on our cultural, familial, and personal identity. Though discussion of memory (in multiple analytical and scientific disciplines) has increased and become far more complex and multifaceted in recent years, it has a decisive place in artistic tradition dating back to ancient times. As explored in later sections of this paper, contemporary artists have confronted the relationship between the index purposes of memory and the interplay between the art object and its trace relationships to the “original” memory. As one could imagine, the “search for memory,”

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<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Cubit, *History and Memory*, (NYC: Manchester University Press, 2007), 9.

attempted by so many of our world's leading thinkers, is a tedious, complex, and seemingly impossible task. What I have attempted to do in this section, (titled somewhat ironically "Understanding Memory") is to give a few examples of artists and scholars who use memory and were informative to my own work to give readers an understanding of what memory has meant to various scholars and artists, and how memory will be explored and "understood" specifically in my own work.

When investigating memory, it quickly becomes clear that there is a lack of one cohesive or "dominant" definition. Most scholars spend time exploring the multi-dimensionality of memory while never deciding on one conclusive meaning. Though all scholars recognize the existence, importance, and role of memory in our cultural and individual lives, memory itself seems to disallow any sort of decisive meaning. Geoffrey Cubit recognizes first the importance (and elusiveness) of memory in his book *History and Memory*. Cubit writes:

Great claims have been made for memory, both as a capacity and as a concept. Without the ability to remember, it has been suggested, 'we should be locked in an infinitesimal present, speechless and without thought'—unrecognizable, in short, as the conscious purposeful, communicating creatures we like to think of ourselves as being. Memory is the 'enabling existence of human existence' the 'scaffolding upon which all mental life is constructed', an 'apparently seamless and omnipresent function' at the heart of our existence.<sup>3</sup>

While the obvious significance of memory is recognized, Cubit also goes on to point out its somewhat chimerical presence when he writes, "...memory's multifaceted involvement in human life means that any intellectual approach is bound to be a partial one...Memory is not, in the end, a thing to be pinned down".<sup>4</sup> If what Cubit says is true, what, then, are we left with? Memory, we are told, is crucial in the understanding of

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Cubit, *History and Memory*, (NYC: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Cubit, *History and Memory*, (NYC: Manchester University Press, 2007), 6-7.

cultural and individual identity. And yet, we are also told, that it is indefinable. If memory is not a thing to be “pinned down” then it would seem that to even attempt an understanding of it, we must examine all available discourse on the subject. How is this to be done? Ultimately, the definitions are endless and the subdivisions more endless still. When discussing memory, one must be specific. Is it individual memory one is exploring? Is it collective memory? Is it familial? Is it cultural memory? Is it semantic memory, relating to the meaning or differences in meaning between meanings of words or symbols? Or is it episodic memory? And, even when that is decided, it seems that the subcategories of memory are as hard to define as memory itself. Collective memory, though acknowledged by scholars as a vastly important process of remembering, memorializing, and understanding certain events within a culture/group, also does not seem to have a constant “working” definition within scholarly discourse. Given this lack of cohesive definition, I believe that Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey are right to assert, memory is a “shifting and elusive field”<sup>5</sup>, “...a labyrinth of mutually interacting materialized forms and images”.<sup>6</sup>

My own exhibition works with (and not against) this lack of cohesive definition, attempting to utilize the instability and immensity of memory to form works in which various kinds of memory interact with one another interchangeably. As Cubit puts it, “What we need are not immutable definitions, but ways of bringing different understandings of memory into contact with each other, of exploring their frictions and intersections, of comparing their different purposes and assumptions”<sup>7</sup>. Here, Cubit

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Hallam & Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Hallam & Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Cubit, *History and Memory*, (NYC: Manchester University Press, 2007), 6-7.

suggests that while a sole definition of memory may be impossible, the exploration and dialogue between multiple definitions and schools of thought will lead if not to cohesion, then at least to a deeper understanding of how memory determines, constructs, invents, re-invents, and sustains our present world and our present selves. It is my hope that this work succeeds in re-animating memory- thus providing the viewer the opportunity for subjective interaction with multiple kinds of memory in order to re-create, re-forge, and re-evaluate certain held, static memories.

While I acknowledge the multi-dimensionality and expansiveness of memory, in order to successfully write my thesis, I find it necessary to settle on a working definition (deficient or incomplete as it may be) of memory. Most importantly, I will be describing memory as a process rather than as a “thing”—a process that allows us (collectively and individually) to create and re-create a meaning of past events and to construct a sense of our “world.” I wish to make it clear that I consider memory (on both an individual and collective level) to be constantly “up for revision:” ever changing, and unstable. With the continuously altering and shifting nature of memory in mind, I will be defining memory as a process by which past events and past meaning is sustained within individuals and cultures. In other words, my exploration of memory will be an exploration of the past’s influence, dissimilarity, and effect on our present personhood and “culturehood”.

When discussing collective, or cultural memory, I will be referring to shared memories or memory processes within a group or culture. Collective memories are “not an accumulation of individual pasts that in principle might be disaggregated, but a past (or set of pasts) that is (or are) envisaged as being somehow general and collective”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Cubit, *History and Memory*, (NYC: Manchester University Press, 2007).

However, it is important to note that collective memories and personal memories are in no way disconnected processes, but rather irrevocably linked, colliding, influencing, and defining each other.

Equally important in understanding the sense of memory in my exhibition is to understand the concept of visual memory. Visual memory is a term referring to memories that are either wholly or partially pertaining to the visual or to the image rather than to the verbal or rhetorical. In its simplest form, visual memory, as stated above, is any memory in which an image is involved. For example, seeing your mother brush out her hair when you are a child is a visual memory. However, visual memories can also be experienced through other mediums like photographs, films, websites etc. And here is where it gets rather complicated—visual memory does not have to be something you experience firsthand for it to become a memory.

“...the distinction between the formation, rather than the emergence, of memories is crucial. Does the photographic image allow the memory to come forth, or does it actually create the memory?”<sup>9</sup> In other words, when is an image a way to access a memory, and when has the image become the memory itself? This, in short, is what this entire exhibition seeks to explore.

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<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Cubit, *History and Memory*, (NYC: Manchester University Press, 2007).

## CHAPTER 2 IMAGOLOGY

When discussing the cultural importance of images (and how and why it is essential for artists to repurpose, challenge, and re-contextualize them) it is useful to examine the writings of contemporary Czech writer Milan Kundera. In his book *Immortality*, Kundera discusses the evolution of the image into ideology. Kundera argues that political powers “no longer form any logical system of ideas” but rather “only a series of suggestive images”.<sup>10</sup> Kundera uses Marxist imagery of fraternity (comrades holding hands, hammer and sickle, etc.), to present us with what he calls the “transformation of ideology into imagology”<sup>11</sup>—the defeat and replacement of ideology (which is complex) by the more powerful, prevailing, and simple image. Kundera writes: “Imagology! Who first thought up this remarkable neologism?...it doesn’t matter. What matters is that this word finally let us put under one roof something that goes by so many names: advertising agencies; political campaign managers; designers who devise the shape of everything from cars to gym equipment; fashion stylists; barbers; show-business stars dictating the norms of physical beauty that all branches of imagology obey”.<sup>12</sup> It is this very definition of imagology—the commanding images of political might, advertising campaigns, celebrity, and political movements—that the appropriation artists use in order to deconstruct dominant cultural narratives and re-purpose meaning itself. When exploring the following artists and how they seek to critique power through their work, it benefits us to keep Kundera’s assertions in mind.

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<sup>10</sup> Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, (NYC: Perennial Classics, 1990), 112.

<sup>11</sup> Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, (NYC: Perennial Classics, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, (NYC: Perennial Classics, 1990), 112.

### **CHAPTER 3**

## **“MEMORY”: POLITICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN ART**

It is important to explore and understand the various ways in which other contemporary artists have investigated memory in order to position myself (and my work) within the contemporaneous conversation. In this section I will examine the work of Rachel Whiteread, Christian Boltanski, Shimone Attie, Anselm Kiefer, Gerz & Gerz, and Wilson- all artists who confront the complexity and chimeric value of memory (specifically traumatic memory) in installation or physical works. Even at its most elemental level, art can be a means of preserving the past and establishing a historical record. From marking on cave walls to complex public monuments, artists continue to follow the urge to create physical markers of what they chose to remember and what they are unable to forget. As Kalb notes, “artists continue to provide a means by which the public reflects upon its history and creates a public memory”.<sup>13</sup> In these cases, aesthetic considerations have political and ideological implications. The question is not only what is considered to be worthy of remembrance, but also how to present and frame the still painful and contentious past. Twentieth century artists had to wrestle both with the historic events (trauma of two world wars, the unwinding of the colonial status quo, and cold war tensions, etc.) and new ways of thinking about history that challenged fundamental assumptions about progress, the nature of knowledge and truth, and artistic authority.<sup>14</sup> Thus, artistic work dealing with these histories was forced to take on new

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 140.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 140.

levels of complexity. Rather than simple tributes to history's winners or remembrances of victims, many of these works, according to Kalb, "focused instead on the history event as a confluence of different individuals, communities, and histories".<sup>15</sup> At the same time an expectation lingers that art can be a force of reconciliation and catharsis. Even in the aftermath of collective trauma and divisive politics, art is thought of as providing potential for "resolution" or a concluding note to be seen by future generations as capturing essential insights.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 1: Rachel Whiteread's *Holocaust Memorial* (2000)

The historical and epistemological challenges of the twentieth century steers artists' representation to abstraction "as the most effective means to reckon with historical trauma".<sup>17</sup> The British sculptor Rachel Whiteread's *Holocaust Memorial* (2000) is a casting of a library presented in a Viennese square. After Whiteread's casting what remains is the library's negative space—the spines of books affixed together in floating rows. Whiteread makes tangible objects no longer present, evoking the absences created by the Holocaust. The books are absent and yet they are physically present in

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 140.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 141.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 148.

Whiteread's memorial. *Holocaust Memorial* offers a sense of how memory works. Memory allows us to think about past events, even to feel again associated emotions, but the past cannot be experienced again. The past is always present but never fully present. Whiteread's work offers this dynamic in physical form as the library is present—but not fully present. It's a library that can be seen but not used. Its books are present and absent. According to Kalb, these concerns manifest throughout Whiteread's work. As Kalb writes, Whiteread's proposal for the memorial was accepted "in large part owing to her proven adroitness at giving form to absence and loss".<sup>18</sup> From a distance *Holocaust Memorial* appears to be a simple tomb. With the names of concentration camps carved into its base, it also functions representationally, directly referring to the horror of the Holocaust. The choice of a library, Kalb contends, refers to the Jewish identity as "People of the Book".<sup>19</sup> There is also perhaps a connection between the systemic orderliness of a library and the Nazi state which weaponized systemic orderliness as a means for destruction.



Figure 2: Christian Boltanski's *Autel Chases* (1988)

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 148.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 148.

Christian Boltanski was an artist born in Paris in 1944 right after the city was liberated from the Nazi army. His father was Jewish and Boltanski had to grow up with the legacy of a war that he had never directly experienced. His work speaks to that indirect interaction of memory that I also attempt to speak to in my own art. His works appear distant and often inaccessible. In *Autel Chases* (1988) Boltanski takes images from a 1931 private Jewish high school yearbook and re-frames them within cracker tins illuminating each photograph with a lamp positioned directly in front of the photograph. Here, we are confronted with the fact that we cannot see the photo as well as the namelessness of the individuals featured, denying us the traditional information associated with portraiture. Indeed, Boltanski blocked our view of the face, showing only the halo or remainder of the edges. Creating installations (that are similar to altars in aesthetic and meaning) Boltanski forces the viewers to pay homage to a generation that he had no interaction with—a generation that experienced a sort of venerated suffering he did not (and could not) directly relate to. As viewers, we are confronted with the fact that we cannot know who was photographed and likely never will because of a loss of history. Boltanski displays loss in what might be experienced as a corralled and limited view, and yet, in the lessening of information we are confronted with the intensity of the loss.



*Figure 3: Shimon Attie's Writing on the Wall (1991-2)*

Similarly, Shimon Attie plays with the dynamic tension between presence and

absence. Attie's series of photographs, *The Writing on the Wall*, (1991-2) has pictures of pre-World War II Berlin streets projected onto the same building more than fifty years later. The typical contrast between then and now is intensified by the choice to focus on what had been Berlin's Jewish neighborhoods. In the projected images, store signs appear in both German and Hebrew and people appear on the street walking and window shopping—giving the impression of a vibrant neighborhood life and local culture. In contrast, the buildings of 1993 appear dark, uninviting, and in need of repair. As Kalb writes, “The Writing on the Wall bears witness to the destruction of the war and the years of disregard afterward”.<sup>20</sup> Of course, the reasons for the “destruction” and “disregard” are neither mysterious nor accidental. By reinserting the pre-Holocaust Jewish community back into these streets, Attie marks a point of departure with the vibrancy of the past. A straight line can be drawn from the absence of the Jewish community to the city's current disrepair. Absence and presence are inevitably intertwined. Attie projections were brief events—performances with an audience—and so, very different from public art intended to permanently memorialize. This was perhaps for the best, as Kalb notes, the current residents of the neighborhood were “distraught” by Attie's projections, “They felt it accused them of either profiting from the Nazi murders or of being Jewish—both, it turned out, were regarded as serious charges”.<sup>21</sup> Rather than repairing, Attie's project exposed further conflict – or rather demonstrated that while buildings had changed considerably since the 1930s, particular attitudes had remained the same. The outrage of the neighbors gives voice to what had been only implicit in Attie's work. Like the work

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 148.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 150.

itself, it suggests a short distance from (and connection between) what has occurred and what is continuously occurring. Additionally, Attie “uses projection to reanimate the memory of specific individuals and places that no longer exist”.<sup>22</sup> This re-animation (and interplay between past and present, absence and existence) is what I attempt to ignite in my own work, as will be discussed in more detail in sections below.



*Figure 4: Anselm Kiefer's Heroic Symbols Photographs (1969)*

With that short distance in mind, Anselm Kiefer’s work explores what is possible and even allowable for a German artist after the Holocaust. It could neither be ignored or addressed directly. As Kalb writes, Kiefer’s answer was to cautiously engage, “his belief that to understand history one must take part in it, even if that history is brutal and one’s mean of participating in it are secondhand”.<sup>23</sup> Kiefer’s art of “secondhand” participation was atmospheric, invoking history without displaying it, creating moods and associations to raise questions and provoke. These moods were dedicated to textures of distress—his work often appearing carved out as much as painted. Kiefer’s work tried to document destruction while showing a lot through absence. His first works in which he photographed himself in the setting of famous Nazi locations, with his hand raised in the

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<sup>22</sup> Norman Kleeblatt, “Persistence of Memory”, *Art in America*, 2000 (98).

<sup>23</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 81.

Sieg Heil salute. These spaces that once represented military might and terror were now empty with one young man standing in them. He showed the absence of power while confronting German society with the history of fascism and genocide. These photographs directly represented that dual relationship between absence and presence. Kiefer's work has been accused of glorifying and/or beautifying a time of great terror and he has been criticized for not having been directly confronted with the realities of the holocaust, only the memories and the weight of that history. Although it could conversely be argued this shouldering of guilt only intensified his visual language and made his works more necessary. He desired to develop an alternative narrative and a way to confront the memory of fascism. While I hold my own ambivalence regarding Kiefer's art, I am cognizant of the ways in which my own work can be accused of beautifying a time (in Southern history) that was oppressive, problematic and traumatizing.



*Figure 5: Gerz and Gerz's Monument Against Fascism (1986)*

In 1986 Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz installed their sculpture *The Monument Against Fascism* (1986) in the town of Harburg, Germany. It was a massive steel pillar that stood 39 feet tall and weighed over 7-tons. They had erected the monument, a lead coated surface where visitors of the city were encouraged to etch their names into, as a pledge of unity against the horrors of fascism. Whenever the surface was

covered the pillar was lowered incrementally down, entombing this record of a pledge. The intentions of the Gerz's was to have something that lived with the participants more than as a physical structure. The monument was fully lowered into the ground in 1993: "Upon disappearing into the ground, the Monument Against Fascism began a new life. According to the artists, the monument can be said to 'work' if it successfully sacrifices the permanence of a statue commutes its memorial function to 'where it belongs---that is, within the people for whom it was created'".<sup>24</sup> This work did something with memory that few public war memorials could—it simultaneously lives on as a pledge and remains as a buried relic. Inevitably, (given how human beings so often behave), the monument became scarred with people covering up names, scratching swastikas into the surface, and firing bullets at it. These acts of vandalism, while intensely distressing, also accomplished another task, revealing the complexities of the work—of what it means to engage in an anti-violence pledge and what it means to attempt to simultaneously animate and bury the past. The work itself, now completely enveloped in the earth, is as striking in its absence as it was in its manifestation. Where once stood a spire, now stands a small plaque, representing the buried and yet living history of Fascist societies. The work is successful because it confronts the duality and complexity of memory—that memories so often get submerged in the mind, and yet, (because humans, after all, are revisionists by nature) they continue to evolve, become re-narrated, and transform.

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 145.



Figure 6: Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992)

Fred Wilson is an African-American artist who came to prominence in the mid 1990's. His installation at the Baltimore Contemporary Art and Historical Society Museum, *Mining the Museum* (1992-93), paired different pieces from the collection, curating them and attaining new associations and meanings. These installations ranged from entire rooms to small vitrine displays. His unique eye for curation brought together different parts of American history, playing with the dichotomies inherent in certain pairings. For example, his piece *Metalwork*, is a display with a traditional pewter tea set in the back, and a pair of slave shackles placed directly in front. These two objects are from the same time period, one a beautiful ornate object, the other a crude tool of human enslavement. One object conveys wealth, status, and refined domesticity, while the other serves as a reminder of the reality of the price of that wealth and status. Wilson's arrangements have the ability to give new meanings to objects and give them more purpose than just being aesthetic relics. Wilson's work was "raising the uncomfortable yet accurate historical connections between the violence of slavery and the economic growth of the nation".<sup>25</sup> His ability to create new lives for objects through juxtaposition

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2013), 155.

works much as personal human memories do. While some of our memories are abandoned or forced into storage (particularly those we associate with shame or guilt), they are often resurrected within our psyche via more mundane, or domestic memories. Much like Wilson's work, which confronts us with necessary aspects of our nation's history that some of us do not wish to confront, our own dichotomous memories confront us with personal aspects of self that we are eager to forget.



Figure 7: Dana Schultz's *Open Casket* (2017)

In my discussion of the work of others—and how their works have impacted my own process—I would be remiss to neglect to directly confront issues of race (which I explore more candidly below). This conversation—about the place of the white male in art, how racial memory is to be contended with, etc.—can perhaps be begun by examining the work of Dana Schutz. Schutz, a contemporary Caucasian artist, who has been accused of using African American culture (and trauma) for the advancement of her career and/or to garner artistic attention. In 2017, Schutz exhibited at the Whitney Biennial a painting of Emmett Till entitled *Open Casket*. The oil painting, an abstract representation of the murdered fourteen-year-old black child, shows, in vibrant colors, a beaten and disfigured black face lying in a coffin. Almost instantly following the opening at the Whitney Biennial 2017, public outcry (led by activists, other artists, and the black

community) ensued. Petitions were signed calling for the removal of the work, and a letter by Hannah Black (a black artist and writer) called for the destruction of the work, writing:

“the painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people because it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalized for a long time” (Hannah Black, e-flux conversations.com, 2017).

Schultz herself responded to criticism by contending that her connection to this terrible and iconic image was as a mother—that, as a mother herself, she could recognize the pain felt by the mother of Emmett Till— not realizing that her potential profit at the expense of the Black experience in America could be thought of as profoundly (even traumatically) problematic. Indeed, Schultz’s one dimensional, perhaps even shallow connection with this moment in history—her singular connection to this image as a mother—does little to speak to the immensity or unspeakable suffering of this event as it is located within the civil rights movement. Additionally, an image so disturbing in photographic form, is obscured and even beautified by Schultz’s brush strokes—obfuscating and prettifying an image that has come to represent accountability and culpability. In my own work and process I have spent a considerable amount of time contemplating how/if my art (without intent) beautifies or benefits from issues of race, and if my art creates spectacle around Black bodies. My attempt to explore my own position (in my neighborhood, in the world as a white male, in my work as a white male artist etc.) seeks not to be voyeuristic regarding race and the Black experience, but rather to provide space for conversation and investigation (discussed in greater detail in the section below).

## CHAPTER 4 REMAINS TO BE SEEN

### *And Then Windows*



Figure 8: Nathanael Kooperkamp's *And Then Windows* (2017)

*And Then Windows* (2017) is a two-part installation featuring a handmade book series and a digital print with projection. All the photographs used were taken in various apartment buildings I lived in as a child—apartment buildings differing in location but similar and exacting in their aesthetic reconstruction of the “home” space. This project was created, in part, to explore different representations the past, present and future, and to examine the ways in which singular moments in time interact/are in conversation with one another. The three books, each of them composed of a different material—handmade kozo paper, handmade white cotton paper, and laser-etched acrylic plexi-glass—provide the opportunity for the viewer to read the images (the past) differently and come to varying conclusions about their meaning, concentration, and weightiness. It was my intent that the books vary in their ability to create feelings of comfort and hope in the viewer. The handmade kozo paper is most representative of the past—it’s distressed and deteriorated look replicating that of old family photo albums and newspapers. There is, I hope, a familiarity and nostalgia in the aesthetic of the kozo paper, triggering feelings of melancholy but also wellbeing. The handmade white cotton paper has a cleaner aesthetic.

I viewed the cotton paper book as a contemporary or “present” re-telling of old family stories and places. While there is little nostalgia felt when examining and holding the cotton paper, there is a clarity and simplicity in it that indicates some safety. Conversely, the plexi-glass book provides little coziness. It was my intention that the viewer/ “reader” experience some discomfort when examining this book—some feelings of distance and remoteness which I connect with contemplating the future. There is a phrase that continuously runs through my mind when I am creating or considering the intent of my work. This phrase is “future memory”. It is something that cannot exist, nor something that I can realistically create. However, this book was the closest attempt I have made to represent our memory in the future—vague, fogged, and disconnected as it may be.

The wall piece—white silkscreen on handmade yellow paper with digital print on top-- compressed all of the individual pages of the book onto one print, attempting to create a window or a screen on which the content of the book might be projected onto. Various images appear to be waiting as they anticipate being illuminated sequentially and then fade into the background. In this piece, all the various memories and moments encapsulated into the books are no longer static as they become simultaneous and synchronized. While there is a permanence in the books, there is variability and intermittence in the wall piece. This piece confronts the supposed eternal quality and fixed nature of memory in a way that the books do not. Indeed, it informs the books of their own limitations—their inability to fully represent the complexity and elasticity of memory. Together, the book series and digital projection piece present and provoke the contradictory essence of memory.

Lastly, it is important for the viewer to recognize that *And Then Windows* is about

upset and, ultimately, about familial trauma. This work features members of my immediate family that I no longer have a relationship with. The distorted (almost scarred) presentation of the images is representative of my own struggle to attend to or privilege memories that trigger feelings of loss and injury. In examining Boltanski's work (in which he distorts or removes the faces of the absent or lost individuals), I discovered a way to finally re-cover and re-work images and memories now burdened by bereavement. Finding that, in scarring the images and laying them thickly on top of each other, I could reframe a memory in artistic form. While the loss is still present, the arrangement is new, and in the newness, I find, there is hope—hope for a new narrative and a new, governing image. This piece is not entirely a rejection of family history but it is a revision—an amendment to the myth that, in the embracing of absence, makes space for revival.

## *Remains to be Seen*



Figure 9: Nathanael Kooperkamp's *Remains to be Seen* (2017)

*Remains to be Seen* (2017), is comprised of a white screen print on grey cotton paper with digital print and projection. In this work, still images (photographs from a 1990's protest in Harlem New York) are silk screened and digitally printed on handmade paper. Overlaying and intermingling with these images of 90's New York City, is family footage from 1950's, rural Kentucky. This piece attempts not only to force interaction between two very different periods/locations in history, but seeks to represent how familial memories are carried with us through the generations. Indeed, this work endeavors to confront the burden of histories that threaten us (our idea of ourselves, our interactions with our communities, our dedication to others) by exposing our own privilege and complicity.

In order for the viewer to understand how these different family histories and moments are in dialogue with one another (and what that dialogue means), it is perhaps necessary to give some ancestral and personal back-story. The church featured in the photographs is St. Mary's Episcopal church on 126<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, New York—a modest brick church nestled between two housing projects. It has been said of St. Mary's

that it is a “small church that casts a long shadow”—a dictum that connotes St. Mary’s involvement in anti-oppression movements and community outreach. The church represents an interesting divide between the Upper West Side of Manhattan and Harlem, as it sits on the edge of both neighborhoods. While its congregation is primarily comprised of African-Americans and Latinx, its location has attracted some middle class white folk as well. My own family’s history with the church is complex and dates back over six decades. My mother (a fourth generation New Yorker), attended St. Mary’s as a child. When my father, who two decades later was completing his doctorate at Union Theological Seminary, was practicing as a deacon, he (and our family) returned to St. Mary’s. My father’s work as deacon, and later as priest, was not only centered around his service to God, but his service to the community—specifically, his dedication to activism and social justice. Representing a common event in my childhood (the protest), these particular black and white photographs featured in *Remains to be Seen* are from a housing discrimination and anti-drug protest on May 21st, 1990.

Existing on the other side of this 1990’s protest imagery, is footage taken by a paternal relative living in 1950’s rural Kentucky. My relatives in Kentucky existed within a conservative, Southern culture and adhered to a conservative, Southern ideology. While that family history is murkier and less available to me than my parents and my own, I do know that my ancestral Kentucky history (white, privileged, Southern, and conservative) is fraught and troubled by its complicity in an oppressive and discriminatory system. While I feel no personal allegiance to, or nuanced knowledge of, that particular time, culture, memory, or belief-system, it is impossible and naïve to believe that I can reject it. Rather, it seems to me, it must be confronted in order to be repaired. Much like Fred

Wilson, I wanted to place aspects of our countries histories adjacent to one another to speak to a frayed historical narrative. Instead of using objects, I chose to use personal/familial images and memories to tackle both the inheritance of guilt and the attempted repentance and reparation.

### *Levels of Resolution*



*Figure 10: Nathanael Kooperkamp's Levels of Resolution (2018)*

*Levels of Resolution* (2018) is a white screen print and digital print on large, handmade yellow cotton paper and mulberry paper. In this piece, each image (footage, again, taken from familial, 1950's Kentucky) moves across the screen, either walking away from or moving closer to the viewer. In this work, I wanted to invoke memories of greetings and partings—of moments in which we see people for the first or last time. The use of square pixels on top of a white halftone dot pattern seeks to blur or obscure, while the video projection provides guidance and clarity to the viewer. It is my view that transitional moments (especially memories of those moments) function similarly—that there are instances of precision within an otherwise murky and indistinct memory. It is this simultaneous exactness and dimness in transitional memory that I wanted to explore

in this piece—first or final moments that possess, within an otherwise convoluted and unclear visual memory, a moment of supreme intelligibility and unambiguousness.

Additionally, in this piece I wanted to secure and investigate the *movement* of memory and of greetings and partings. Here, I realized, static images would not suffice. If I were to truly explore and meaningfully represent meetings and departures, the images would need to move and to interact. In seeking to explore absence and presence, I was inspired by Attie’s work—his active points of departure and his reanimation of memory. However, as stated above, the use of static images, I believed, would not work to fully reanimate or consider the moments or memories in which we salute or bid goodbye to those we care for. By animating the objects through movement, and by selecting footage that utilizes nostalgia—a child holding her parent’s hand as she crosses the street, two friends walking in a pair, an old man in a Stetson hat—I sought to invoke the overwhelm experienced by children when they unite or separate from others. Indeed, it occurs to me as I write this, that this piece is as much about separation—permanent separation and estrangement—as it is about a brief parting. In making this piece I did not imagine the individuals in the images to necessarily ever reunite. Rather, I imagine, there is a permanence in the farewell that is irrevocable.

***Paper Folding Chairs/ Folding Chairs Print Series***



*Figure 11: Nathanael Kooperkamp's Paper Folding Chairs/Folding Chairs Print Series (2018)*

*Paper Folding Chairs* (2018) are white cotton impressions of metal folding chairs. To create this piece, I first cut a mold on the CNC router. I then filled this mold with small sheets of white cotton pulp, let the pulp dry, and removed the cast object. I made six chairs in total. To construct the print series, I took these six chairs and placed them in forgotten spaces throughout the school—in basements, hallways, bottoms of staircases, etc. The piece attempts, again, to confront absence and presence, but this time to explore the significance of abandoned objects—of objects that have specific function but are otherwise left in corners, in church basements etc. This project was inspired by my childhood as a “pastor kid,” forever stacking and re-stacking folding chairs before and after church-related events, community happenings, and meetings. The chairs themselves represent the absence and presence of people and how a person might momentarily activate an object. These are objects that allow community and gatherings to happen, but are often regarded as non-essential and purely utilitarian. However, I realized, as an adult, that my memories of events and gatherings were unclear and fleeting, while my memories of stacking folding chairs remain, somehow, intact. Because of this, I wanted to give meaning to these objects, not moments of activation, but, rather, when they are sitting, *inactive*. Similar to Whiteread’s library holocaust memorial, I sought to reconstruct functional objects that can be (as art objects) viewed but not used, elevating their utilitarian expediency to fine art.

In discussing the evolution of this piece, it is important to consider my process—both the successful and unproductive choices. Even in my process and selection of material, I wanted to represent the mindless stacking of folding chairs. In making the pulp and placing the cotton pulp again and again into the same mold, I sought to signify the

monotony of cleaning up chairs after a church event—of folding them up, removing them from the communal space, and placing them (in rows) in the undercroft. I wanted my relationship with the material to be similar to my relationship with the objects in life. While I believe that I was successful in doing so, my initial attempts at display were less effective. Originally, I stacked the paper chairs in arching, falling helixes, much like a spiral staircase. However, while the effect was “pretty,” it spoke poorly to the humbleness of the object or to my conceptual intent—the recognition of the forgotten object and/or space. After conversations with my committee, I saw that these were not objects to be beautified, rather they needed to remain useless and ignored. These conversations led me to create the series of prints—placing and photographing the casts in various disremembered locations around the studio building. In doing this, the chairs began to take on the look of gravestones or marker of lost loved ones—ghosts of objects and people, traces of memory.

### *Nothing But Water*



*Figure 12: Nathanael Kooperkamp's Nothing But Water (2018)*

*Nothing But Water* (2018), the largest project in the collection, provides the least amount of information on the print itself. It is constructed with handmade, cotton paper,

over which blue pulp was placed strategically to look like water. The blue markings, meant to signify swimming pools, remain constant and unchanging, while projected video footage of people in bathing suits jump into and swim through the water. This piece, like *Folding Chairs*, addresses and investigates the objects that provide the means to community, and plays with ideas of absence, presence, animation, activation, and abandonment. However, this work takes this investigation a step further by including the presence of water—an uncontrollable, moving, ever-changing substance that defies complete containment or designation. I would argue that the shifting and unstable quality of water is similar to the process of memory—like memory, it is impossible for water to be static or fixed. Because water in this work is within a communal context (the man-made swimming pool), it was my intention that the water represents collective memory. Pools, like other communal spaces, provide the opportunity for shared memory and memory processes within a group or culture—memories that become part of the cultural dialogue and storehouse of recollection.

This piece also attempts to address and represent segregation in the South, as well as my own, very different experience in swimming pools. As a young boy growing up in Harlem, my mother signed me up for a swim team. Our swim team, practicing out of Riverbank State Park (a park that exists in Harlem as reparations for an incorrectly built sewage treatment plant), was often discussed as the most diverse co-ed swim team in New York City. I shared the pool with my friends and peers, Caucasian, Latinx, Hispanic, African-American, and Asian children. For me, the pool was a place that offered a communal space for diverse individuals, with very different perspectives, privileges, and intersecting identities to interact and make meaning together. Conversely,

at the time that this family footage was gathered in Kentucky, swimming pools remained segregated spaces. I am very cognizant of the fact that this footage shows only white bodies interacting with one another, and with the water itself. I am also very cognizant of who is excluded, and who is absent. This footage not only forces me to confront my own family history (and the legacy of segregation that I myself am complicit in), but challenges my idea of/hope for a “universalized” space that is available to everyone. Indeed, ideas of collective memory becomes complicated when you begin to examine who is included (and who is excluded) from this supposed “collective”. Lastly, I believe it is important to address some of my discomfort with this piece—namely the same criticism lobbed (perhaps rightly) at Kiefer, who has been accused of beautifying a time of unrest. While it was not my intent to do so, I feel I must offer up for criticism and contemplation the possibility that I too might have not directly confront the realities and horrors of segregation. Indeed, perhaps the beauty in the piece somehow, against my best intention, glorifies something that is ugly, oppressive and marginalizing.

### ***Chasing Butterflies***

*Chasing Butterflies* (2018), the final piece I completed for the collection, is different dimensionally than the other works. Again, in this piece, I used a mold to create a sort of topographic map made of hardened paper pulp over which I projected a video of young girls chasing butterflies (again using all family footage). This piece really was about childhood memories—about an inaccessible innocence that memories from childhood can embody. I attempted to represent this through the pieces freedom—it is the only piece that is not restricted by digital print or other markings. Additionally, the constant motion of the piece makes the moving projections difficult to identify until the

final moment. Much like chasing butterflies, or attempting to re-create a childhood feeling, the moment you identify an image within the piece, it moves away or fades out. Like Gertz and Gertz's *Monument Against Facism*, I wanted the digital-file part of the piece to be, in some ways, meaningless. Instead, I wanted the reminder of the object to function as prominently as the object itself, so that, if I were to remove the moving imagery, that the cast—ghostly, white, and husk-like—would serve as its own representation of absence and loss.

## CHAPTER 5 IN CONCLUSION

*There are no stars tonight But those of memory. Yet how much room for memory there is In the loose girdle of soft rain.*<sup>26</sup>

- Hart Crane

There is so much room for memory, as Crane reminds us. That “room” allows for multiplicities of interpretations, presentations, connections or disruptions between then and now. My work engages with the vast “room for memory” by investigating the complex narratives we tell ourselves and are told about our place in the world. Just as the past is both present and absent, these narratives are both true and untrue. My hope is that my work challenges the viewer to consider further the complexity of these unfinished stories.

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<sup>26</sup> Hart Crane, *The Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, (NYC: Liveright, 2000).

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**ARTIST IN THE STUDIO**



*Figure 13: Artist in the Studio (2018)*