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**Rawlings, J.**

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# **DIS-LOCATIONS AND BROKEN NARRATIVES**

articulating liminal and interstitial experiences  
through a series of moving image and mixed media  
installations

**JINI RAWLINGS**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2018





Detail. *Illegitimate Daughter*, etched glass, mirror, light box, (2001). Jini Rawlings.



## ABSTRACT

This practice led research explores three video and mixed media artworks created and exhibited between 2006-17. *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home*, (2006) *WAVE/ING*, (2011/12) and *Dear Child*, (2016/7) are part of a substantive body of artwork which has been produced since the late discovery of my adoption in 1991. This event and its effect changed both the content and shape of my work reflecting my personal response to the experience of otherness and dis-location identified as, “The feeling of being between places and people, the sense of transience, the experience of seeing the world and one’s place in it from different perspectives.”<sup>1</sup> This led to the creation of multi-layered artworks inspired by narratives of migration and exile and the the development of various imagistic and material strategies which reflect liminality. These include acausal<sup>2</sup>, non-linear editing and asynchronous multi channel projections and layers of glass and silk within expanded installations. The three main sections of this commentary relate to different elements of the research journey. They cover responses to historic events and narratives, the distinctive use of original archives, the function of physical journeys in the development and making of artworks and the use of interpretive dance to create an embodied response to loss. I would argue that my situated and exploratory practice, applied throughout the development and production process was effective in transforming the effects of dissociation and dissonance<sup>3</sup> into innovative imagistic outcomes. This is situated in relation to other artists working with trauma and memory and to key ideas around post adoptive psychology with reference to other feminist theorists. This body of work represents an effective and fluid response to the dis-locations of late discovery which is not principally therapeutic or sociological in intent.

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<sup>1</sup> David Howe in *International Advances in Adoption Research for Practice*, eds. Gretchen Miller Wrobel and Elsbeth Neil (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009),14.

<sup>2</sup> Acausality as a methodology is explored in Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> The experience of inbetweenness, otherness and the distantiation felt in adoption was identified by Erik Erikson, quoted in *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self*, eds. David Brodzinsky, Marshall Shechter and Robin Henig (New York: Bantam Dell Pub. Group, 1992). Erikson’s 7 stage life cycle is used as a basis for their approach.

## CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION: DIS-LOCATIONS AND BROKEN NARRATIVES.</b>	1
<b>CHAPTER 1: VESSELS AND CONTAINERS.</b>	12
<i>Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home.</i>	13
In the National Maritime Museum.	17
<i>Hrimceald Sae.</i>	18
<i>Sent to Sea.</i>	20
Approaches to the Archive.	23
Artists and Museum Archives.	26
Using Original Archives in the National Maritime Museum.	28
Migrants, Mariners and the Lost Child.	32
<i>Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home: Conclusion.</i>	34
<b>CHAPTER 2: THE LITTORAL AS A LIMINAL SPACE.</b>	36
<i>WAVE/ING: Installations; Bound for Iceland;</i>	
<i>North of the Forest-North of the Corn; The Sublime;</i>	
<i>Waving; Alone in Iceland/a Treacherous Coast; Refuge.</i>	
Iceland.	37
<i>WAVE/ING.</i>	38
Iceland: Background Texts/stories: Alfred Craig;	
the log book (1941).	40
Elizabeth Jane Oswald; <i>By Fell and Fjord;</i>	
<i>or, Scenes and Studies in Iceland (1882).</i>	42
Different Perspectives/Voices/Narratives.	44
Images of Women.	46
Shetland: <i>Refuge.</i>	47
Controlled Chance.	48
The Journeys.	49
Post Production: an Improvisatory Approach.	52
Asynchronicity and Acausality.	53
Materiality/ Black Mirrors/ Silk/Aluminised Glass.	56
Site Specificity and Installation in the Museum.	60
<i>WAVE/ING: Conclusion.</i>	62
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE CIRCLE AND THE VOID: DEAR CHILD.</b>	63
Pre-amble: Louise Bourgeois.	65
The Matrixial.	67
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; One of the Mothers I Never Had.	69
The Familial Letter.	70
Background Research and Filming.	76
Un Domaine a Soi/ a Place of her own	77
The (M)other: <i>The Exile: The Performer.</i>	79
The use of Interpretive Dance	81
The Circle.	85
The Void.	87

Silk and Veils.	89
The Installation.	91
<i>Dear Child</i> : Conclusion.	92
<b>CONCLUSION.</b>	94
<b>ADDENDUM, REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	96
Artists/Artworks	97
Archives	100
Bibliography	102

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

All photographs by Jini Rawlings apart from; 1.5, 1.11, 2.8, 2.16, 3.13.

### INTRODUCTION: DIS-LOCATIONS AND BROKEN NARRATIVES

Handwritten personal note, 1992. Rediscovered, 2017. 4

### CHAPTER 1: VESSELS AND CONTAINERS

1.1:	<i>Hrimceald Sae</i> , installation, National Maritime Museum, 2006.	12
1.2:	On Board the <i>Cast Prestige</i> , mid Atlantic, 2005.	13
1.3:	Dr. Mary Majka, still from video, 2005.	14
1.4:	<i>Cast Prestige</i> en route from Liverpool to Montreal, June 2005.	16
1.5:	<i>SS Hibernian</i> , Allen Line, 1869, National Maritime Museum Archives.	17
1.6:	2 screen presentation <i>Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home</i> , V&A, Museum of Childhood, 2016.	18
1.7:	Detail, North Atlantic Chart, National Maritime Museum Archives.	19
1.8:	Detail, plan <i>SS Nova Scotian</i> , National Maritime Museum Archives.	20
1.9:	2 screen presentation, <i>Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home</i> , V&A, Museum of Childhood, 2016.	21
1.10:	Detail, maquette, <i>Sent to Sea</i> .	23
1.11:	Birth family photograph at Niagara Falls, gifted by John MacRobert. McMasterville, Quebec, Canada, 2002.	25
1.12:	Detail, Marine Society records, National Maritime Museum Archives.	28
1.13:	Detail, <i>Sent to Sea</i> , installation, National Maritime Museum, 2006.	30
1.14:	Detail, Marine Society Records, National Maritime Museum Archives.	31
1.15:	Detail, Marine Society Records, National Maritime Museum Archives.	32
1.16:	2 Screen presentation, <i>Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home</i> , V&A, Museum of Childhood, 2016.	33
1.17:	Approaching the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, June, 2005.	34
1.18:	Grave marker, St. Johns, Newfoundland. 2005.	35

### CHAPTER 2: THE LITTORAL AS A LIMINAL SPACE

2.1:	<i>North of the Forest; North of the Corn</i> , installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.	36
2.2:	Still, <i>Bound for Iceland</i> .	37
2.3:	Still, <i>Bound for Iceland</i> .	40
2.4:	Still, <i>The Sublime</i> .	42
2.5:	Women of Eskifjord c. 1900. Reference for <i>North of the Forest, North of the Corn</i> .	44

2.6:	<i>Bound for Iceland</i> , installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.	46
2.7:	<i>North of the Forest; North of the Corn</i> , installation, Aberdeen Maritime, 2012.	47
2.8:	<i>Refuge</i> , exhibited, Exploding Cinema 2012. Photograph, Tommaso Stingo.	48
2.9:	Alone in Iceland.	51
2.10:	<i>Bound for Iceland</i> , installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.	52
2.11:	2 screen still, <i>Bound for Iceland</i> .	55
2.12:	<i>Waving</i> , silk hangings, installation, London Gallery West, 2011/12.	57
2.13:	<i>Waving</i> , silk hangings, Installation, London Gallery West, 2011/12.	58
2.14:	<i>Refuge</i> , installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.	59
2.15:	<i>Bound for Iceland</i> , installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.	60
2.16:	Alfred Craig on right, Craig family Archive.	62

### CHAPTER 3: THE CIRCLE AND THE VOID

3.1:	Exhibition invite, <i>Dear Child</i> .	63
3.2:	Detail, letter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1713. Harrowby Manuscripts, National Archives.	64
3.3:	<i>I Am Afraid</i> , Louise Bourgeois, 2005, exhibited, Artist Rooms, Tate Gallery, 2016.	66
3.4:	<i>Dear Child</i> , l-r ( <i>M</i> )other, <i>Exile</i> , <i>Performer</i> , Installation, London Gallery West, 2017.	69
3.5:	Detail, letter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1713. Harrowby Manuscripts, National Archives.	72
3.6:	Trial projection, <i>Dear Child</i> .	74
3.7:	Detail, letter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1746-56, Harrowby Manuscripts, National Archives.	75
3.8:	Trial visual, Pierrepont Memorial Tomb, Borbach Chantry, West Dean. Ancestral home of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.	76
3.9:	Sketch of Garden in Gottolengo, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1746, Harrowby Manuscripts, National Archives.	78
3.10:	<i>Dear Child</i> , installation London Gallery West, 2017.	79
3.11:	<i>Dear Child</i> , Installation London Gallery West, 2017.	80
3.12:	Hannah and Reuben, 2015.	82
3.13:	Charles Jervas, <i>Lady Mary Wortley Montagu</i> , 1715. (Chawton House Library)	83
3.14:	Details, <i>Dear Child</i> , installation, London Gallery West, 2017.	84
3.15:	Detail, the <i>Performer</i> , studio shoot, 2015.	85
3.16:	Detail, <i>The Exile</i> , studio shoot, <i>Dear Child</i> .	87
3.17:	Mock-up of silk panels for installation, 2016.	88
3.19:	<i>Dear Child</i> , Installation set up.	89
3.20:	<i>Dear Child</i> , Installation, London Gallery West, 2017.	90

3.21:	<i>Dear Child</i> , trial Installation.	92
3.22:	<i>She is called a blood mother</i> , trial projection for <i>Dear Child</i> .	93
3.22:	Detail, letter Lady Wortley Montagu, 1746-56, Harrowby Manuscripts, National Archives.	95

**ENDPAPER**

*Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home*, Daily Record of journey. In the Annapolis Valley, location of Hillfoot Farm where Annie Delaney disappeared. Annapolis Nova Scotia, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2005.

As a journal strategy for *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home* I marked each day with a postcard image using an 'evocative object' to map the passage of time and space in relation to historic and contemporary journeys. Wild Lupins are a feature of the Annapolis Valley.

## SUPPORTING MATERIAL (IN FOLDERS ON USB)

### A *DEAR CHILD*

1. *Dear Child*, exhibition Record, 2017.
2. *Dear Child*, exhibition invite cover.

### B *WAVE/ING*

1. *WAVE/ING*, exhibition record, London Gallery West, 2012.
2. *Bound for Iceland*, excerpt.
3. *North of the Forest: North of the Corn*, excerpt.
4. *The Sublime*, excerpt.
5. Additional stills from exhibitions.

### C *MARINERS AND MIGRANTS: IN SEARCH OF HOME*

1. Exhibition introduction, Lisa Lefeuve, curator of New Visions, National Maritime Museum 2006.
2. *Hrimceald Sae*, exhibition record, National Maritime Museum, 2006.
3. *Sent to Sea*, exhibition record, National Maritime Museum, 2006.
4. *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home*, excerpt, 2 screen record, *Hrimceald Sae, Sent to Sea*, V&A, Museum of Childhood presentation, 2016.
5. *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home*, excerpt, 2 screen record, V&A, Museum of Childhood presentation, 2016.

### D OTHER RELATED MATERIAL

1. *Amy, Emma, Emily and the Four Times of Day ...* - Vimeo Player Uppark House, *Unravelling the National Trust*, 2015.  
- Stills from installation and exhibition record at Uppark House.
2. *CUSP*, installation at St Mary's in the Castle, 2013.  
<https://vimeo.com/101870165>.  
- Stills from exhibition *Ici et La*, 2013.
3. *Sea/Landscapes of Memory*, excerpt solo exhibition, Duff House, National Gallery of Scotland, 2009.
4. *As the Crow Flies*, exhibition record, London Gallery West, 2009.
5. *The Ocean Between*, exhibition record, in *The Voyage Out*, Dock Museum Barrow in Furness, 2003.
6. *The looking Bowl from Kitchie Deems to NAAFI girls: 100 Years of Illegitimacy*, exhibition record, Brighton Festival, 2003.
7. *Illegitimate Daughter*, details, etched Glass Sculpture, exhibited first, *Absence and Presence*, travelling exhibition, 2003.
8. *She Slipped Like Water Through My Hands*, Details, etched glass sculpture exhibited first as part of *Screen Memories* multi-part installation, Phoenix Gallery, Brighton, 1999.

## INTRODUCTION: DIS-LOCATIONS AND BROKEN NARRATIVES

This commentary focusses on selected video and mixed media installations, part of a substantive body of work made over the last ten years. The three main chapters, Vessels and Containers; The Littoral as a Liminal Space and the Circle and the Void relate to different elements of the research journey. They explore the distinctive practices that were developed in response to personal experience of late discovered adoption and historic narratives of exile and otherness. This includes the use of original archives<sup>4</sup> and physical and filmic journeys undertaken during the development and making of the artworks. They cover the use of glass and silk to reflect liminality and explore how interpretive dance creates an embodied response to loss. This is situated in relation to other artists working with trauma and memory and to key ideas around post-adoptive psychology with reference to other feminist theories.

For this commentary I have revisited a site of personal trauma in order to examine a series of artworks that are inscribed with its traces and illustrate its transformative potential. It demonstrates how my late discovery of adoption influenced both content and methodological approaches. How the gaps and potentialities in original archives were used to suggest the multivalent effect of dis-locations and broken narratives and filmic journeys retracing migration, exploration, occupation or rescue changed both personal understanding and created affective and effective installations. My prior knowledge and understanding of video and film processes was used to develop a distinct approach to acausal,<sup>5</sup> non-linear editing and asynchronous multi channel projections.

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<sup>4</sup> Identified by Lisa Le Feuvre in her introduction to my installation at the National Maritime Museum. (See accompanying record of work.)

<sup>5</sup> Acausality is explored further in Chapter 2, WAVE/ING in relation to Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) Carl Jung *Synchronicity, an Acausal Connecting Principle* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) and John Cage, *Silence, Lectures and Writing, Indeterminacy* (London: Marion Boyars, 1980).

In 1991 I discovered by chance that I had been adopted at the age of 3 months. I later found out that I had been told when my father died when I was nine that he was not my father. This is erased from my memory<sup>6</sup> but explained my experiences of dissociation<sup>7</sup> and dissonance,<sup>8</sup> originally identified by Pierre Janet as a symptom of a hysteric personality and in later theories of post-traumatic stress disorder as a psychological defence against the effects of overwhelming events. Kim Coull, an Australian writer, artist, academic and late discovered adoptee recognises the state of dissociation as,

... an all pervading sense of unreality experienced as dissociation (the experience of depersonalisation-where the self feels unreal –and derealisation –where the world feels unreal) disembodiment and existential elision –all characteristic of PTSD.<sup>9</sup>

This commentary is not an attempt to examine trauma or the traumatic event itself nor is the artwork primarily a therapeutic practice to mitigate its effect but demonstrates how the experience was an impetus to develop new ways of creating artwork.

My own early losses had a profound effect, “the yearning for the lost object is both more intense and more prolonged than is generally supposed”<sup>10</sup> during early

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<sup>6</sup> The resultant screen memory inspired an earlier artwork, *Screen Memory*, 1998. Screen Memory was originally Identified by Sigmund Freud in 1899, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 3, ed. James Strachey et al (London : The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-74), 301-322.

<sup>7</sup> Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart, *The Intrusive Past: the Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma*, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press 1995), 158-179, and Lawrence Kirmayer, *Landscapes of Memory*, in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, eds. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (NY, London: Routledge 1996), 173-198.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957) explains the effect which occurs when there is an attempt to psychologically integrate two opposing and contradictory facts.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Coull, *Secret Fatalities and Liminalities: Translating the Pre-Verbal Trauma and Cellular Memory of Late Discovery Adoptee Illegitimacy*. (M/C Journal, [S.I.], v. 17, n. 5, oct. 2014. ISSN 14412616. Available at: <<http://journal.mediaculture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/892>>.

<sup>10</sup> John Bowlby, *Pathological Mourning and Childhood Mourning* (Journal of the

childhood, which can have a great impact in later life. The revisiting of these events and experiences and their re-evaluation in relation to their inscription in my artworks has enabled me to consider how these losses were creatively transformed.<sup>11</sup> As Gregory Rochlin says, “Where we had losses, we may find an impetus to creativity.”<sup>12</sup> He suggests that the early experiences of object loss and the dread of abandonment are potentially, ‘catalysts of change’, which “play a critical role in psychic development, and especially in that most exalted of human qualities, creativity.”<sup>13</sup>

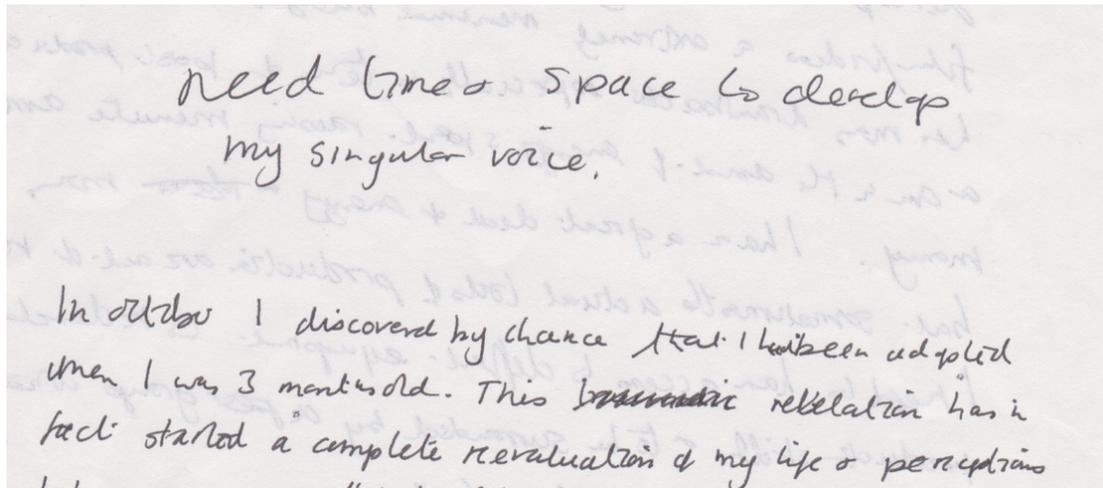
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American Psychoanalytic Association, Volume: 11 issue: 3, Issue published: July 1, 1963), 522.

<sup>11</sup> It is understood that all artworks may have therapeutic properties both for artists and spectators and many artists use their work to explore psychic pain and loss. *I am Afraid*, created by Louise Bourgeois in 2005, briefly explored in Chapter 3, *Do Not Abandon Me*, 2009-10, a collaboration between Louise Bourgeois and Tracy Emin, the conceptual/autobiographical work of Sophie Calle, “*pas pu saisir la mort*” (“Impossible to Catch Death”), 2007 and Chantal Akerman’s *No Home Movie*, 2015 are some of many personally affecting works which explore this terrain. However while the installations considered in this commentary are inflected by my personal post-adoptive experiences and reverberate with its aftereffects they are not directly autobiographical and do not offer an explicit causal examination of psychic events. They are also distinct from work focussing specifically on the post-adoptive experience such as the paintings of Kim Coull (referenced in the introduction) and from work created primarily to address/resolve specific psychological problems as a form of Art Therapy. Chiharu Shiota frames this in a different way, “I make my art not as a kind of therapy for internal anxiety, since in my case the fear is necessary to actually make art”, in *Chiharu Shiota*, ed. Caroline Stummel (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, Haunch of Venison II, 2012). 215. The idea that all art is therapeutic is popularised by Alain de Botton and John Armstrong in *Art as Therapy* (London, New York: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Gregory Rochlin, *Griefs and Discontents; the Forces of Change* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), vii.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 121.



Handwritten personal note 1992, rediscovered 2017.<sup>14</sup>

The chance discovery of my adoption also led to a radical change in my art practice from single screen issue-based video and photography to gallery based multi-part video and mixed media installations.

Griselda Pollock has undertaken an in depth examination of the work of artists responding to various aspects of trauma<sup>15</sup> and reflects both on the work and aesthetic transformation, the construction of the self and the singular voice.

Being an artist/woman constructing herself, as a person is not a matter of image making, it is not the mirror of self-portraiture. It concerns above all being able to speak in one's own voice.<sup>16</sup>

This necessity to speak in my own voice has affected all the artwork produced post discovery and while initial work was based on a direct response to these intimate

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<sup>14</sup> "Need time and space to develop my singular voice.

In October I discovered by chance that I had been adopted when I was 3 months old. This traumatic revelation has in fact started a complete reevaluation of my life and perceptions."

<sup>15</sup> Griselda Pollock, *After-affects | After-images, Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

events<sup>17</sup> in later works this search for an authentic voice was relocated and translated through the use of historical archives and journeys.<sup>18</sup>

I developed specific artistic strategies to translate the liminal state and experience of dissociation, and the experiences of others inhabiting in-between states.<sup>19</sup> The interstitial and fluid space between identities is echoed in my artworks through the use of multiple non-linear video projections, glass and silk, archival texts etched onto glass, reflected and refracted in mirrors and water, printed on layers of silk or overlaid in videos.

While referencing their authentic provenance this questions their veracity as historic records. This reflects my experiences in the archives during my original search for birth family when things were not what they always appeared. I explored this in my earlier work with layered glass<sup>20</sup> and is related visually to the work of other artists and filmmakers using personal text including Mona Hatoum<sup>21</sup> who explored her exile and longing through handwritten letters and veiled images of her mother. This was a particularly emotive piece, showing the symbiotic closeness of mother and daughter while revealing absence and loss.<sup>22</sup>

The three moving image and mixed media installations chosen for this commentary, *Mariners and Migrants: In Search of Home*, *WAVE/ING* and *Dear Child* were based on a subjective response to different historical 'broken' narratives of migration, exile and outsiderdom. Betty Jean Lifton explores the complex meanings of broken narratives<sup>23</sup> within the adoption triangle of the adoptee, adopter and birth parents

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<sup>17</sup> The artwork, *Screen Memories*, included my first etched glass and mirror sculpture, *She Slipped Like Water Through My Hands*, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> While it is important to recognise polyvocality and the exploration of different 'voices' or positions taken by artists in their work, for the late-discovered adoptee the sudden discovery of a hidden identity necessitates the re-evaluation of previous life experiences and the lifelong search for authentic voice(s) in both work and life.

<sup>19</sup> My use of glass and mirrors stems from my early experience of trauma and dissociation when my reflection disappeared in the mirror.

<sup>20</sup> *She Slipped Like Water Through My Hands* (1998/9) *Illegitimate Daughter* '(2000).

<sup>21</sup> Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988) [www.vdb.org/titles/measures-distance](http://www.vdb.org/titles/measures-distance).

<sup>22</sup> These maternal resonances are explored in chapter 4, *The Circle and the Void*.

<sup>23</sup> Betty Jean Lifton, *The Journey of the Adopted Self: A Search for Wholeness* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 36-45.

who all have a particular response to fracturing of identity, culture and histories. This seems an appropriate term which also covers the psychic and physical fracturing experienced by the migrant or cultural other.

In her consideration of exile and connection<sup>24</sup> Pollock also reflects on the *encounter* with “artworking in which art may function as a site of transformation that lies between the making, the moment of meeting and the reflections to which this forming gives rise in the participating viewer.”<sup>25</sup> While this relates to work whose making becomes part of the final piece the concept of the encounter is central to the creation and interpretation of my work where spaces constructed through layering, multiple projections and looped audio invite the spectator to create their own conceptual and physical journey in relation to the piece. The concept of postmemory<sup>26</sup> developed by Marianne Hirsch was important during the early stages of post-adoption discovery when the past began to make a different sense. While postmemory was initially used to reflect on trans-generational transmission of memories of the Holocaust and response to familial rupture, it also relates to the fractured narrative of the adoptee. The discovery of previously unknown familial history had a profound impact on my psychological, physical and emotional life. It provided a rationale for the sense of displacement with my adoptive family without giving any new fixed sense of identity. This in-between status underlies my intention to show that history and memories can be malleable.

One of the key elements of Hirsch’s concept is the photographic index locating the past in specific cultural and generational space accessed by the child in an intimate if imaginary and dislocated way,

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<sup>24</sup> *Being and Language, Maria Maria Maiolino’s gestures of Exile and Connection in Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*,131.

<sup>25</sup> Pollock, *After-affects/ After-images*,141.

<sup>26</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA :Harvard University Press,1997) also *The Familial Gaze*, ed. Marianne Hirsch (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1999).

Postmemory is mediated by the photographic index of another time, place, world and generation; it is a space in the child-subject that links it with a world and events it personally never knew but with which it acquires a dislocated, imaginary intimacy.<sup>27</sup>

Although she identifies photography as the medium for the transmission of these experiences I would extend this to include other (archival) material and focus on the 'imaginary intimacy' acquired. I have a labile relationship to birth family history and in other artworks have used reclaimed photographs or ancestral records to reflect semi-fictional fractured narratives. These are not an attempt to recreate an 'authentic' past but question the veracity of the record.<sup>28</sup> In all these pieces and the artworks considered here there is a disjunction, through anachronism or a contemporary landscape not identical to the past, which prevent identification with specific (hi)stories or events .

In the early stages of my post discovery in order to make sense of my experience I read many key texts on the psychology of adoption<sup>29</sup>, the early work of Sants on genealogical bewilderment,<sup>30</sup> on trauma by Kirmayer<sup>31</sup> and Caruth and Robert Jay

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<sup>27</sup> Marianne Hirsch, (2002) quoted in *Impure Cinema: Intermedial and Intercultural Approaches to Film*, Tauris World Cinema Series, eds. Lucia Nagib and Anne Jerslev (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 239.

<sup>28</sup> My installations, *Kitchie Deems to NAAFI girls 100 years of Illegitimacy*, 2001, *Illegitimate Daughter*, 2003, *The Ocean Between*, 2003, *Tri-angulation*, 2008, *As the Crow Flies*, 2008, *Longmuir/Laighmuir*, 2009. use personal or familial narratives/locations.

<sup>29</sup> David Brodzinsky, Marshall Shechter and Robert Henig, *Being Adopted The Lifelong Search for Self* (New York: Bantam Dell Pub Group, 1992). John Triseliotis, *Adoption: Theory, Policy and Practice* (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 1997). Betty Jean Lifton, *Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1979) and *Journey of the Adopted Self: A Search for Wholeness* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> H J Sants, *Genealogical bewilderment in children with substitute parents* (British Journal of Medical Psychology VL - 37IS – 2, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1964).

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Kirmayer, *Landscapes of Memory: Trauma Narrative and Dissociation, in Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, eds. Paul Antze, and Michael Lambek (London: New York: Routledge, 1996) 173-198, and *Trauma: Explorations in*

Lifton. His positive responses to the effects of uninvited change were particularly resonant,

We are becoming fluid and many-sided. Without quite realizing it, we have been evolving a sense of self appropriate to the restlessness and flux of our time. This mode of being differs radically from that of the past, and enables us to engage in continuous exploration and personal experiment.<sup>32</sup>

This encouraged me to examine my own maelstrom of emotions and to develop a positive response to multiplicity. It facilitated my practice-based approach to new knowledge and experiences and its application in making the artworks. This was combined with the concept of controlled chance and Indeterminacy developed by John Cage,<sup>33</sup> based on a responsive approach to unexpected events within a structured framework. This methodology for making allowed the process to both shape and become part of the outcome.

For the installations considered in this commentary original texts relating to specific historic narrative were located in archives held by museums and other public and private collections These were used to develop physical research and filming journeys partially re-tracing the steps of earlier travellers. Material gathered during these journeys informed and shaped the final artworks forming the central core of both both *Mariners and Migrants: In Search of Home* and *WAVE/ING*. Similar methodologies are used by many artists and single screen filmmakers, such as Richard Long<sup>34</sup> and Simon Faithfull.<sup>35</sup> The deliberate fragmentation of linearity disrupts any single reading and my intention is always to create an affective filmic

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*Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Robert, J. Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999),1.

<sup>33</sup> John Cage (<http://www.johncage.org>).

<sup>34</sup> Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking* (1967).

[www.richardlong.org/Sculptures/2011sculptures/linewalking.html](http://www.richardlong.org/Sculptures/2011sculptures/linewalking.html)

<sup>35</sup> Simon Faithfull, DVD 44min 2005'44', which tells the story of a journey from the Falkland Islands to Antarctica and back. 0°00 Navigation – Part I and 44', 44 pieces of footage from 44 days at sea.

response to land and seascape.<sup>36</sup> The sculptural and material elements of the installations became containers or vessels for the journeys made.

While all the artworks are connected through the post adoptive experience each is examined from a distinct angle. *Mariners and Migrants: In Search of Home* links the approaches to the archive inflected by the work of other artists such as Susan Hiller and explored by Carolyn Steedman and Arlette Farge<sup>37</sup> to the situated learning and experiential response to the journey identified by David Kolb.<sup>38</sup> This approach to the physical journey appears in *WAVE/ING* as part of a consideration of gendered response to place. *Dear Child* references Pollock's<sup>39</sup> reading of the matrixial theories of Ettinger and the post Lacanian theories relating to the girl child of Irigaray.<sup>40</sup> It touches on the ways in which the Family Romance identified by Freud in 1908, when the child creates an ideal fantasy family to replace the original parents can be co-opted and reinterpreted by the adoptee.<sup>41</sup>

There are many artists and filmmakers whose work has inflected the development of my artistic practice including Satyajit Ray whose exploration of loss and longing in the Parallel cinema neo-realism of *Pather Panchali* (1955) and the black and white cinematography of Subrata Mitra were important early influences.<sup>42</sup> These shaped my approach to the emotional power of moving image, the importance of symbolism, gesture and framing.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> James Putnam, *Art and Artifact : The Museum as Medium* (London, New York: Thames and Hudson 2009),143.

<sup>37</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust; the Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002) and Arlette Farge, *the Allure of the Archive* (New Haven:Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development* (New Jersey:Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*.

<sup>40</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Cornell University Press, 1985) and in Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*,119-20.

<sup>41</sup> Herbert Wieder, *The Family Romance Fantasies of Adopted Children* (The Psychoanalytic quarterly, Vol.46(2),1977), 185-200. For earlier work see Frances Clothier, *The Psychology of the Adopted Child* (Mental Hygiene, XXVII, 1943),222–230.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.criterion.com/films/28021-pather-panchali>.

<sup>43</sup> This is encapsulated in the sequence of the first rainfall of the monsoon when Durga's dance in the rain is intercut with her mother dragging wet saris from the

Willie Doherty's use of location and voice over in *Ghost Story* 2007 powerfully evokes the the alternative violent memory of place while *Re-run* 2002<sup>44</sup> elegantly illustrates the different interpretation of the same place seen from opposing cultural/religious view points. This dual reading is particularly relevant post discovery when the same place, events and people are read totally differently with new knowledge. Other artists include Susan Hiller whose work on outsider narratives includes *Witness* 2000 while disappearing peoples and languages in *The Last Silent Movie* 2007/8 and *The J Street Project* 2002-5 address issues of loss and absent presence.<sup>45</sup> The haunting installations of Chiharu Shiota, *Labyrinth of Memory*, shown at La Sucrière, Lyon with long white dresses hung among dense webs of black thread in an old factory, *The Key in the Hand* at the 2015 Venice Biennale, Roni Horn's *Vatnasafn / Library of Water, Iceland* 2007 and Rachael Whiteread's *Embankment* of 2005<sup>46</sup> are all visceral evocations of absence. Their strategies for developing work, practical research methods and use of specific materials, thread, water and the resin cast interiors of storage boxes are relevant to my intention to transform personal response into more universal meanings. I am also influenced by artists who focus on conflicted memory such as Christian Boltanski<sup>47</sup> whose affective memorialising work uses a combination of banal artefacts and emotive symbolic elements to create a highly charged response to memory and history. "This is difficult to say, but I am for an art that is sentimental. What I want to do is make people cry. My job is to find the means to do it."<sup>48</sup>

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clothesline, followed by her protectively wrapping her brother Apu in her own wet sari as they sit under the tree. This is followed by her illness and death. I travelled to India for background research for my undergraduate thesis on Satyajit Ray.

<sup>44</sup> Willie Doherty (williedoherty.com).

<sup>45</sup> Susan Hiller (susanhillier.org).

<sup>46</sup> Chiharu Shiota (www.chiharu-shiota.com.) *Chiharu Shiota* ed. Carline Stummel (Hatje Cantz/Haunch of Venison, 2102) *Labyrinth of Memory* at La Sucrière, Lyon, France May-June 2012.

Roni Horn ( <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/library-of-water>).

Rachael Whiteread (The Unilever Series: – *Embankment*, Tate Modern).

<sup>47</sup> Christian Boltanski (artnet.com).

<sup>48</sup> Christian Boltanski, quoted by Tom Lubbock in the Independent 7<sup>th</sup> May 1994. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/remembrance-of-things-past-christian-boltanski-is-a-multi-media-artist-theres-the-book-the-triple-1434581.html>.

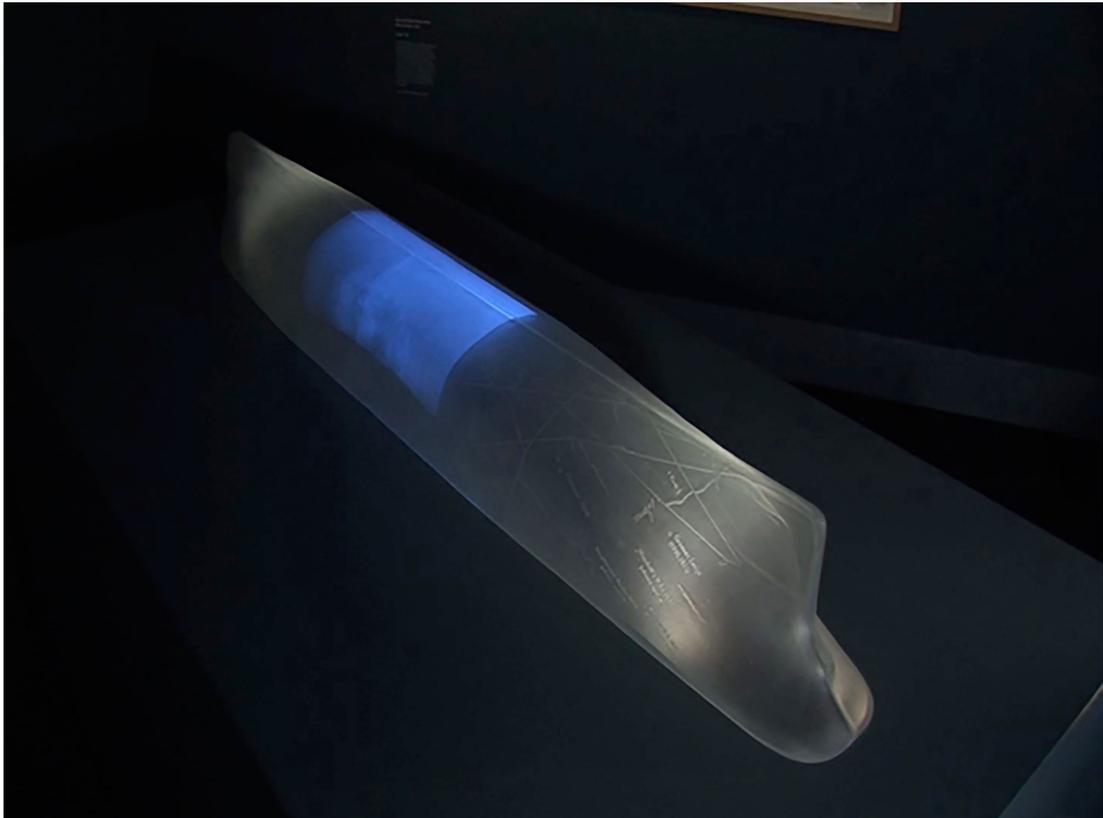
The anguished text based artwork, *I am afraid*, by Louise Bourgeois explored in chapter 4, made as a late response to her perceived abandonment by her mother is particularly resonant.

Post discovery a linear approach to narrativity is no longer appropriate when there are so many possibilities for rereading of events. Liminal, in-between states are evoked in the videos through acausal non-linear editing and the montage of heterogeneous images which created multiple or ambiguous meanings. The use of asynchronicity in multi-channel projections and/or the layering of text-etched glass and printed silk created a fluid, open and affective 'text' which echoed the dislocation, loss and longing of the late discovered adoptee and a four dimensional space of memory. This openness is related to the curatorial approach of Richard Wentworth when he suggests artists/curators, "keep fluidity and open-endedness where meanings are fugitive and things can coalesce in different ways"<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (London, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2009),143.

## CHAPTER 1: VESSELS AND CONTAINERS



1.1: *Hrimceald Sae*, installation at National Maritime Museum, 2006.

### **MARINERS AND MIGRANTS: IN SEARCH OF HOME**

#### **TWO INSTALLATIONS COMPRISING:**

1. *HRIMCEALD SAE*, slumped and etched glass sculpture, 200 x 30 x 25cms.  
*THE WANDERER AND LOST SIGHT OF*, 2 part single Channel HD video, 20 mins.
2. *SENT TO SEA*, museum vitrine, acrylic container, etched glass panels, etched mirror light box, water. *SENT TO SEA*. single channel HD video, 13 mins.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Funded by the Arts Council of England, Leverhulme, Artist-in-Residence Fellowship, Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship.  
*Mariners and Migrants in Search of Home*, exhibited National Maritime Museum, 2006.

*Hrimceald Sae*, exhibited in London Gallery West (2008) and *Land/Seascapes of Memory*, solo show, Duff House, National Gallery of Scotland (2009).  
*Mariners and Migrants: In Search of Home* shown as two screen presentation as invited artist for, *On Their Own' Britain's Child Migrants –Interpreting the Past and Remembering Today*, Child Migration Conference, V&A, Museum of Childhood (2016).



1.2: On Board the *Cast Prestige*, mid Atlantic, 2005.

### ***MARINERS AND MIGRANTS: IN SEARCH OF HOME***

The two video and sculptural installations *Hrimceald Sae* and *Sent to Sea* comprising *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home* were completed after my artist's research residency in the Caird Library and Archives and Reserve Collections of the National Maritime Museum in 2005/6<sup>51</sup> and exhibited as the frontispiece to the travelling exhibition *Life at sea* 2006. The project was inspired by the journeys of 19<sup>th</sup> century child migrants, Home Children,<sup>52</sup> sent to Canada and the boy sailors who sailed the same transatlantic routes.

My birth mother, Elsie made a similar journey when she emigrated to Canada in the 1950s. As part of my research process tracing the journeys of the Home children I

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<sup>51</sup> I was the first artist to be based in the archives of the National Maritime Museum, initially with the Education Department for the research, then as part of the New Visions Programme for the travelling exhibition, *Life at Sea*.

<sup>52</sup> The Home children were unaccompanied, impoverished child migrants sent to Canada from 1869 to the late 1930s by a number of Philanthropic Societies. Early migrations were organised by Maria Rye, Louisa Birt, Annie MacPherson and Emma Stirling. Dr. Barnado was a key figure in later migrations.

travelled by sea<sup>53</sup> and visited the main emigration sites, Grosse Isle in the St Lawrence, used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>54</sup> and Pier 21, Halifax Nova Scotia, where Elsie landed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>55</sup> Mary Majka also arrived in Halifax as a refugee after the second world war and her testimony,<sup>56</sup> gives a sense of what it felt like to become stateless. This echoed the earlier experiences of the Home Children and my own sense of home-less-ness.

When I first saw land after those 10 days although I was not seasick, I was homesick, land sick... Because I lost my own country I was homeless, I was what they call DP, a displaced person. Here in Canada DP was a bad word, almost like ... gypsy, a homeless person. So it was not easy to integrate into this society. As a matter of fact that society did not accept you.

You were somebody from away.<sup>57</sup>



1.3: Dr. Mary Majka, still from video,2005.

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<sup>53</sup> I travelled on the first transatlantic voyage of the container ship *Cast Prestige*, which sailed from Bremen to Liverpool and Montreal in 2005. Funded by a Winston Churchill Traveling Fellowship.

<sup>54</sup> Grosse Isle, the Quarantine Station in the Gulf of St Lawrence outside Quebec processed migrants from Ireland and Great Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1842 and 1848, 3000 Irish emigrants fleeing the famine died on the island. 5000 are buried there. (Library and Archives Canada, [www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng)).

<sup>55</sup> Pier 21, now the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 Halifax, Nova Scotia, was the main Canadian immigration site from 1928-71. Over 1 million immigrants arrived there. (<https://www.pier21.ca/home>).

<sup>56</sup> Recorded in New Brunswick June 2005.

<sup>57</sup> From Transcript of interview with Mary Majka, (1923-2014), recorded in 2005, Albert County, New Brunswick, Canada.

My art practice is about exploring this sense of being 'somebody from away'. It has also meant the search for a form, which will meld the emotional intensity and story telling potential of film to the open ended installations of artists, such as Boltanski, allowing the spectator to make their own narratives.

This chapter explores the ways in which experiences of dis-location and fractured memories influenced the approach to the subject. It examines how original archives from the National Maritime Museum and other archives in the UK and Canada<sup>58</sup> were selected and fragments of text used to create an affective response to the historic and contemporary narratives of absence, separation, loss and the emotional effects of emigration, exile from home, country and birth family. It situates this in relation to the approaches to research in the archives taken by Carolyn Steedman and Arlette Farge and to other artists such as Susan Hiller working with archival collections.

The physical journey on a container ship, retracing the voyages of the 19<sup>th</sup> century child migrants and my birth mother was a transformative event. The visceral experience of the pitch, roll and judder on the transatlantic crossing, the spatiality of the ship, the vastness of the ocean and the passing of time at sea changed my understanding of solitude and empathy with the sense of loss of the migrant, who can never return home.

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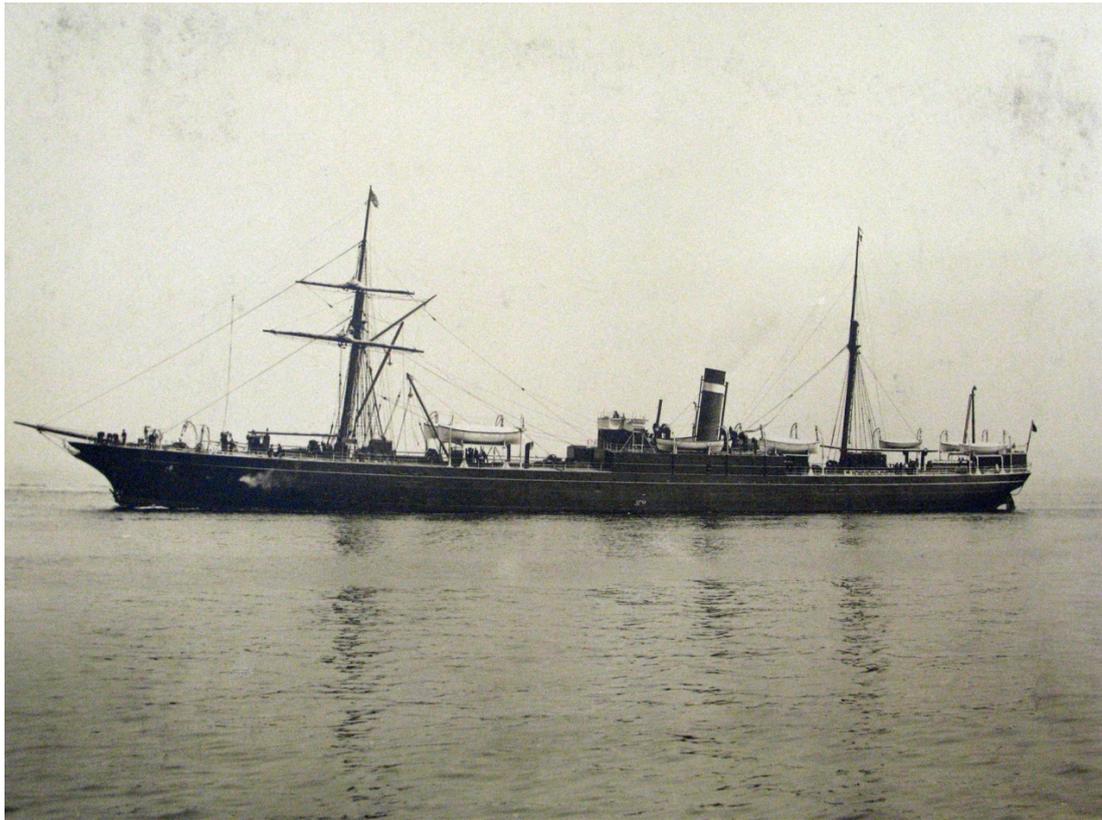
<sup>58</sup> Archives included; Special collections and Archives, University of Liverpool. Maritime History Archive, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St Johns, Newfoundland, Canada. The Rooms, Museum and Archives, St John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Nova Scotia Archives and Records, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.



1.4: The *Cast Prestige*, en route from Liverpool to Montreal, June 2005.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>-In May/June 2005 the journey from Liverpool to Montreal took 8 days on the German registered container ship, *Cast Prestige*, Maersk Line (built 2005) now Reinbeck IMO 9313204.



1.5: *SS Hibernian*, Allen Line, 1869. National Maritime Museum Archives.<sup>60</sup>

### IN THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

The National Maritime Museum is both an archive and a ‘Lieu de Mémoire’, a memory site of a maritime island nation.<sup>61</sup> This concept developed by Pierre Nora may also be applied to the ship.<sup>62</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> century container, the 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs, ships models and plans are all symbolic vessels for collective and personal memories and histories. Nora notes that,

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<sup>60</sup> *SS. Hibernian* took child migrants from Maria Rye’s Home to Canada in 1869. It took about 11 days to travel from Liverpool to Quebec.

[www.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/)

<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/sheet/10>.

<sup>61</sup> Pierre Nora, ed. *Realms of Memory*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–8), xvii. This concept is identified by Pierre Nora as, ... “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.”

<sup>62</sup> Pierre, Nora, ed. *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-92).

“Lieux de Mémoire are created by the interaction between memory and history. Without an intent to remember, lieux de memoire would be lieux d’histoire.”<sup>63</sup> In their content, materiality and siting within the Maritime Museum the two installations were a nuanced response to this interstitial space and the convergence of historic and contemporary experience.



1.6: 2 Screen presentation at V&A, Museum of Childhood, 2016.

### **HRIMCEALD SAE**

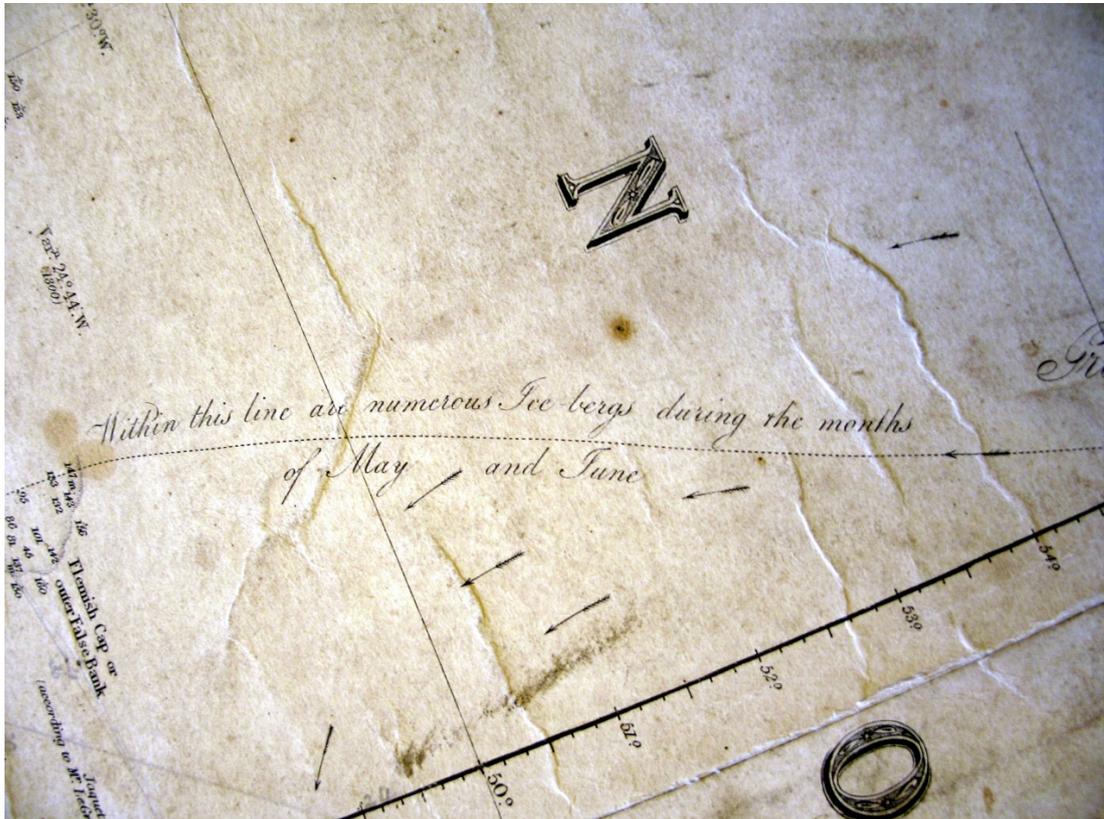
*Hrimceald Sae*, (trans. Ice-cold sea)<sup>64</sup> includes a sandblasted, slumped glass sculpture based on scale plans of Allen Line ship *SS Nova Scotian* by Denny of Glasgow 1859 which transported child migrants from Liverpool to Montreal, Canada.<sup>65</sup> It is etched with iceberg flows copied from sea charts used to plot the Great Circle route taken by the original ship. Lit from below it resembles an

<sup>63</sup> Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, quoted in *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, James E. Young (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press 2000), 62.

<sup>64</sup> Phrase taken from Old English/Anglo Saxon poem, *The Wanderer* in the Exeter Book, 10<sup>th</sup> century. <http://www.anglo-saxons.net>.

<sup>65</sup> Between 1869 and 1932 over 100,000 unaccompanied children arrived in Canada from the British Isles. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/news/Pages/2015/home-children-records.aspx>, <http://canadianbritishhomechildren.weebly.com>.

upturned hull and recalls the icebergs and whales encountered on the transatlantic journey.<sup>66</sup>



1.7: Detail, North Atlantic Chart, National Maritime Museum Archives.

A two-part single channel video is projected onto the underside of the glass. In the video, *The Wanderer*, lines from an Old English poem of exile are recited<sup>67</sup> over slow moving images of the fogs of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland shot from ship and shoreline.<sup>68</sup>

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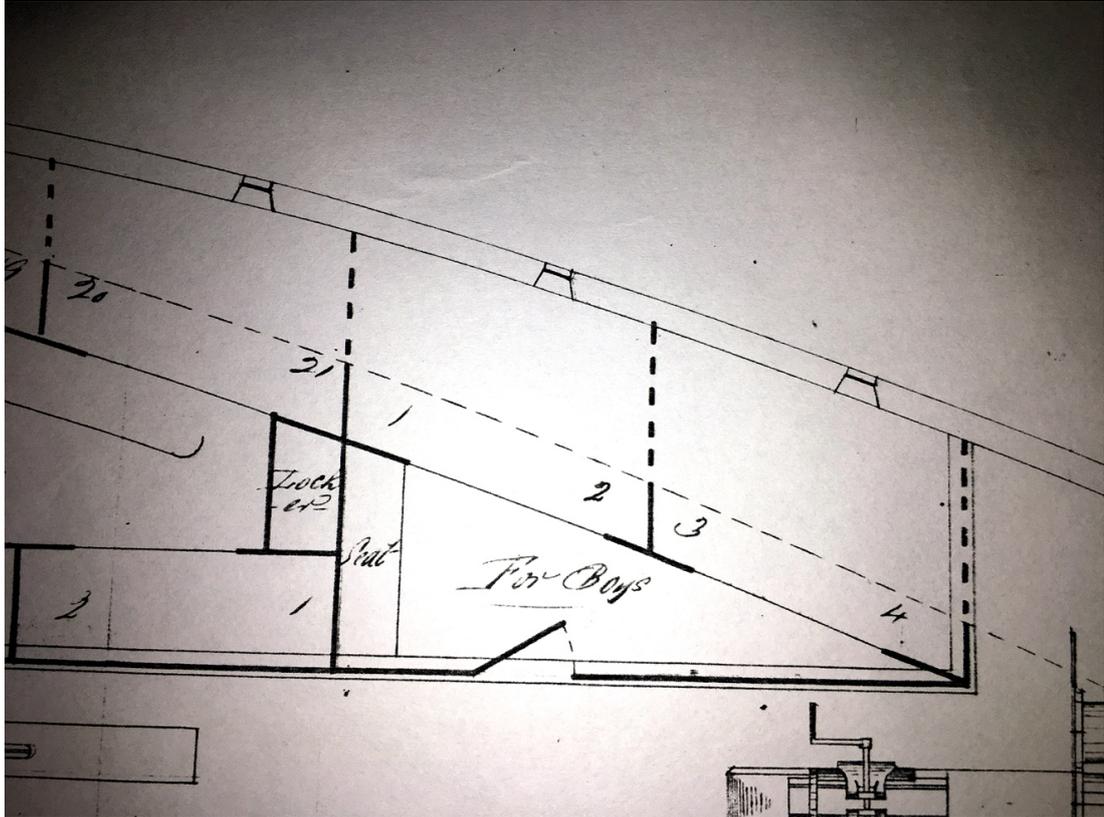
<sup>66</sup> Developed from Original plans and photographs in National Maritime Museum collections. Final construction by Max Jacquard ([maxjacquard.com/](http://maxjacquard.com/)).

<sup>67</sup> Read by Professor of Old English, Bill Schipper, Memorial University, St. Johns, Newfoundland. His parents were Displaced Persons from Holland.

<sup>68</sup> This recalls the Romantic painting by Caspar David Friedrich, *The Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog* (1818). <https://www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de/en>.

The video, *Lost Sight Of*, follows the journey of a Home child,<sup>69</sup> Annie Delaney, one of three siblings who were philanthropically abducted by Emma Stirling in 1888 after the death of their mother, sent to Canada and lost sight of in Quebec in 1890.

## SENT TO SEA



1.8: Detail, plan, *SS Nova Scotian*, National Maritime Museum Archives.

*Sent to Sea* comprises an original mahogany and glass museum vitrine, formerly used to house a ship's model, containing a water-filled acrylic tank and three vertical glass panels etched with text from Marine Society Records relating to the boy sailors. The panels are partially sandblasted and etched with shapes based on plans of the forecastle of *SS Nova Scotian*, where the boy sailors slept.<sup>70</sup> A back-etched

<sup>69</sup> The video was shot in Annapolis, former site of Hillfoot Farm, Miss Stirling's children's home. Annie Delaney's mother had died but her father was still alive and tried unsuccessfully to reclaim his children. Recorded in Emma Stirling, *Our Children in Old Scotland and Nova Scotia* (London: John Haddon, 1892), 146-147.

<sup>70</sup> This space on the actual ship would have resembled the dark corner, "The little dark corner between the fireplace and the oak chest, where you used to hide."

mirrored light box sits behind the tank. The video *Sent to Sea* linking the boy sailors with other migrant journeys is projected externally through the vitrine and layers of glass. The sound of the sea is mixed with migrating birdsong.<sup>71</sup>

The accidental effect of gathering condensation within the vitrine throughout the exhibition reminded one visiting museum curator of his journeys home on the ferry to Ireland.



1.9: 2 screen presentation, *Mariners and Migrants :in Search of Home*, V&A, Museum of Childhood, 2016.

Both methodology and the final outcome are related to the poetic, non-linear and spatialised approach suggested by Bachelard. In his consideration of the intimate space of the Corner as a ‘haven’ (although based on the idea of immobility) Bachelard references the story of the girl child who makes a ‘house’ in the bow of a boat, “for the recess in the boat is also a corner of being.”<sup>72</sup> This image is particularly resonant in this piece. The corner as a potential space of dreaming, perhaps of home, for the boy sailors is suggested by the layered glass panels in the

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Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958 tr.) New Edition (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994),140.

<sup>71</sup> Recordings from the Chants d’oiseaux du Quebec, guides Peterson, from The Centre for Research into Bird Migration, Montmagny, were used in both installations, in addition to my field recordings.

<sup>72</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*,139.

vitrine. The girl discovers ‘*herself*’ in the “vast universe of the boat in the middle of the ocean”. And “now that she knows that she is *herself* .... will she return home, in other words withdraw again into herself?” This open question is poignant in the case of the child migrants, who were ‘Lost Sight of’, but also resonates with my own personal transatlantic journey, in the middle of the Ocean taking bearings.

The intention was to create work which “at the level of the poetic image, the duality of subject and object is iridescent, shimmering, unceasingly active in its inversions.”<sup>73</sup> This is echoed materially in the artwork as the video projections are multiplied, reflected and refracted by layers of glass and water in the vitrine and on the gallery walls or semi-occluded through frosted glass. This aims to evoke the emotional resonance of home-less-ness.<sup>74</sup> It reflects the psychological effects of dissociation and dissonance<sup>75</sup> that occur when identity is under erasure.

The sculptural and moving image elements relate to other artists working with memory and history such as Shimon Attie, Christian Boltanski and Susan Hiller<sup>76</sup> who use real events to create transformative artworks. Hiller’s exploration of “cultural and historical points of slippage”<sup>77</sup> echo my own approach to the archives.

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<sup>73</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xix.

<sup>74</sup> As one ex-shoebblack writes of an earlier voyage “ I have lost all thorts of coming home”, Archives: Ware Family of Tilford Farnham: Martin Ware 1818-1895 co-founder of the Ragged Boy Shoebblack Society. Ref 1487 Surrey History Centre. Used in my installation *Tri-Angulation* (2004).

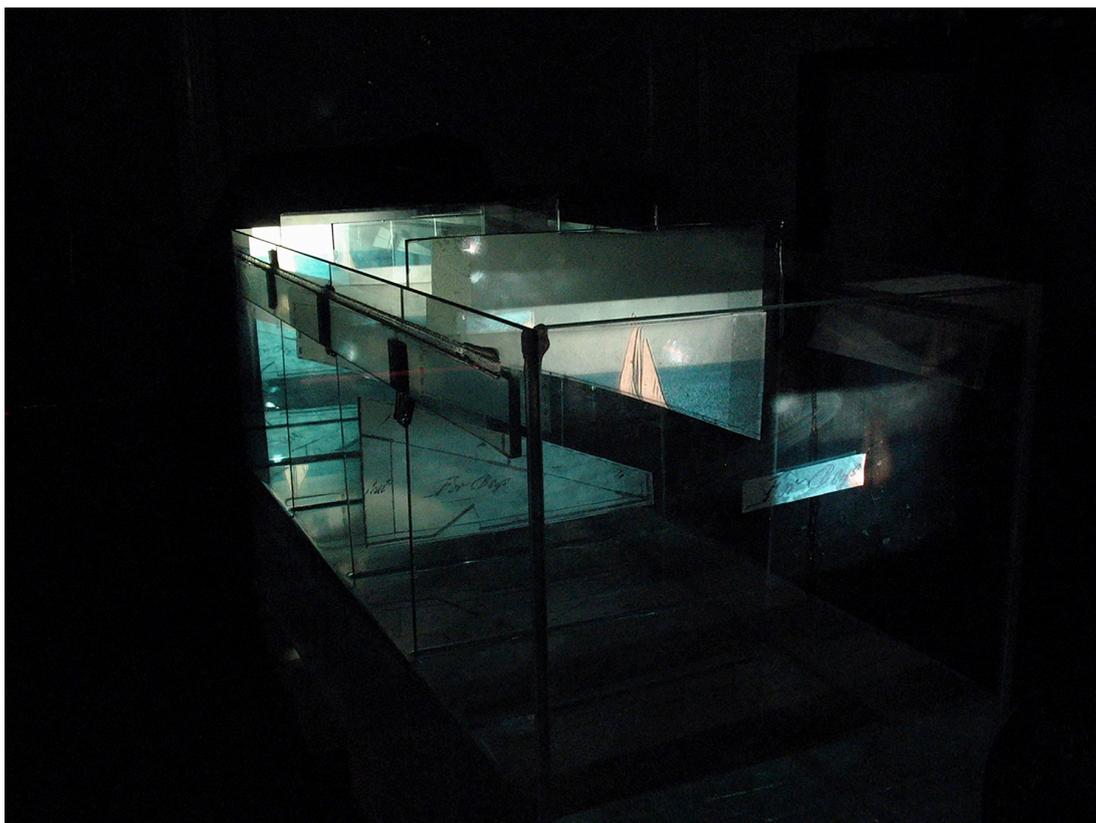
<sup>75</sup> Onno Van der Hart and Horst Rutger, *The Dissociation Theory of Pierre Janet* (Journal of Traumatic Stress, vol. 2, issue 4, 1989), 397-142.

and Leon A. Festinger, *Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (CA:Stanford University Press; 1 edition, 1957).

<sup>76</sup> James Young, *At Memories Edge After –Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000) includes Shimon Attie, *Sites Unseen* (1991-6),62-7 and *Portraits of Exile*(1995),75.

Christian Boltanski, *Monument* (1986) *Shadows* (1990) *Ordinary Days* with Jean Calman (1996); Susan Hiller Hiller, *Monuments* (1980-1).

<sup>77</sup> Kynaston McShine, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: Museum of Modern Art 1999), 93.



1.10: Detail, Maquette, *Sent to Sea*.

#### APPROACHES TO THE ARCHIVE

My approach to the archives in the National Maritime Museum was influenced by my earlier use of official records to re-construct personal history.<sup>78</sup> This required a flexible attitude towards unexpected events and revelations<sup>79</sup> resulting in an ambivalent attitude to the veracity of archives. This instability also created the possibility for constructing different narratives from heterogeneous elements. The search for birth family records is an emotionally fraught endeavour and as Arlette Farge suggests, “The archival document is a tear in the fabric of time”<sup>80</sup>. This tear can be very visceral when the documents are personal and not historical

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<sup>78</sup> This refers to adoption under the closed system. The Adoption Act 1976 gave over 18s access to birth family records.

<sup>79</sup> This is covered extensively in Betty Jean Lifton, *Lost and Found; the Adoption Experience* (New York:Dial Press, 1979), David Brodzinsky, Marshall Shechter and Robin Henig, *Being Adopted: the lifelong Search for Self* (New York:Bantam Dell Pub. Group, 1992.)

<sup>80</sup> Arlette Farge, Translated by Thomas Scott-Railton, *The Allure of the Archives* (New Haven:Yale University Press,2015),6.

judicial records.<sup>81</sup> This methodology is similar to that of the social historian, illustrated by Carolyn Steedman,

The archive is this kind of place, that is to do with longing and appropriation. It is to do with wanting things that are put together, collected, collated, named in lists and indices; a place where a whole world, a social order, may be imagined by the recurrence of a name in a register, through a scrap of paper, or some other little piece of flotsam.<sup>82</sup>

This longing and appropriation has a very different meaning when it is identity rather than a social order that is being researched. So the slippages and gaps in the records when inferences can be made become instead fissures and voids. The “real” becomes fugitive glimpsed fleetingly and sideways. Steedman does address this issue around loss and longing and the mutability of the archive,

What we are searching for is the lost object, which really cannot be found. The object (the event, the happening, the story from the past) has been altered by the very search for it, by its time and duration: what has actually been lost can never be found.

This is not to say that *nothing* is found, but that thing is always something else, a creation of the search itself and the time the search took.<sup>83</sup>

This relates both to the psychological search for the lost object as theorised by Freud<sup>84</sup>, Lacan and Winnicott as well as the search in the archives. However unlike

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<sup>81</sup> My search took place in the old Family Records Centre, British Library, National Archives City of Toronto archives and locations in Canada and America. *Who Do You Think You Are*, production Wall to Wall, 14 series, 2004-present and *Long Lost Families*, 'Long Lost Family production, [https:// walltowall.co.uk](https://walltowall.co.uk) 2011-present, take a simplified linear approach to genealogy.

<sup>82</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 81.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>84</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, (1917). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 237-258; Jacques Lacan, *l'objet petit a: (Seminar XI,[1] 1964)* [www.lacan.com/seminars1a.htm](http://www.lacan.com/seminars1a.htm). Donald Winnicott, *Transitional Object and*

many social historians while I am aware of the importance of discovering hidden voices and narratives of working class children and women I am not attempting to recreate histories through using archives.<sup>85</sup>



1.11: Birth family photograph at Niagara Falls, gifted by John MacRobert, McMasterville, Quebec, Canada, 2000.

My own search was changed by the process and an appreciation of the mutable nature of the record and fracture in notions of the self has influenced all my subsequent work. A sometimes-serendipitous approach to tracing pathways through archives has been applied to work on *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of*

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*Transitional Phenomena –A study of the First Not-Me Possession* (International Journal of Psycho-analysis, vol., 34,1953), 89-97.

<sup>85</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, (London, New York: Verso 1994). *The History Workshop Journal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 –present) and Carolyn Steedman on social history provided useful background in addition to personal responses to stories of outsiderdom and loss.

*Home*.<sup>86</sup> This allowed new non-linear threads to emerge during the initial investigation of the archives in the National Maritime Museum creating gaps and overlaps and leaving space for interpretation. It also shaped the transatlantic voyage and travel in Canada. The decision to research the archives of Memorial University<sup>87</sup> and film in Newfoundland was made after the discovery of the 1863 log of the *Great Eastern* sailing from Valentia to Hearts Content.<sup>88</sup>

#### ARTISTS AND MUSEUM ARCHIVES

There are a number of artists whose work has been particularly relevant both conceptually and practically. These include Susan Hiller's installation, *From the Freud Museum 1991-6*, where she searched for,

what is unspoken, unrecorded, unexplained and overlooked –the gaps and overlaps between content and context, dream and experience, the ghost in the machine, the unconscious of culture.<sup>89</sup>

This echoed my archival search for hidden narratives while the use of non-linear connections can be related to Rachel Lichtenstein's imagistic approach to accidental contiguities in her exhibition and artist's book, *Add.17469 A Little Dust Whispered*<sup>90</sup>. This explored the interstices of culture through enlarged fragments of the marks and mark-making from variety of non-related texts/drawings in the British Library. While both of these artists used existing material in these artworks

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<sup>86</sup> Raphael Samuel in his radical and class sensitive work suggested "Historians .... could stop dealing with surface concordance, indeed, could rethink the notion of cause itself, which might be 'more convincingly elaborated if it were removed from a temporal sequence,'" Quoted in Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, 79.

<sup>87</sup> Memorial University, St. Johns, Newfoundland, holds the majority of British crew lists for the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>88</sup> Hearts Content is the site of the first transatlantic cable. William Howard Russell, *The Atlantic Telegraph* (1st. Edition, Naval Institute Press, 1865. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Kynaston McShine, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 93.

<sup>90</sup> Produced as part of her British Library Pearson Creative Research Fellowship, 2003. The material dust, referenced in her title is echoed by Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*.

ceramic artists Christie Brown, in *Collective Traces; A Response to the Petrie Museum*<sup>91</sup> and *Dreamwork* in the Freud Museum<sup>92</sup> and Clare Twomey in *Exchange*<sup>93</sup> created new work in response to archival collections. Their embedded installations and interventions in museums and in-depth research and critical and physical response to location and collections inspired my own practice in response to the materiality of the archives and artefacts within the museum. The archives are always political<sup>94</sup> and this was clear in records that I used in the Maritime Museum Archives where subaltern viewpoints are absent. This absence is inferred in my use of archival text in my installations.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Collective Traces: A Response to the Petrie Museum*. Institute of Archaeology, London, 2006 ([www.christiebrown.co.uk/](http://www.christiebrown.co.uk/))

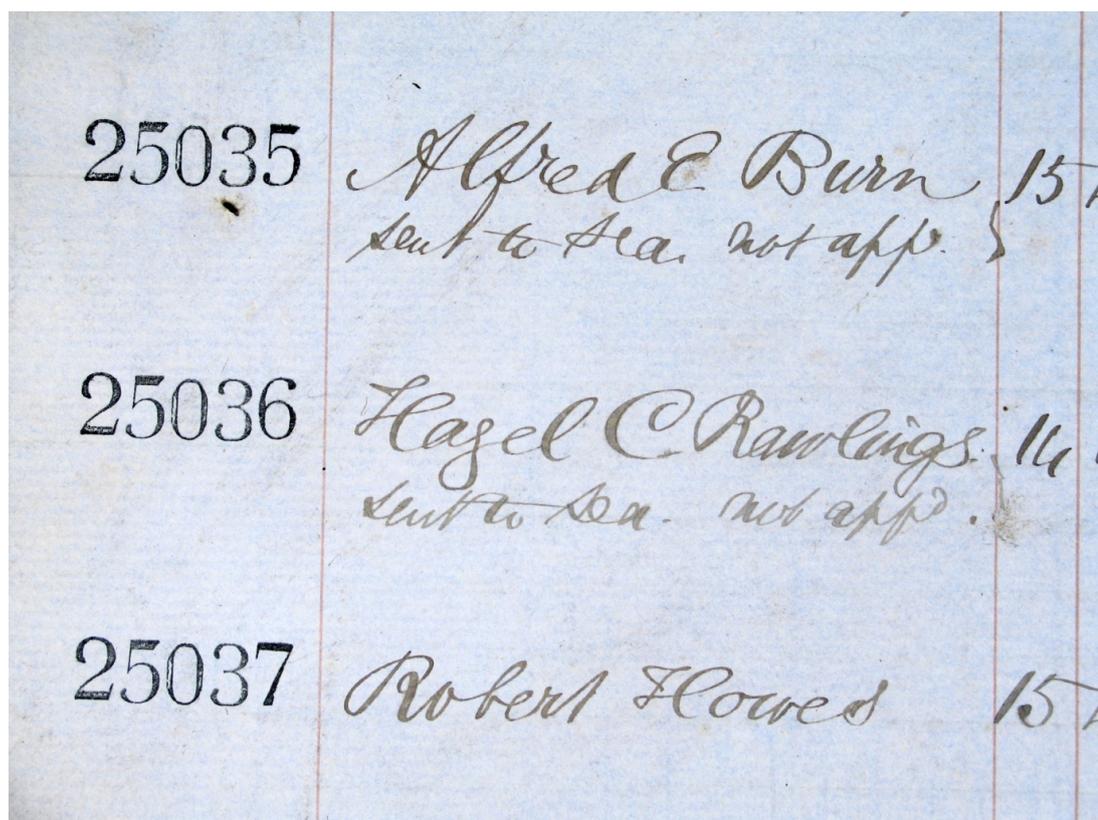
<sup>92</sup> *Dreamwork*, In the Freud Museum, London, 2012-13.

<sup>93</sup> *Exchange*, Foundling Museum, London, 2013 ( [www.claretwomey.com](http://www.claretwomey.com)).

<sup>94</sup> Steedman, *Dust, The Archive and Cultural History*.

<sup>95</sup> Other artists approach archives more directly from a critical cultural perspective, informed by postcolonial, feminist or gender fluid position to reframe historic narratives. Ingrid Pollard: *The Valentine Days*, a response to *Making Jamaica: Photography from the 1890s*, (2017) [www.ingridpollard.com](http://www.ingridpollard.com); Roshini Kempadoo, *Creole in the Archive: Imagery, Presence and the Location of the Caribbean Figure* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

## USING ORIGINAL ARCHIVES IN THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM



1.12: Detail, Marine Society Records, National Maritime Museum Archives.<sup>96</sup>

There are no 19<sup>th</sup> century journals or letters from migrants or sailors in the Maritime Museum Archives, although the latter are sometimes recorded as dead, deserted or punished in ships logs. They do appear in lists. This is common in official archives when working class women and children only appear in subordinate positions. These differ from the French judicial Archives explored by Arlette Farge<sup>97</sup> where she finds verbatim testimonies that give a flavour of subaltern lives.

During my residency I focused on material from 1869-1900, the key dates for early child migration to Canada. These included crew lists<sup>98</sup> Charts and Maps , Ships

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<sup>96</sup> Rawlings is my adoptive name but my birth ancestor Edward Joseph Wortley was apprenticed by the Marine Society in 1858. Those records were used in the installation, *As The Crow Flies*, 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Arlette Farge, *Le Goût de l'Archive, The Allure of the Archive* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>98</sup> Remaining crew lists are held by Memorial University, St Johns, Newfoundland. <https://www.mun.ca/mha>.

These were consulted during my research trip in 2005.

Plans, Ship Models, Historic Photographs as well as pilot books, ships logs and Lloyd's Registers of Shipping,<sup>99</sup> which gave an overview of the transatlantic journeys undertaken by the child migrants and the boy sailors.

The Marine Society records<sup>100</sup> provided information about boy sailors, their age, height and status as errand boys, shoeblacks, oakum pickers or destitute orphans and their widowed mothers working as char- or washerwomen, needlewomen or mangling and ironing. They differed little from the child migrants although the death of the mother often meant the migrants were put into a "Home" as fathers could rarely look after young children while working

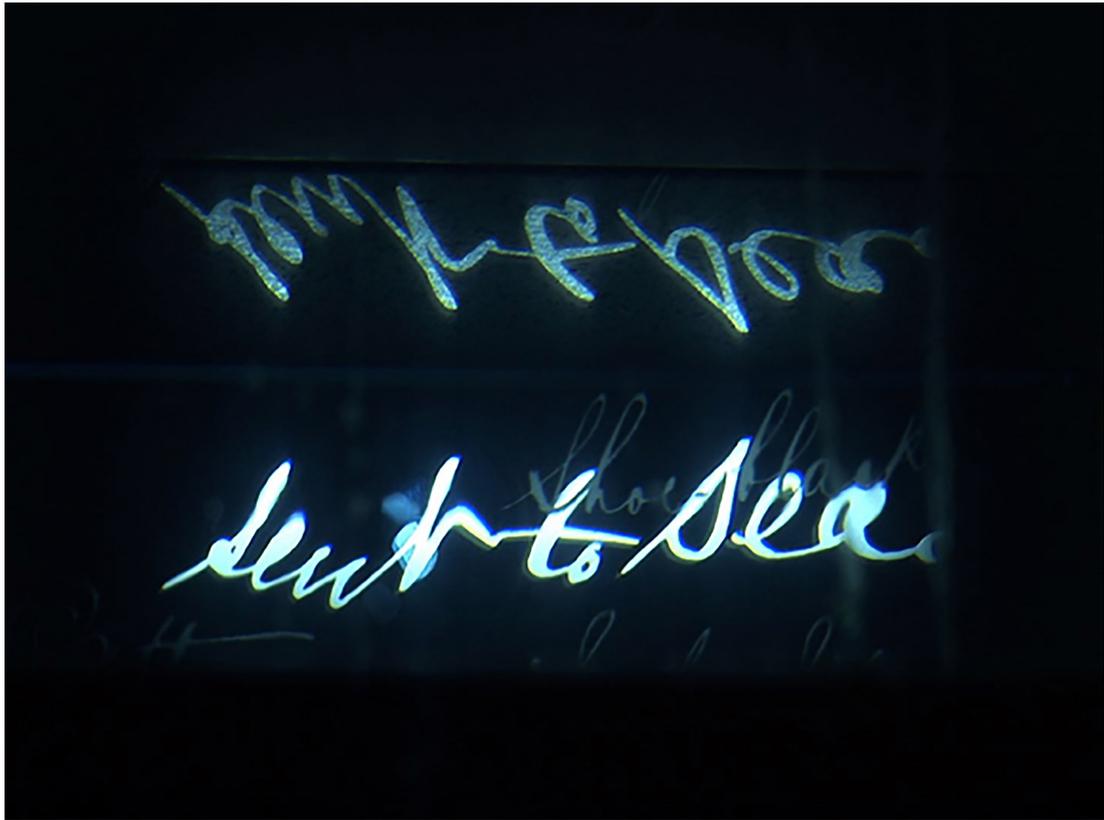
Fragments from these lists, were etched onto glass or overlaid in video for the installations. This decontextualisation transformed the institutional nature of the records<sup>101</sup> into unexpected poetry.

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<sup>99</sup> Archives collections, Royal Museums Greenwich.  
<https://www.rmg.co.uk/research-collections>.

<sup>100</sup> The Marine Society was set up by Jonas Hanway in 1756 to train orphan and impoverished boys for a life at sea. <https://www.marine-society.org/history>. Original records held at National Maritime Museum. For further background see *Ships' Boys and Charity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: The London Marine Society, 1756-1772*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2003, The PhD thesis contains a database). Roland Pietsch, *A Boyhood at Sea: The Records of the Marine Society at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich* (Genealogists' Magazine, XXVII, March 2001), 3-8.

<sup>101</sup> Copperplate was used extensively until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



1.13: Detail, *Sent to Sea*, installation, National Maritime Museum, 2006.

The phrase *Sent to Sea* indicated that the boy was not to be apprenticed. With little training they often worked on coalers sailing up and down the coast from Newcastle to London. The text is back-etched onto a mirrored light box and reflected onto water indicating a fugitive presence. This perhaps echoes Foucault's idea, "in which the archive restores as if by magic what is lacking in every gaze".<sup>102</sup>

In *The Allure of the Archive*, Arlette Farge captures some of intensity of the research experience and the haptic nature of working with fragile or unwieldy material. She illuminates the moments when the tactile nature of archives imbues the slightest fragment with intense meaning and emotional valency. As she says, "An archival manuscript is a living document".<sup>103</sup>

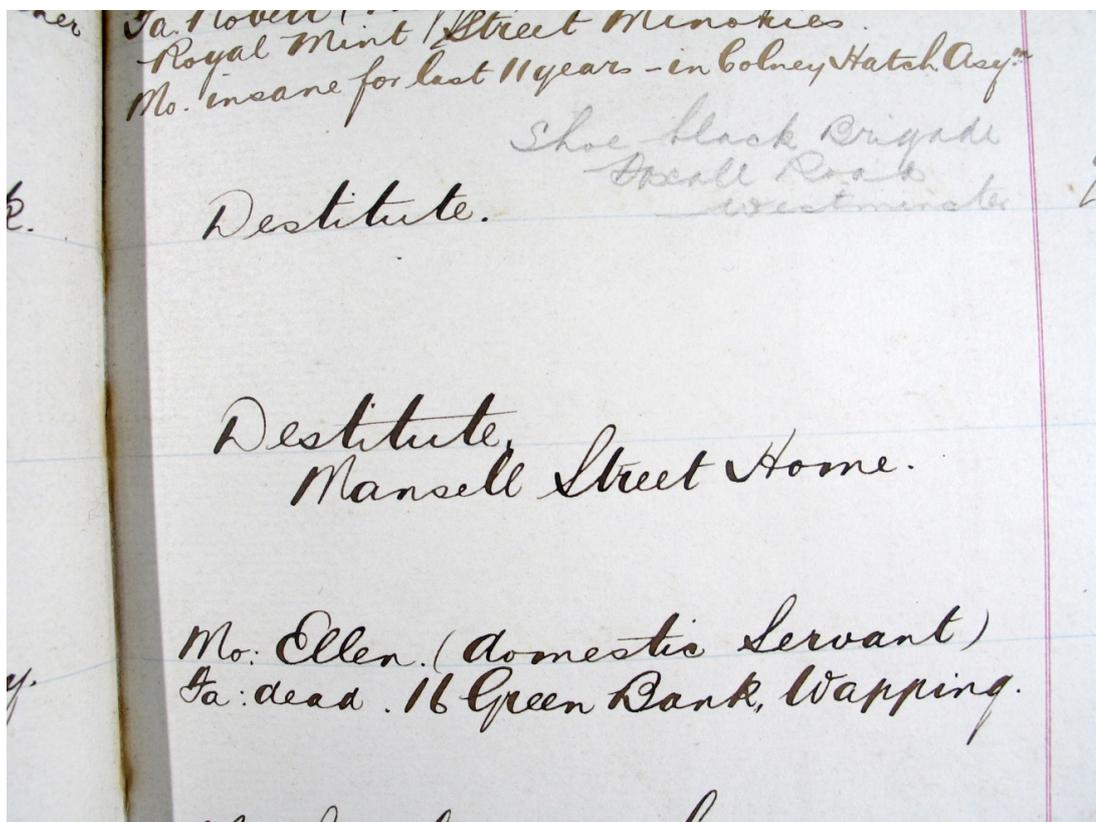
My intention was to translate this intensity into the final piece, retaining some of the original historic resonance but reconfigured to create contemporary meaning.

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<sup>102</sup> Steedman, *Dust; The Archive and Cultural History*, 2.

<sup>103</sup> Farge, *The Allure of the Archive*, 15.

The authenticity of each of the original documents/artifacts used in the final work is key to the affect of the piece.



1.14: Detail, Marine Society Records, National Maritime Museum Archives.

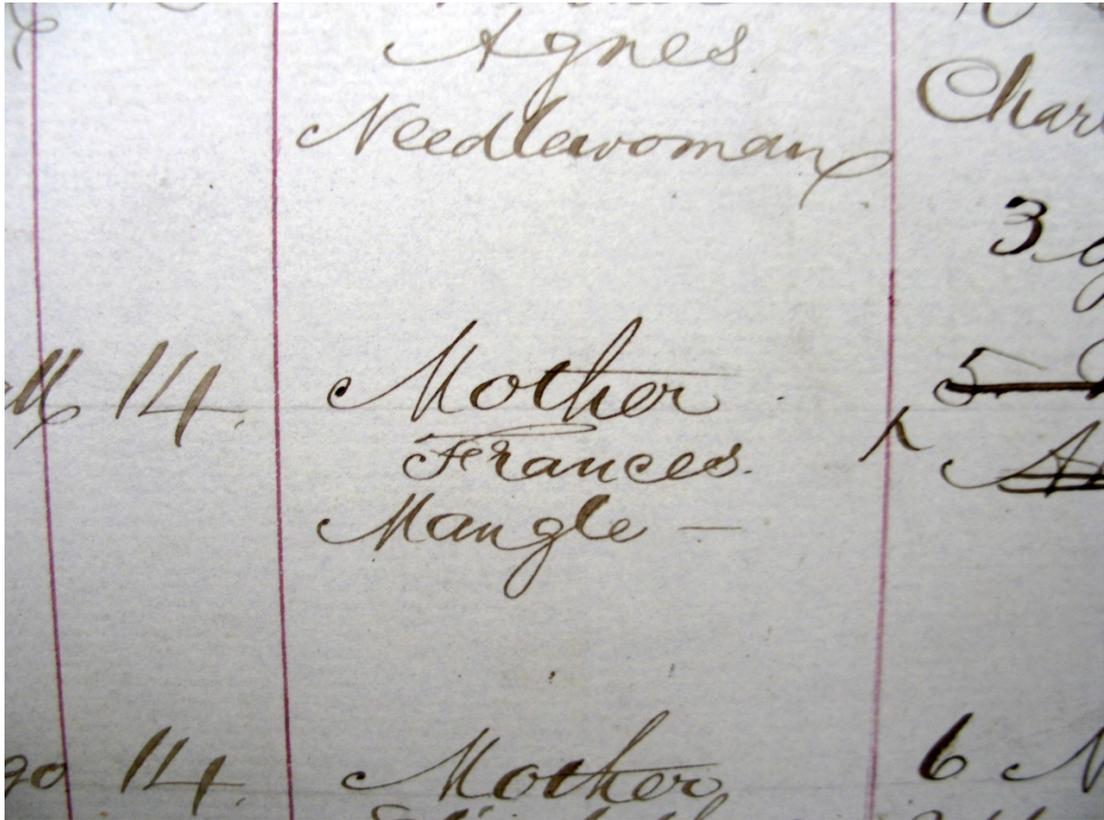
The particular power of handwritten text has been effectively explored by a number of artists including Fiona Banner, *The Rumble in the Jungle* (1995) and *Nude*, (2002)<sup>104</sup> Sophie Calle, *The Razor Blade: True Stories*, (1988)<sup>105</sup> and Tracy Emin in her Neon Series, (2014).<sup>106</sup> These are focussed on the idiosyncratic personal handwriting of the artist and often autobiographic in intent.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup> [www.fionabanner.com/words/strippedbare.htm](http://www.fionabanner.com/words/strippedbare.htm)

<sup>105</sup> [https://www.perrotin.com/exhibitions/sophie\\_calle-true-stories/62](https://www.perrotin.com/exhibitions/sophie_calle-true-stories/62)

<sup>106</sup> [www.traceyeminstudio.com/](http://www.traceyeminstudio.com/)

<sup>107</sup> For other explorations of orthography see a record of exhibition, *Showing Their Hands* (Cambridge University, Special Collections, 2012).



1.15: Detail Marine Society Records, National Maritime Museum Archives.

### **MIGRANTS, MARINERS AND THE LOST CHILD**

Research into the child migrants took place in parallel to research in the National Maritime Museum. While much work has been done in Canada about the Home Children with extensive online resources<sup>108</sup> the material for the artwork was located in the Social Work Archive in Special Collections University of Liverpool<sup>109</sup> and the Provincial archives in Halifax Nova Scotia<sup>110</sup>. These provided two strands in the final installations. The first links the mothers of the boy sailors in the Marine Society

<sup>108</sup> *The Golden Bridge Child Migration from Scotland to Canada, 1869-1939*, exhibition (Heatherbank Museum of Social work, Glasgow Caledonian University, Research Collections, 2001. <https://content.iriss.org.uk/goldenbridge/exhibition>). Marj Kohli, *The Golden Bridge, Young immigrants to Canada 1833-1939* (Toronto, Canada: Natural Heritage, 2003) and *Uprooted: The Shipment of Poor Children to Canada, 1867-1917* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2008).

<sup>109</sup> Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool for Maria Rye, Annie Macpherson and the Liverpool Sheltering Home. Archives Canada for British Home Children. ([www.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/)).

<sup>110</sup> Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia (<https://archives.novascotia.ca/>).

records with the poor widows in Liverpool<sup>111</sup> who were encouraged to make clothes for the children emigrating from the Liverpool Sheltering Home run by Louisa Birt. The mothers/widows are referenced through text and images in '*Sent to Sea*'.



1.16: 2 screen presentation, *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home*, V&A, Museum of Childhood, 2016.

The second strand relates to the story of Annie Delaney and inspired the video *Lost Sight Of*<sup>112</sup> in *Hrimceald Sae*. Her narrative exposes class differences and power relationships, she is also a lost child both constructed and lost in the cracks between the competing narratives of Miss Stirling and her father.<sup>113</sup> Her absence mirrors that of the boy sailors and has a particular personal relevance as someone whose identity was lost in the archives between adopted and birth name.

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<sup>111</sup> They were each given 6d and a meat sandwich for their work. The middle class philanthropic ladies also helped, minus the meat sandwich and 6d. Records of the Liverpool Sheltering Homes for Orphan, Fatherless and Destitute Children, 1873-1983, (ref: D175) and registers relating to emigration and legal papers (ref: D6/ii) (University of Liverpool, Special Collections and Archives.

[www.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/).)

<sup>112</sup> Mary Manning on ship Polynesian, Leaving Liverpool Oct 29th 1874 was "Lost sight of", in 1875. (University of Liverpool, Special Collections and Archives, [www.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/))

<sup>113</sup> Details of Annie Delaney from 1886 in Emma Stirling, *Our Children in Old Scotland and Nova Scotia* (London : J. Haddon,1892),146-7 and Depositions by James Colston JP, directors of Edinburgh Children's Aid and Refuge and Mr.Cogswell, investigator for the Court (Provincial Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia. <https://archives.novascotia.ca.>).



1.17: Approaching the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, June 2005.

### ***MARINERS AND MIGRANTS: IN SEARCH OF HOME: CONCLUSION***

The specificity of my experience as a late discovered adoptee has enabled me to develop a sensitive approach to the broken narratives of migration and ways of using original archives and historic records to create new and effective artworks while still maintaining the affect of the source.<sup>114</sup> I have developed a relevant process based methodology using the physical journey retracing routes which

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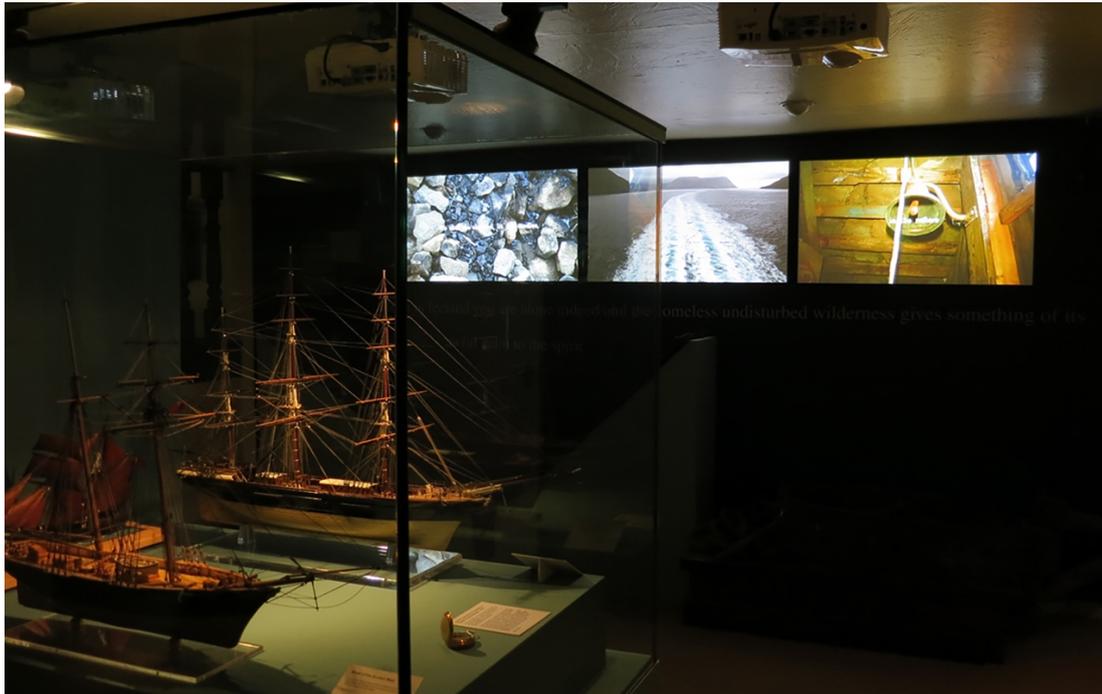
<sup>114</sup> David Howe in *International Advances in Adoption Research for Practice*, eds. Gretchen Miller Wrobel and Elsbeth Neil (Chichester:Wiley-Blackwell, 2009),14. He suggests that, “The experience of the self as slightly dislocated, the sense of being both inside and outside of experience might provide the adopted individual with a peculiar sensitivity to many human situations”.

interleave personal and historic stories of dis-locations and exile to inform the content and structure of the final installations. The combination of sculptural glass, historic artefact, video projections and the reflective and refractive qualities of etched glass within the artworks have been used to create a layered and labile exploration of the space(s) between memory and history.



1.18: Grave marker, St. Johns, Newfoundland.

## CHAPTER 2: THE LITTORAL AS A LIMINAL SPACE



2.1: *North of the Forest; North of the Corn*, installation Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.

### **WAVE/ING**<sup>115</sup> MULTI-PART INSTALLATION COMPRISING:<sup>116</sup>

1. **BOUND FOR ICELAND**, 2 screen HD video, stereo sound.
2. **NORTH OF THE FOREST; NORTH OF THE CORN**, 3 screen HD videos stereo sound.
3. **THE SUBLIME**, single channel HD video, stereo sound, 3x black glass panels, 180x 90cms, Perspex panel, 180x 120cms. Wooden stands.
4. **WAVING**, 9 digitally printed silk panels, 180 x 120cms.
5. **ALONE IN ICELAND/A TREACHEROUS COAST**, vinyl wall text.
6. **REFUGE**, single channel HD video, stereo sound, 4 aluminised glass panels, 50 x 30 x 0.5cms, 3 steel containers, 40 x 30 x 10cms, water.

<sup>115</sup> Funded: Arts Council England, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums. Supported by University of Westminster.

<sup>116</sup> Exhibited: London Gallery West, (nos. 1-5) Nov-Jan 2011/12.

Exhibited: Aberdeen Maritime Museum, (nos. 1-6) WAVE/ING, solo show, site specific installation, May-Sept, 2012.

Invited speaker, *Memories of Conflict, Conflict of Memory*, International Conference University of London. Paper, 'Ripples and Dissolves', Feb 2013.

## ICELAND

The shorelines of Iceland, bordered by basalt cliffs in the north eastern fjords, covered in black volcanic sand at Vik, littered with ice from the glacier lake at Jökulsárlón and riven by rivers in Hornafjörður are a potent symbol of the fluidity of both land/seascape and identity. As points of departure and arrival these places between land and sea are also spaces of memory.



2.2: Still, *Bound for Iceland*.

## **WAVE/ING**

This chapter explores how moving image installations inspired by historic narratives of exploration and occupation in Iceland, exile from Norway and refuge in Shetland relate to contemporary experiences of dis-location and outsiderdom.<sup>117</sup>

*WAVE/ING*, a multi-part video and mixed media installation was devised for and exhibited in the Aberdeen Maritime Museum in 2012. It was based on journeys by sea and land to Iceland and Shetland partially retracing routes and reframing narratives from two disparate historical texts, the handwritten log book of Aberdeen trawler Captain Alfred Craig (1941)<sup>118</sup> and the writings of Scottish traveller Elizabeth Jane Oswald (1892), which reflected the experiences of the engaged outsider<sup>119</sup> and a related story of escape and rescue in the little known story of the Shetland Bus (1940). The artworks were informed by wider background research into relevant events, cultural and geographical landscapes. This included the British Occupation of Iceland from 1940-42, 19<sup>th</sup> century travel in Iceland and women's position as independent travellers.

Filmed both from the sea and on key coastal locations it explored the littoral as a liminal space of welcome and farewell, of joy or sorrow. The gesture of the Wave marked these interstitial moments

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<sup>117</sup> Outsiderdom may be related to Hannah Arendt's notion of pariah groups and communities. While there are differences the experience of outsiderdom can apply to the adoptee. See also Jonathan Rutherford, *The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha in Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207-221.

<sup>118</sup> Gifted to the museum in 2006 by the family of Alfred Craig and uncatalogued when I was given a copy. Now in the Aberdeen Maritime Museum Archives. ([www.aagm.co.uk](http://www.aagm.co.uk)).

<sup>119</sup> The concept of the engaged outsider is considered in *Creative Tourism, a Global Conversation*, eds. Rebecca Wurzbarger, Sabrina Pratt and Alex Pattakos (Santa Fe & UNESCO International Conference on Creative Tourism, 2008).

This chapter considers how acausality<sup>120</sup> combined with asynchronicity, reflection/refraction, layering and the use of black and coated glass, and silk were used to create an affective response to otherness.<sup>121</sup>

As a lone woman traveller in the often uncanny landscape of Iceland the experiences of Elizabeth Jane Oswald are particularly pertinent. As part of a new wave of independent women travellers she is emblematic of late 19<sup>th</sup> century feminism.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> This relates to Bachelard's consideration of the poetic image, which may be 'counter-causal', *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), 168. The work of Jung in *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) and the use of chance in the work of John Cage ([www.johncage.org/](http://www.johncage.org/)).

<sup>121</sup> For some discussion of otherness in relation to adoption see Elizabeth Hughes, *Adopted Women and Biological Fathers: Reimagining Stories of Origin and Trauma* (London: Routledge, 2017). David M. Brodzinsky, Marshall D. Shechter and Robin Marantz Henig, *Being Adopted: the Lifelong Search for Self* (New York: Bantam Dell Publishing Group, 1992).

<sup>122</sup> Andrew Wawn, *A Victorian feminist in Iceland? – The strange case of E. J. Oswald*, (<https://rikk.hi.is/a-victorian-feminist-in-iceland-the-strange-case-of-e-j-oswald/>).

Elizabeth Jane Oswald benefitted from the efforts of earlier feminists, including the work of The Langham Place Group, initiated by Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes in the 1850s (<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/women-and-work>).

ICELAND: INSTALLATIONS COMPRISING; *BOUND FOR ICELAND*; *NORTH OF THE FOREST*; *NORTH OF THE CORN*; *THE SUBLIME*; *WAVING*; *ALONE IN ICELAND/A TREACHEROUS COAST*.

### BACKGROUND TEXTS/STORIES



2.3: Still, *Bound for Iceland*.

### ALFRED CRAIG; THE LOG BOOK (1941)

Following my exhibition *Mariners and Migrants; in Search of Home* in 2006 I was given a copy of the handwritten wartime logbook of Aberdeen trawler skipper Alfred Craig by John Edwards, Keeper of Science and Maritime History at the Aberdeen Maritime Museum. This text became one of the inspirations when I was invited to create the 2012 summer show for the Museum.

The original ships log was lost during heavy seas as Craig sailed from Aberdeen to Seyðisfjörður Iceland in November 1940 carrying Christmas mail for the British occupying troops.<sup>123</sup> The 26 pages were a rewritten record of the voyage and a personal diary of events during his time patrolling the North Eastern fjords. They are referenced in the installation *Bound for Iceland*.

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<sup>123</sup> Iceland had been formally neutral but was occupied by British troops on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1940 in order to protect the allied Atlantic convoys after Hitler invaded Norway in April 1940.

As a peacetime fisherman Craig developed a good relationship with many local people but he was also an alien occupier. An informal interview with a man who had been a fisherman at Eskifjörður at the time uncovered the antagonism felt by local men. The fjords were blockaded and fishermen had to sail in more dangerous waters further from the coast.<sup>124</sup> In contrast a man who was a child during the occupation remembered the excitement the newcomers brought to the village and how they were allowed to attend the small cinema set up for the troops. In the log details of Craig's close contact with the Icelanders are mixed with responses to the naval battles happening just over the horizon, including the sinking of HMS Hood and The Bismarck<sup>125</sup> As a former civilian he was not part of the formal hierarchy of the British Navy. His writing used in the video maps this borderland between cultures and communities.

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<sup>124</sup> A community of 917 was occupied by 3000 British soldiers.

<sup>125</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> May 1941 HMS Hood was sunk by The Bismarck during the Battle of Denmark Straits on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1941 the Bismarck was also destroyed. Both involved great loss of life. Alfred Craig's log includes his response to both events.

ELIZABETH JANE OSWALD, *BY FELL AND FJORD; OR, SCENES AND STUDIES IN ICELAND*  
(1882)



2.4: Still, *The Sublime*.

Scottish saga<sup>126</sup> enthusiast Elizabeth Jane Oswald's book *By Fell and Fjord; Or, 'Scenes and Studies in Iceland'* (1882) provided a parallel narrative of an engaged outsider. One of a small number of single women who travelled in Iceland at a time when any travel was challenging<sup>127</sup> she was pragmatic and practical while maintaining a romantic view of the culture and interpretation of the sublime in landscape.<sup>128</sup>

Alone in Iceland you are alone indeed and the homeless, undisturbed wilderness gives something of its awful calm to the spirit. It was like listening to

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<sup>126</sup> William Morris was a key influence in the rediscovery of Icelandic Sagas.

<sup>127</sup> For other records by women travellers see Ida Laura Pfeiffer, *A visit to Iceland and the Scandinavian North* (London: Ingram Cooke, 1853). Ethel Brilliana Tweedie, *A Girl's Ride in Iceland* (London: Horace Cox, 1889) and Mrs Disney Leith *Iceland* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908).

<sup>128</sup> For other responses to the sublime see Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) and *The Sea of Ice* (1823/4) (<https://www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de/en>). Also Frederic Edwin Church, *The Icebergs*, (1861) (<https://collections.dma.org/artwork/4171219>).

noble music, yet perplexed and difficult to follow - say Schumann at his oddest and wildest.<sup>129</sup>

Earlier Mary Wollstonecraft<sup>130</sup> used the sublime to reflect on the self, society and the position of women. Oswald embodied the rise of the 19<sup>th</sup> century independent woman and her reading of the sagas as a model of female empowerment echoes Wollstonecraft's attitude to feminism. "Hers was a book of heroines rather than heroes".<sup>131</sup> Heidi Hansson<sup>132</sup> situates the Nordic north as both a potential Arcadian utopia based on the (mythic) past and offering a less class bound and more gender equal society. This reading influenced my own approach to the project.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Elizabeth Jane Oswald *By Fell and Fjord; Or, Scenes and Studies in Iceland* (Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1882),215.

<sup>130</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (London: Joseph Johnson,1796).

<sup>131</sup> Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians. Inventing the Old North in 19th-Century Britain* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000),306. Also quoted in *Between Nostalgia and Modernity Competing Discourses in Travel Writing about the Nordic North*, in *Iceland and Images of the North*, Heidi Hansson, 37.

<sup>132</sup> Heidi Hansson, *Between Nostalgia and Modernity: Competing Discourses in Travel Writing about the Nordic North, in Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, "Droit au Pôle" series, and Reykjavík: ReykjavíkAkademían, Umeå University Sweden,2011).

<sup>133</sup> I explored some aspects of this earlier feminism in a later installation, 'CUSP', inspired by feminist artist and founder of Girton College, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon.



2.5: Women of Eskifjord c. 1900. Reference for *North of the Forest:North of the Corn*.<sup>134</sup>

### DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES/ VOICES/ NARRATIVES

The two narratives were related in the exhibition through the use of wall texts in addition to printed silk hangings *Waving*:

shipping heavy seas ... going slow ahead --- wind s'ly now strong to gale ... ship rolling like hell ...sea running like a mountain --- a treacherous coast ...<sup>135</sup>

alone in Iceland you are alone indeed and the homeless undisturbed wilderness gives something of its awful calm to the spirit<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Einar Bragi Sigurðsson, *Eskja. Sögurit Eskfirðinga, Eskifjordur, i mali og myndum 1786-1986* (Eskifjardar, Eskifirdi: Byggdarsogunefnd, 1986).

<sup>135</sup> Excerpts from Alfred Craig's log, 1942, Aberdeen Maritime Museum Archives and morse code.

<sup>136</sup> Oswald, *By Fell and Fjord*, 215.

Although both texts are mediated, one by 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism and the other by 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare they both subvert dominant narratives through gender or class. Many earlier accounts of travel in Nordic countries by British male writers are framed in terms of conquering the unknown from a position of cultural imperialism.<sup>137</sup> While Craig's text reflects the heroism needed to face mountainous seas it carries no trace of imperialism.

In *Representations of the North in Victorian Travel Literature* Kassis identifies the importance of gender in travel narratives.<sup>138</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> century male travel writers saw a journey to the North as a process beset with perils, challenging their masculinity. Oswald's journeys of exploration and discovery subverted this masculinist discourse through her very presence in the North. This was particularly resonant at a time when there were other challenges to the status quo.<sup>139</sup> She offered a positive model of the anti-tourist who did not seek to 'other' the people she travelled among.

#### **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

The narratives of these two travellers separated by class, gender and history but related by their position as cultural outsiders in Iceland echoed some of my own experiences of outsiderdom. This personal sense of dis-placement, loss and longing is reflected symbolically in the contemporary journeys retracing these historic narratives and in the structure and materiality of the final installations.

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<sup>137</sup> Dimitrios Kassis, *Representations of the North in Victorian Travel Literature* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars publishing, 2015). This also situates the travel writings in relationship to post-colonialism and the role of the Empire in mostly male writers accounts.

Dimitrios Kassis, *Icelandic Utopia in Victorian Travel Literature* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

See also, Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, England and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2000).

<sup>138</sup> Kassis, *Representations of the North in Victorian Travel Literature*, 40.

<sup>139</sup> The Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1882, the same year *By Fell and Fjord* was published. Under this act married women had the same property rights as unmarried women.

## IMAGES OF WOMEN



2.6: *Bound for Iceland*, installation Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.

The littoral in Iceland is a shifting space between the ring road and the sea, dynamic and constantly changing. This fluid region shaped by time, tide and melting glaciers represents a place of transformation of welcome and farewell within the artworks. The sense of a border space between the known and unknown, the pragmatic and the uncanny is embodied in the work in the image of the Woman Waving on the shoreline.

When performing the gesture for the Waving Woman the actress/artist was asked to reflect on particularly strong personal memories of saying welcome and farewell. This double action of welcome and farewell has a specific resonance in stories of adoption when both child and mother(s) experience the borderland when an old identity is lost and a new one created. The final image and costume was related to both wartime loss and that of my birth mother.<sup>140</sup>

Both the littoral site and the gesture can perhaps be related to the matrixial borderspace posited by Ettinger<sup>141</sup> as a place of emergent consciousness. A liminal site of memory.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> There are statues of women waving on various shorelines, symbolising fishermen's wives as in Lofoten Norway, emigrants, or Florence Martus, the waving girl of Savannah (1868–1943).

<sup>141</sup> Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*: (2005) Cited in Pollock, *After Affects I After-Images* (2013)15,16,18,19,111,112,211,343.

<sup>142</sup> Pierre Nora, ed. *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, or *Between Memory and History* (Paris: Gallimard,(1984-9).



2.7: *North of the Forest: North of the Corn*, installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.

The ghostly image of the woman drifting in and out of a tiny historic chapel and an abandoned farm in *North of the Forest: North of the Corn* also symbolises an in-between space of presence and absence. Based on the writings of Oswald she reflects the experience of the 19<sup>th</sup> century woman traveller and a contemporary response to sites of history and memory.

#### **SHETLAND: REFUGE**

*Refuge*, made specifically for the Aberdeen Maritime Museum, responded to the story of the Shetland Bus,<sup>143</sup> small boats which rescued refugees and agents from Norway after the German invasion on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1940 and carried them to Shetland.. It explored stories of belonging and exile and, loss and rescue and the fragile spaces in between using images of drystone walling and knitting, signifying cultural embeddedness, intercut with material based an archival photograph of a mother

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<sup>143</sup> *Refuge* was initially inspired by Trygve Sorvaag, *Shetland Bus: Faces and Places 60 Years On* (Gremista, Lerwick, Shetland: Shetland Times Ltd,2002). Trygve also provided a translation and voiceover for 'Refuge'.

and child escaping from Televaag Norway and a voice over of his memory of escape.<sup>144</sup>



2.8: *Refuge*, exhibited at Exploding Cinema, 2012. Photograph Tommaso Stingo.

### CONTROLLED CHANCE

The artworks were developed through the process-based approach to production and post-production used previously, which responded to controlled chance.<sup>145</sup> This approach to indeterminacy is framed by an initial structure, the development of a budgeted outline journey plan and a location and date for an exhibition. This allowed a flexible and fluid response to site and narrativity and the development of an imagistic approach to reflect new knowledge and understanding gained from the process.

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<sup>144</sup> Telavåg, Norway, was devastated by the Germans in 1942. Archival photograph from The North Sea Traffic/ Maritime Museum in Telavåg, Norway. <http://nordsjofartsmuseum.museumvest.no/english>. An Informal interview with the escapee took place at the museum.

<sup>145</sup> John Cage, *Silence, Lectures and Writing, Indeterminacy* (London: Marion Boyars, 1980), 260.

John Cage's development of aleatoric music in the early 50s is one example of this approach.

This is related to the methodology employed by Rebecca Solnit in her research and the development of her psycho-geographical writings. She sees travel as a ‘psychic experiment’, a means of exploring “the remoter reaches of the psyche by wandering across literal terrain.”<sup>146</sup>

Her feminist approach and multi-layered and digressive methodology have inflected both my own travels and the structure of the artworks.

“Chance and contingency are the compositional ideals sought after by Solnit, though a level of coherent narration, which may temper such idealism, is inevitable.”<sup>147</sup>

### THE JOURNEYS

*WAVE/ING* was developed through daily filming during journeys by sea and on land to Shetland and Iceland in 2011. Secondary sources and informal interviews were used to identify key sites<sup>148</sup> on Shetland while the initial Icelandic routes were planned in response to the texts by Craig and Oswald, which I carried with me on location. These were developed through information gathered from a variety of people and sources<sup>149</sup> and evolved and changed in response to space, site, and often uncanny landscape and shoreline.

The physical experience of the journey is central to my work. Craig’s log refers to a bumpy crossing in December 1940 when the ammunition box fell overboard and all

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<sup>146</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *A Book of Migrations: Some Passages in Ireland* (London:Verso, 1998),xii. These concepts are explored further in *Wanderlust; A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) and *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005).

<sup>147</sup> Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Ecocriticism: Literature, History and Environmental Justice* (New York,Oxon: Routledge, 2015),152.

<sup>148</sup> This included research in the Scalloway Museum, WW11 Shetland Bus Museum, Shetland Museum and Archives Lerwick, Shetland. Norwegian North Sea Traffic Museum, (Nordsjøfart Museet) and Trygve Sorvaag, *Shetland Bus: Faces and Places 60 Years On* (2002). Interviews with Trygve Sorvaag, May, 2011, Davy Inkster, Drystone waller, Shetland, June, 2011.

<sup>149</sup> This included collections in the National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavik, Icelandic Wartime Museum, (Íslenska stríðsárasafnið), Reyðarfjörður, Saga Centre, Hvolsvöllur, Saga Museum Reykjavik, Technical Museum of East Iceland, Seyðisfjörður,Iceland.

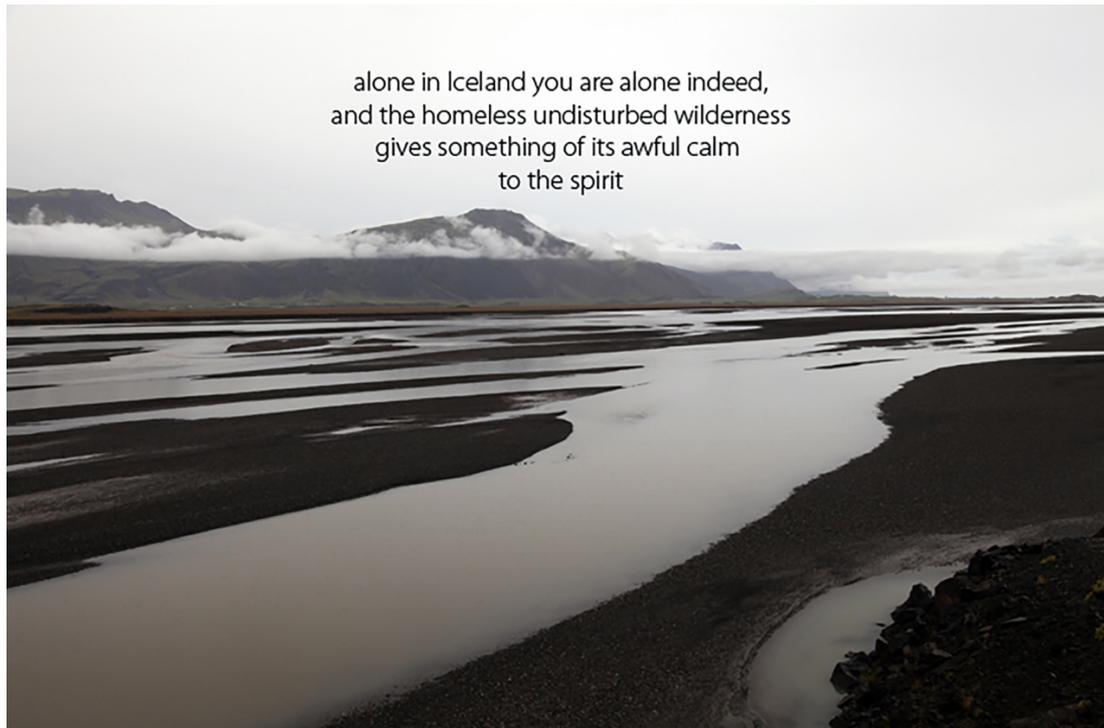
the crew were seasick. Oswald's crossing was equally squally. The ferry from Denmark to Seyðisfjörður in 2011 provided a suitably uncomfortable two days at sea. This embedded approach gave a visceral understanding of the historic journeys without seeking to directly replicate them. It enabled an affective response to land, seascape, history and memory which was translated visually into the artwork. Craig was based around Seyðisfjörður, in the North Eastern fjords, now the port of arrival for the ferry from Denmark. This became the starting point for my journey in Iceland following the physical<sup>150</sup> or metaphorical paths taken by<sup>151</sup> Oswald. The waterfalls at Gullfoss, bubbling sulphur mud at Krysuvik-Seltun, the glacial lagoon at Jökulsárlón, black sand beaches at Vik, the ashes of a burnt out chapel in South Iceland and the volcanic ash left after the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010, were all used in the final artworks, while long tunnels cut through basalt rocks on the North Eastern fjords and miles of bleak volcanic excrescences informed an underlying sense of isolation. My personal psychic response to the solitary journey and the relationship to space and place is effectively explored by Rebecca Solnit. Her exploratory practice and personal, political and psychological approach reflected part of my own interior journey. As she writes, "By travelling across the surface of the earth, it seemed, one could begin to explore the geographies of memory, and what had been lost to consciousness could be recovered through judicious arrival in new places."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Sites included Thingvellir, Gullfoss and Geysir all visited by Elizabeth Jane Oswald. Núpsstaður in Fljótshverf, a small chapel, which replicates one she slept in. Oswald, *By Fell and Fjord; or Scenes and studies in Iceland* (1882), 82.

<sup>151</sup> Kristi Siegel, *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing* (New York, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004) and Mary Morris, ed. *The Virago Book of Women Travellers* (London: Virago, 1993) situate Oswald's experiences in a broader context.

<sup>152</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *A Book of Migrations* (London, New York: Verso, 2011) 197. Solnit, *Wanderlust; a History of Walking* and *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.



2.9: Alone in Iceland.

As indicated in the introduction many artists /practitioners base their work on physical journeys. These include psychogeographers, such as Ian Sinclair and experimental filmmaker Andrew Kotting,<sup>153</sup> who situate themselves centrally and visually in the landscape and the journey. Patrick Keiller in *The Robinson Trilogy* uses an alter ego to reflect on the urban landscape and political change.<sup>154</sup> While they differ in intentionality and political analysis they share a masculinist approach to journeys and landscapes.<sup>155</sup>

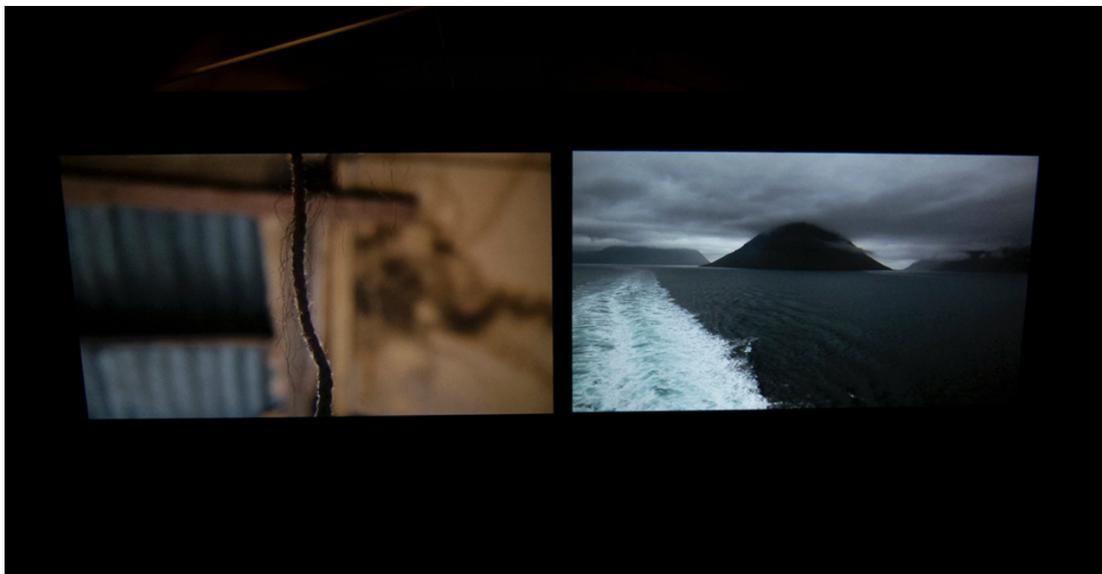
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<sup>153</sup> Andrew Kotting, Ian Sinclair, *Swandown, a journey from Hastings to Hackney* ([www.iainsinclair.org.uk/tag/iain-sinclair-and-andrew-kotting](http://www.iainsinclair.org.uk/tag/iain-sinclair-and-andrew-kotting), 2012). Andrew Kotting, Ian Sinclair, Claudia Barton, Jem Finer, *Edith Walks* ([www.townereastbourne.org.uk/exhibition/andrew-kotting](http://www.townereastbourne.org.uk/exhibition/andrew-kotting), 2017). Andrew Kotting, *Gallivant* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116387/>,1996).

<sup>154</sup> Patrick Keiller, *London* (BFI Screenonline: London,1994). *Robinson in Space* (BFI Screenonline: Robinson in Space,1997). *Robinson in Ruins* (Robinson in Ruins – IMDb, 2010).

<sup>155</sup> This is perhaps most apparent in *Edith Walks* when the the journey of the handwife of King Harold is followed from Waltham Abbey to St Leonards. While she is a central character both conceptually and figuratively she is only identified by her relationship to the king.

There are significant differences when travelling as a lone woman in isolated areas when the landscape itself has agency. This is particularly true in a landscape that is in a constant state of flux, when roads disappear, volcanoes create new islands and rivers spread across the littoral. The lava fields in the volcanic landscape which deny any human agency have a particular effect on the psyche when travelling alone. This unstable terrain reflects the imagistic description by Kirmayer in *Landscapes of Memory* who suggests that traumatic experience is, “not a story but a cascade of experiences, eruptions, crevasses.”<sup>156</sup> and maps onto the psychic landscape referenced by Solnit.



2.10: *Bound for Iceland*, installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.

### **POST PRODUCTION: AN IMPROVISATORY APPROACH**

The final installations were created during post-production with reference both to the original texts and new location material. This experiential approach to research and gathering material, which is crafted during a post production period relates to methods used in some intersectional documentary filmmaking.<sup>157</sup> It is also aligned

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<sup>156</sup> Lawrence Kirmayer, *Landscapes of Memory: Trauma Narrative and Dissociation*, in *Tense past: cultural essays in trauma and memory*, eds. Paul Antze, and Michael Lambek (London: New York: Routledge, 1996), 181.

<sup>157</sup> Bettina Frankham, *Evidentiary to Experiential a Poetic approach to Documentary*. (Expanding Documentary, Conference Proceedings. Vol. 1, No. 2, 2011), 25-34. [http://www.aut.ac.nz/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/255173/4-Frankham.pdf](http://www.aut.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/255173/4-Frankham.pdf).

to an improvisational practice used in choreography and experimental theatre when information from a broad range of sources with a variety of cultural referents is reworked and edited to produce a finished work. *Flight Pattern* choreographed by Crystal Pite<sup>158</sup> and produced in response to the refugee crisis used this approach to develop movements and powerful gestures in response to loss. A coat becomes a symbol of a dead child carried by the dancer/mother who then is made to carry many coats until she almost falls under the weight.

### **ASYNCHRONICITY AND ACAUSALITY**<sup>159</sup>

The final form for each moving image section was developed in post-production, combining location filming, short constructed sequences and words/sentences taken from written texts. All of the installations used a non-linear acausal methodology in the edits to create new synergies in response to these fragments of landscape and narrative. This image based approach can be related to Bachelard's response to the 'reverberation' of the poetic image, which reflects a deeper meaning independent of causality. "In this reverberation, the poetic image will have a sonority of being. The poet speaks on the threshold of being."<sup>160</sup> This reference to liminality is particularly resonant in explorations of shorelines and identity. The use of acausality also reflects the 'meaningful coincidences', which create new potential meanings, identified by Jung,<sup>161</sup> which occurred both in post

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This is a specific use of the terminology by Frankham where Intersectional applies to the interface between documentary and media art as well as a focus on artists such as Fiona Tan (<https://fionatan.nl>) and Isaac Julien (<https://www.isaacjulien.com>). It does not specifically address issues around gender or race as explored by Kimberlé Crenshaw et al.

<sup>158</sup> Royal Opera House Production, March 2017. This used Górecki's third symphony; *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, as a symbol of maternal loss. (<https://www.roh.org.uk/productions/flight-pattern-by-crystal-pite>.)

<sup>159</sup> Carl Jung, *Synchronicity – An Acausal Connecting Principle* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>160</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), xvi. Bachelard posits that the "poetic image is independent of causality." xvii.

<sup>161</sup> Jung, *Synchronicity – An Acausal Connecting Principle*, 14.

production and during the filming. It builds on the approach to controlled chance<sup>162</sup> which underpinned the practical research process.

In addition the multi screen installations, *Bound for Iceland* and *North of the Forest: North of the Corn* use asynchronous projections. The individual video loops, which comprise each installation, vary in duration and combine to shift the meaning slightly through each iteration.

This particular methodology was developed previously in other installations<sup>163</sup> to reflect the slippages which occur when identity is under erasure and every event is open to re-interpretation. This instability and shift in perception when things are never the same again is explored in WAVE/ING through two slightly different uses of asynchronicity, one exploring narrativity and the other document and imagistic affect.

### ***North of the Forest: North of the Corn***

*North of the Forest: North of the Corn* comprised 3 channel HD videos responding to the journeys, explorations and adventures of Elizabeth Jane Oswald and my own experience as a lone traveller and cultural outsider in Iceland. Using fragments of text from her book and constructed sequences based on particular incidents or locations; Oswald's stay in a 'haunted chapel', the Saga of Burnt Njal, told over the remnants of Krisuvikurkirkja church in Reykjanes peninsula, burnt down in 2010, the aftermath of the eruption of Eyjafjallajokull in 2010 echoing earlier eruptions it is a form of storytelling but uses non-linear editing and asynchronicity to disrupt the potential narratives.

The three videos were projected side by side on the wall of the historic ships gallery in the Aberdeen Maritime Museum using three short-throw projectors installed on the top of vitrines containing 19<sup>th</sup> century ships models. Sound, image and objects became an integrated part of the overall experience. The reflections of the videos in the glass of the vitrines added movement and life to the objects which in turn inflected the reading of the videos. The sound of the chapel bell in the video

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<sup>162</sup> John Cage (<http://www.johncage.org>).

<sup>163</sup> *Tri-angulation* (2008) and *As the Crow Flies* (2010).

became translated into a ships bell in the gallery. This transformed the gallery into a dynamic space inviting new interpretations of both art and artefact.



2.11: 2 screen still, *Bound for Iceland*.

### ***Bound for Iceland***

The two screen installation *Bound for Iceland* was a response to Craig's text (1941) and an exploration of outsiderdom. The videos intercut material directly related to events or location with sequences related by movement, shape or colour. This interwove Craig's relationship to the local community and his wartime naval role with my personal response to fluid identity using asynchronicity as a poetic methodology to create a constantly changing combination of images. So the string hanging from the roof of the old WW2 Nissen hut, once housing occupying British troops,<sup>164</sup> the blue bucket slowly swinging in an old barn outside Seyðisfjörður, the frayed rope swaying from the funnel of a derelict whaler in Reykjavik harbour, drying fish hanging from frames in a volcanic landscape in Southern Iceland and the wake of the ferry passing Faro are read differently when seen alongside land or seascapes, a woman waving from the shoreline or text relating to the death of a brother in 1942. The projections created a disjunctive but affective response to belonging and otherness while also suggesting many other potential resonances. It is particularly effective with spectators who may never see the same thing twice

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<sup>164</sup> Íslenska Stríðsárasafnið, Icelandic War Museum, Reyðarfjörður, Iceland

when viewing the work. Laurent Van Lancker provides a very concise explication of asynchronicity relating to documentary practice<sup>165</sup> which also applies to my practice with moving-image based installation art.

“Asynchronicity questions how the interplay of sound and image can induce a more synaesthetic sense production, more corporeal experiences, and a more poetical knowledge. Asynchronicity creates an excess in meaning and knowledge that is specific to cinema.”

### **MATERIALITY/ BLACK MIRRORS / SILK /ALUMINISED GLASS.**

*The Sublime, Waving and Refuge* also use black mirrors, silk and alumised glass, and layout to explore different layers of narrativity and reflect indeterminacy.<sup>166</sup>

#### **BLACK MIRRORS**

*The Sublime* used single channel HD video and black glass to explore the promise and denial of the black mirror.<sup>167</sup> Images of glaciers, waterfalls and wild seascapes illustrating the Romantic notions of the sublime in Oswald’s text are projected through Perspex onto three large black glass panels. Like the original Claude Glass these reflected an idealised image and like the glass they also offered only a partial view. Situated in a small in-between gallery devoted to the Leith Ferry, which took Oswald to Iceland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the constricted site meant that it was impossible to see the whole image from any one angle. This accentuated both the fugitive nature of memory<sup>168</sup> and a sense of dissociation and displacement when the viewer can never see their reflection in the mirror.

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<sup>165</sup> Laurent Van Lancker, quoted in *Anthropology and Art Practice*, eds. Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (London, Oxford, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 1.

<sup>166</sup> *Tri-angulation* (2008) and *As the Crow Flies* (2010).

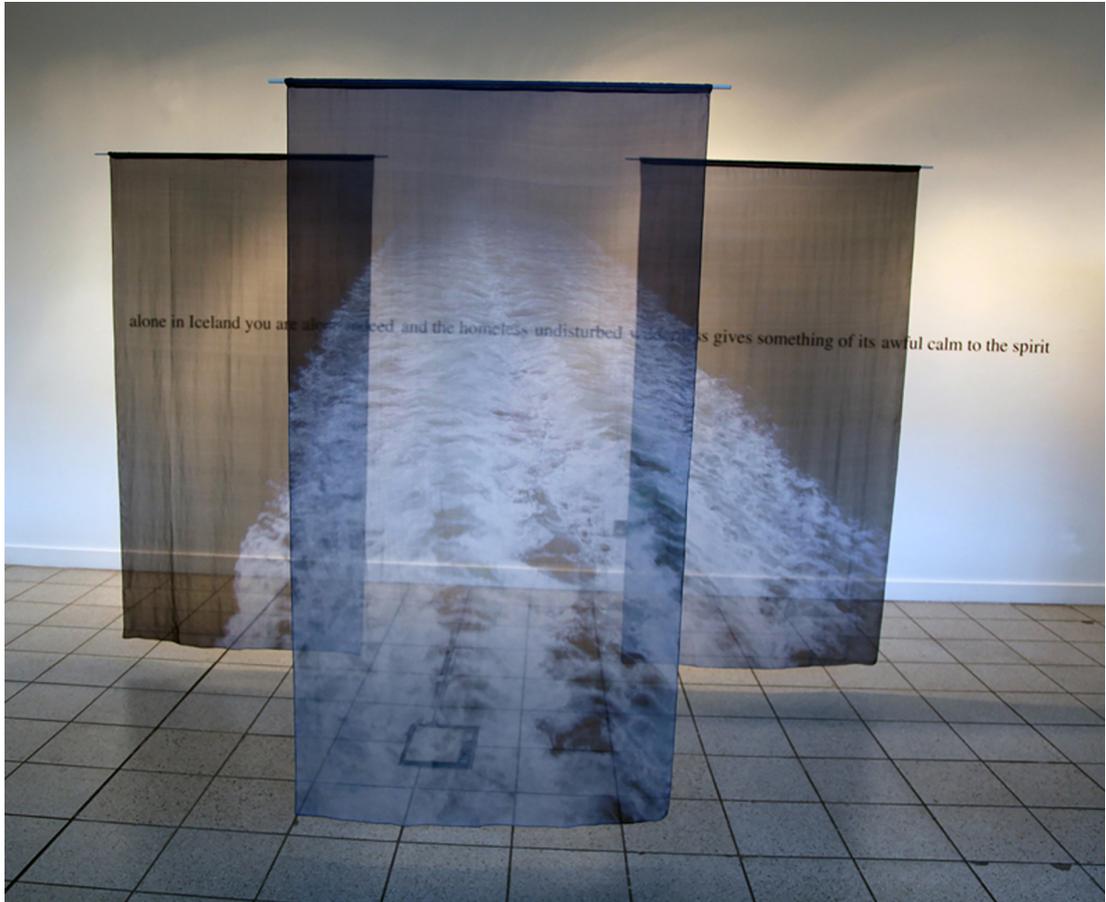
<sup>167</sup> The Claude glass or black mirror was originally used by 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century artists/travellers to reflect landscapes which resembled the romantic, classical painting by Claude Lorrain, (1600-1682). The viewer always faced away from the scene.

A slightly convex, blackened mirror, known as Claude glass. (1775-1780), Museum Number P.18-1972 (Collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78676/Claude-glass-unknown/).

<sup>168</sup> Arnaud Maillet, *The Claude Glass, Use and Meaning of the Black Mirror in Western Art*, tr. Jeff Fort (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

## SILK

*Waving*, comprising 9 semi-transparent printed silk panels, marked a transitional space between the moving image installations. The wall texts linking the Iceland texts are visible through the layers.



2.12: *Waving*, silk hangings, installation at London Gallery West, 2011/12.

In the installation at London Gallery West they were hung in offset layers moving slightly in the air suggesting the transience of memory. The expanded wake of the Iceland ferry and a rusting porthole of an abandoned whaler in Reykjavik harbour were separated by triple layered image of the waving woman. The physical layout encouraged the spectator to move between layers and reflect a relationship to the littoral as an in-between space.



2.13: *Waving*, silk hangings, Installation at London Gallery West, 2011/12.

### ALUMINISED GLASS

In *Refuge* video was projected through a series of scientifically coated aluminised glass, creating partial 2 way mirrors. These were separated by water filled vessels inside a modern vitrine. This methodology built on that used in the previous installation *Sent to Sea* in *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home*. It used reflection and refraction to fragment the images and in addition they appear and disappear, depending on the angle of view, echoing the sense of instability in stories of flight.<sup>169</sup>

In *Art and Artefact: the Museum as Medium*<sup>170</sup> Putnam examines the transformative potential of the vitrine to confers gravitas on the content and its<sup>171</sup> potential to displace and make objects enigmatic.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Aluminised glass was also used in my installations *CUSP* (2013) and *Amy, Emily, Emma and the Four Times of Day* (2014).

<sup>170</sup> James Putnam, *Art and Artefact: The Museum as Medium* (London, New York: Thames and Hudson 2009),36.

<sup>171</sup> Lothar Baumgarten, *Unsettled Objects*, installation (Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 1968-9).

<sup>172</sup> Lothar Baumgarten, in *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999),94.

“the display of powerful objects in vitrines and the desire to make use of their energy for didactic exhibition displaces them and makes them enigmatic”.

While placement within the vitrine reinforces the fragility and importance of both *Refuge* and *Sent to Sea* they become enigmatic objects questioning the function of the vitrine as a safe dry space and breaking its boundaries through reflection and refraction of the videos.



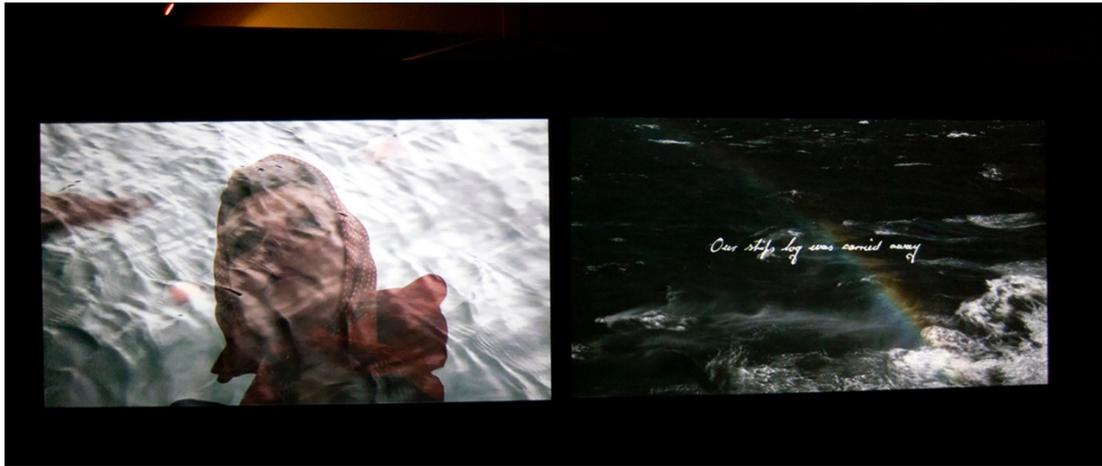
2.14: *Refuge*, installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.

Cornelia Parker and Tilda Swinton powerfully question the use of the vitrine in *The Maybe* (1995)<sup>173</sup> while *Rims Lips Feet* (1996) by Richard Wentworth at Castle Bowes<sup>174</sup> most successfully challenges the notion of the vitrine both as a safe container and one which confers value on its contents.

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<sup>173</sup> Cornelia Parker, and Tilda Swinton in *Art and Artifact, the Museum as Medium* James Putnam (London, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2009) 146-7. *The Maybe* | Serpentine Galleries. [www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/maybe,1995](http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/maybe,1995).

<sup>174</sup> Putnam, *Art and Artifact*, 6.



2.15: *Bound for Iceland*, installation, Aberdeen Maritime Museum, 2012.

### SITE SPECIFICITY AND INSTALLATION IN THE MUSEUM

There are many ways in which an artwork can be site specific. A common artistic approach is to produce work in direct response to location so that the materiality and spatiality as well as the cultural history of the site is integral to the installation. This approach is seen in works as diverse as Ian Hamilton Finlay's sculpture garden *Little Sparta*,<sup>175</sup> Rachel Whiteread's *House*, 1993<sup>176</sup> and *The Chapel of Light* in the Church of Bourbourg, created by Anthony Caro in 2010.<sup>177</sup> Other artists use projections and time based methodologies to create interventions in site. These may refer directly to historical trauma as in *The Writing on the Wall* 1991-2<sup>178</sup> when Shimon Attie projected pre WW2 photographs of Jewish street life onto the walls of the places in Berlin where they once lived and *Portraits of Exile; Copenhagen* June-July, 1995<sup>179</sup> when light boxes were submerged in the canal with images relating to contemporary and historic stories of refugees and rescue. One relates to the rescue of Danish Jews taken by fishing boat to Sweden in 1943. In *Alter Bahnhof* video

<sup>175</sup> <https://www.littlesparta.org.uk/>.

<sup>176</sup> <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/house/>.

<sup>177</sup> *The Chapel of Light in the church of Bourbourg- Le Choeur de Lumiere dans L'eglise de Bourbourg*. It was commissioned and developed for the site, which suffered extensive bombing in WW2. Visited during an artist's residency in Dunkerque in 2013.

<sup>178</sup> James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge, After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (Newhaven, London :Yale University Press, 2000), 62-7. [shimonattie.net/portfolio/the-writing-on-the-wall/](http://shimonattie.net/portfolio/the-writing-on-the-wall/).

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. [shimonattie.net/portfolio/portraits-of-exile/](http://shimonattie.net/portfolio/portraits-of-exile/).

walk Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller used pre-recorded material shot on the site of a former deportation station which required the spectator to physically explore the location and its history.<sup>180</sup> While my work only tangentially references historical events it encapsulate some of the affective responses to displacement and otherness found in these works. Other artists such as Christie Brown (referenced in chapter 1) who create work in direct response to museums and collections are also important to contextualise the approach taken to the installation of *WAVE/ING* exhibited in the Aberdeen Maritime Museum.

For both *Mariners and Migrants: in Search of Home* and *WAVE/ING* the museum was the location of the final exhibition of the work and the container of the archives which informed its content. *WAVE/ING* was conceived as an intervention in the Aberdeen Maritime Museum whose rationale is based on explication and clear historical timelines. While referencing some identifiable places and stories the artworks were a poetic and affective response to both and necessitated synergy between location, objects and installations in the museum. This was achieved by working closely with curators, archivists and maritime historians.<sup>181</sup> The siting of each element was carefully considered in relation to the permanent holdings and the idiosyncratic layout of the museum and shown in relevant spaces alongside ships models, maritime objects and historic signage. Sound evoking memory, loss and longing was a core element of all the video installations. Field recordings of waves on shorelines, a chapel bell, bubbling mud were interwoven with carefully selected sequences of music ; a traditional Shetland lullaby,<sup>182</sup> plangent contemporary fiddle music<sup>183</sup> and *Wanderleid* by Rheinberger. The sound drifted through the galleries creating a journey through the artworks and resonated with the permanent collections. This created a positive interaction, adding different

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<sup>180</sup> Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, // *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* (Documenta 13, 2012. <https://www.cardiffmiller.com>).

<sup>181</sup> This relationship is explored in *Art and Artifact; The Museum as Medium*, James Putnam, 2009.

<sup>182</sup> Elizabeth Morewood. - *Traditional Shetland Songs* [CD] TSSEM2009.

<sup>183</sup> *Missing You, White Nights*, Catriona McKay and Chris Stout. [www.mckaystoutmusic.co.uk/white-nights](http://www.mckaystoutmusic.co.uk/white-nights).

historical valences to the artworks and animating the historic artefacts to make new potential readings of both.

### ***WAVE/ING*: CONCLUSION**

In *WAVE/ING* I developed effective ways of using asynchronous video projections in response to specific texts. The resulting installations transformed the historic narratives of engaged outsiders and exiles to explore experiences of contemporary otherness and became open texts which allowed for multiple interpretation by the spectator. I developed a particular way of using black and aluminised glass to viscerally explore liminality and through layering of silk and text addressed the borderland of the littoral. The siting of the work within the Aberdeen Maritime Museum enhanced the historic resonances of the work while enabling new responses from a broad audience.



2.16: Alfred Craig, on right. (Craig family Archive).

### CHAPTER 3: THE CIRCLE AND THE VOID



3.1: *Dear Child*, exhibition invite.

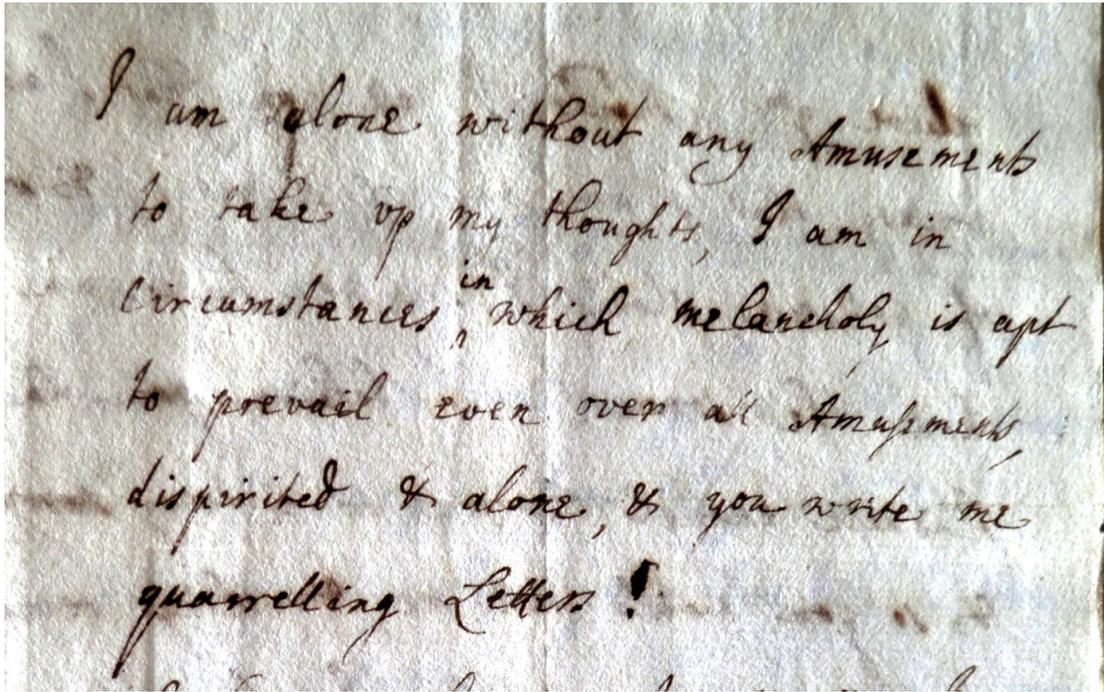
#### **DEAR CHILD**<sup>184</sup>

##### INSTALLATION COMPRISING:

1. *THE (M)OTHER*. HD video, 7.41mins.
2. *THE EXILE*. HD video, 8.57mins.
3. *THE PERFORMER*. HD video, 7.32mins.
4. 9 PRINTED SILK PANELS, 140 x 300cms.
5. STEREO SOUND. Itri Buselik Beste '*Her Gördüğü Periye Gönül Müptela Olur*' Ertan Tekin & Murat Aydemir & Çağ Erçağ.<sup>185</sup> On Itri and Bach.

<sup>184</sup> Exhibited London Gallery West, 2017.  
Exhibited ASC Studios, Chaplin Centre, 2016.  
Funded by University of Westminster.

<sup>185</sup> Buhurizade Mustafa Itri, (1640 - 1712) was (possibly) a member of the Mevlevi, part of a Sufi Order also known as whirling dervishes. Yaprak Melike and Şehvar Beşiroğlu, *Recent representations of the music of the Mevlevi Order of Sufism* (Journal of interdisciplinary music studies, vol.6, issue 2, 2012)137-150.  
[http://musicstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Uyar\\_JIMS\\_12060202.pdf](http://musicstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Uyar_JIMS_12060202.pdf).



3.2: Detail, letter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1713, Harrowby Manuscripts National Archives.

### **DEAR CHILD**

This chapter focuses on *Dear Child* a three channel video and mixed media installation initially inspired by the life and familial letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) writer, poet and proto-feminist.<sup>186</sup> The artwork is a personal reflection on key threads in these records, her complex response to motherhood, the masquerades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Beau Monde<sup>187</sup> and the two sided nature of independence in exile. It uses the affective resonances of these historical texts to echo the contemporary effects of absence, maternal loss, conflicted /masked identities and the protective strategies of performativity found in the late-discovered adoptee. This is reflected in the artwork through movement and gesture in three interpretive dance sequences and the multi layering of asynchronous projections onto printed silk hangings. Contrasting ideas around power and

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<sup>186</sup> Other writings include Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, with Alexander Pope and John Gay, *Six Town Eclogues, A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes. By Several Hands. Vol. I* (London: printed by J. Hughs, for R. and J. Dodsley, 1763, 1st ed. 1758). Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters, 1763*. Eds. Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Editions, 2013).

<sup>187</sup> Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

embodied experiences are developed imagistically and materially through the use of coal and silk.

The chapter demonstrates how Irigaray's theories around the response of the girl child to abandonment and dereliction<sup>188</sup> in addition to the concept of the Matrixial developed by Bracha Ettinger<sup>189</sup> and explored by Griselda Pollock<sup>190</sup> may be applied to the artwork. How some other artists have approached the mother daughter relationship including the personal response to abandonment seen in the late text based work of Louise Bourgeois.<sup>191</sup> The narrative ruptures of dissociation and "narrative reconstructions of memory... offering vistas that reveal and conceal"<sup>192</sup> are an important influence on the structure of the installation.

#### **PRE-AMBLE: LOUISE BOURGEOIS**

The artwork of Louise Bourgeois is particularly relevant as she reveals and conceals her personal experiences through her multi-form practices and processes. Her exploration of the 'mother' from spider *Maman*<sup>193</sup> to handsewn figures and the abandoning mother in the woven text work *I Am Afraid* maps the terrain of attraction and resistance, attachment/detachment within a conflicted maternal site.

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<sup>188</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, tr. Gillian Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>189</sup> Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Feminist Arts and Histories Network, Dept. of Fine Art, University of Leeds, 1995). *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

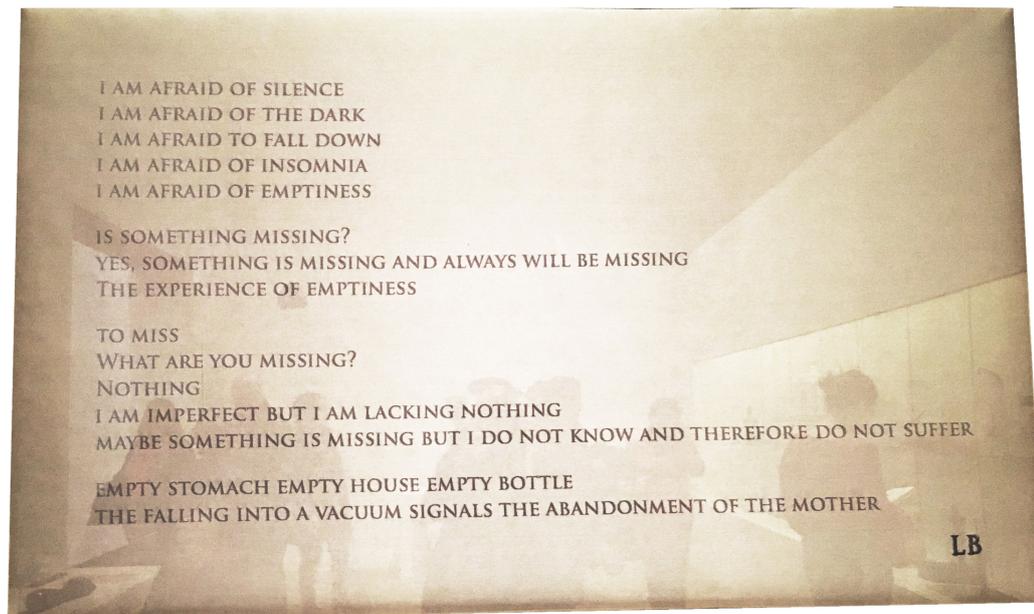
<sup>190</sup> Pollock, *After-affects | After-images; Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*.

<sup>191</sup> Louise Bourgeois, (1911-2010) *I Am Afraid*, (2009) in Artist Room (Tate Modern Gallery, 2016. [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bourgeois-i-am-afraid-al00341](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bourgeois-i-am-afraid-al00341)).

<sup>192</sup> Kirmayer, *Landscapes of Memory*, in *Tense Past; Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, eds. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, 182.

<sup>193</sup> *Maman*, Bronze Stainless Steel and Marble (1999).

(<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bourgeois-maman-t12625>).



3.3: *I Am Afraid*, Louise Bourgeois, 2005, exhibited, Artist Rooms, Tate Gallery, 2016.

*I Am Afraid*, based on her archive of journal notes and poetic writings was made in 2005 when Bourgeois was 94. It is a direct confrontation of trauma and its reparation through artwork. It also identifies the abandoning mother as the root of inner emptiness. As she writes “Something is missing and will always be missing”, which relates directly to my personal experience of loss and the “Windy Place right at the core of my heart”<sup>194</sup> and is central to the making of *Dear Child*. *I Am Afraid* also encapsulates the dichotomy of the older woman both afraid of abandonment yet “lacking nothing”, which has a direct correlation with the later writings of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, simultaneously liberated and isolated, who also lost her own mother at the age of four. The final line of the woven text “The falling into a vacuum signals the abandonment of the mother”, relates to the sense of the void when all is lost. This is both personally affecting and with its sense of movement and falling relates to the gradual disappearance into darkness which is a key component of *Dear Child*. In the videos the dancer moves in and out of pools of light and in the final installation after passing through layers of silk the projections appear as ghostly shadows on the surrounding black drapes.

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<sup>194</sup> Jackie Kay, *Red Dust Road* (London: Picador, 2011) 45, also Jackie Kay, *The Adoption Papers* (Hexham, Northumberland, UK: Bloodaxe Book, 1991).

## THE MATRIXIAL

The link to an unknown but intimate past, which inflects *Dear Child*, as a response to notions of the (m)other, motherhood, absence, identity and loss relates to the concept of the Matrixial developed by Bracha Ettinger<sup>195</sup>. She suggests that pre and perinatal experience and prelinguistic responses affect the entry into the symbolic and subject formation rather than the phallogentricity of Freud or Lacan.<sup>196</sup> This Lacanian approach was taken by Mary Kelly in *Post Partum Document* a key art/work/ text exploring motherhood and relationship to the child originally exhibited at the ICA in 1976<sup>197</sup>. She explored ideas of phallic castration, the child as the phallic object for the mother and the separation between them being configured in terms of castration theories. While this was an important analysis and engaged with the physicality of the child's development from stained nappies to early written language it centred on the experience of the mother/artist. Although psychoanalytic theories of lack and loss can be applied to the post adoptive experience when I re-discovered my adoptive status my first response was of visceral loss, absence of the smell, the touch and sound of my birth mother. An animal sense of perinatal closeness and post-natal loss which is touched on by Bowlby in his work on childhood response to loss.<sup>198</sup> In *Dear Child* the sense of longing for the lost object is expressed through gesture, slow movement and looped music to create a contemplative but also potentially melancholy space.

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<sup>195</sup> Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze*,(1995),*The Matrixial Borderspace* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>196</sup> By exploring co-affect and transsubjectivity in Bracha L. Ettinger, *Matrixial Trans-subjectivity* (Theory Culture and Society, Volume: 23 issue: 2-3,2006) 218-222, Ettinger also critiques the object relations theories of Melanie Klein, which identified the child's initial paranoid/schizoid phase in response to the 'good' and 'bad' mother/breast, explored in *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*, eds. Elizabeth Bott Spillius, Jane Milton, Penelope Garvey, Cyril Couve and Deborah Steiner (London:Routledge, 2011). <http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/theory> and Donald Winnicott's concept of the 'good-enough mother'. Donald Winnicott, *Transitional objects and transitional phenomena* (International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 34,1953),89-97.

<sup>197</sup> Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

<sup>198</sup> John Bowlby, *Grief and Mourning in infancy and early childhood* (The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Volume 15, Issue 1, 1960 ), 9-52.

This embodied sense of loss also resonates with Ettinger's theorisation of the pre and peri-natal experience when the internal and external connection with the maternal body creates a "borderlinking to the m/other's psychic environment"<sup>199</sup> Ettinger sees the matrixial as a space where prenatal sharing "shapes postnatal subjectivity, ethics and aesthetics with non-phallic potentiality".<sup>200</sup> This delineates the space of my own lack experienced as a tear in the fabric of this borderlinking creating a void which is also a potential space of creativity. It is reflected in the more essentialist view of Nancy Verrier in the *Primal Wound*<sup>201</sup> which she suggests occurs after adoption when the child is taken from the birth mother and can only be 'cured' through reunion with her. This is challenged through the work of Elizabeth Hughes who suggests other ways of attaining a sense of wholeness.<sup>202</sup> Ettinger's concept of a matrixial zone makes sense of my own psychic and physical experiences and relates more closely to my own practices of making. Her very subtle and sensuous approach to a mother /child relationship in addition to Irigaray's exploration of the specific responses and gestures of the girl child when facing abandonment, real or imaginary,<sup>203</sup> is related to both the materiality and content of *Dear Child*. A more fluid response to liminal experiences and spaces, which underpins much of the physical nature of my work can be linked to Ettinger's feminist reading of entry into language.

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<sup>199</sup> Pollock, *After-Affect / After-image in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, 70.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., Preface, xxiii.

<sup>201</sup> Nancy Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the adopted Child* (Lafayette, CA: Verrier Publishing, 1994).

<sup>202</sup> Elizabeth Hughes, *Adopted Women and Biological Fathers; Re-imagining Stories of Origin and Trauma* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>203</sup> Luce Irigaray 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis' in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. G.C. Gill, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 89-104. Explored by Hilary Robinson in, *Louise Bourgeois's Cells: Looking at Bourgeois through Irigaray's Gesturing Towards the Mother*, in, n.paradoxa : international feminist art journal, ed. Katy Deepwell (online issue no.3, May 1997), 17-27. <http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaissue3.pdf>.

### LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU: ONE OF THE MOTHERS I NEVER HAD



3.4: *Dear Child, l-r (M)other, Exile, Performer*, Installation, London Gallery West, 2017.

*Dear Child* was created in response to personally significant elements found in the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. An aristocratic woman in a patriarchal society, constrained from publishing by both class and gender she left a unique body of letters and writings which illuminate her personal, political and performative selves. She uses a number of styles and ‘voices’<sup>204</sup> within the correspondence broadly divided into the public persona and private woman/wife/mother. My birth name is co-incidentally Stuart Wortley<sup>205</sup> (unrelated ) and this may be read as a semi-ironic reference to the Freudian concept of the Family Romance<sup>206</sup> when the non-adopted child fantasises about being adopted by higher status parents. In general this is not a fantasy shared by

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<sup>204</sup> Cynthia Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and The Eighteenth Century Familiar Letter* (Athens, Georgia : University of Georgia Press, 2010),10.

<sup>205</sup> Later descendants of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu included artist Archibald Stuart Wortley (1849-1905).

<sup>206</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Family Romances*, In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume IX, 237–241, 1906-1908, also T. M. Horner & Rosenberg, E. B. *The Family Romance: A Developmental-Historical Perspective* (*Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 8,2, 1991), 131-148.

adoptees<sup>207</sup> These personal letters born of absence, abandonment, exile, love and liberation and her participation in the beau monde of London and Venice were used as the basis for the development of dance sequences and digitally printed silk panels. The music used in the final installation was composed by Buhurizade Mustafa Itri (1640-1712) a near contemporary of both Bach (1685-1750) and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She spent two years in Turkey when her husband was the Ambassador. (1716-18) Her Turkish Embassy Letters were published after her death<sup>208</sup>.

### THE FAMILIAL LETTERS

The three volume collection of the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu by Robert Halsband<sup>209</sup> and the work of Isobel Grundy<sup>210</sup> provided an overview of her life and writings which enabled focussed research of her original handwritten letters in the Harrowby Manuscripts Archives at Sandon Hall<sup>211</sup>. The letters vary in tone and intentionality and through both style and emotional content she adopted many different 'performative selves' in her writing and this fluidity had a significant influence in the development of the final installation.

'performance-the visible, gestural, mannered behaviour presented to others-shapes and fashions a fluid identity'<sup>212</sup>

While writings related to her public life and persona are immensely rich there are two particular sequences of intimate personal letters from different periods of her

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<sup>207</sup> Herbert Weider. *The family Romance Fantasie of Adopted children* (Psychoanalytic quarterly, vol 46, 1977, issue 2 pubd. Online, 20 Nov, 2017), 185-200.

<sup>208</sup> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters.1763*, eds. Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Editions, 2013).

<sup>209</sup> Robert Halsband, ed. *The complete letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu Vol 1 1708-20* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) *Vol. 11, 1721-51, Vol. 111 1752-62* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press 1967).

<sup>210</sup> Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1999).

<sup>211</sup> National Archives, Harrowby Manuscripts Trust ,Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762)poet and letter writer, corresp, notes (59 vols), literary MSS (c140 items) and papers vols.74-81.

<sup>212</sup> Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth Century Familiar Letter*,10.

life which became the initial inspiration for *Dear Child*. As Cynthia Lowenthal points out, letters signal both presence and absence and the extensive collection contains the letters she wrote and not the replies so there is always an absence at their heart which accentuates the depth of her isolation at key moments.

As another layer of this absence Sven Spieker notes that 'Archives do not record experience so much as its absence; they mark the point where an experience is missing from its proper place.... 'Archives ...remind us ...of what we have never possessed in the first place.<sup>213</sup> This slippage and the impossibility of ever healing the absence provides the interstitial space where the text may be reconfigured and new meanings can be made.

I selected potential 'narratives' founded on absences in the letters which resonated with my own absences and narrative gaps. These echo the lacunae identified by Kirmayer, which occur as a response to trauma,

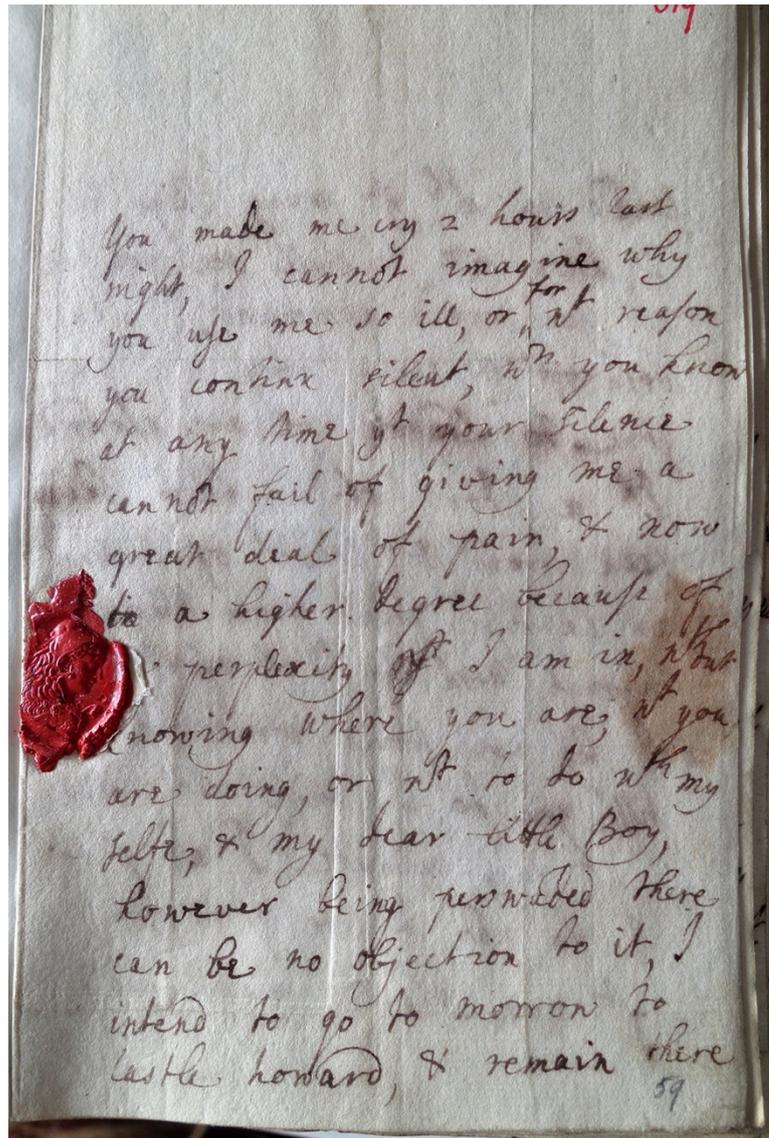
'dissociation is a rupture in narrative, but it is also maintained by narrative because the shape of the narrative around the dissociation protects (reveals and conceals) the gap.'<sup>214</sup>

While this may indicate a specific 'lost' narrative the meaning of the letters in the final installation are intentionally fluid and open to other responses.

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<sup>213</sup> Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 2008), 3.

<sup>214</sup> Kirmayer, *Landscapes of memory: Trauma, narrative and dissociation*. In *Tense Past: Cultural Essays on Memory and Trauma*, 181.



3.5: Detail, letter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1713.  
Harrowby Manuscripts, National Archives.<sup>215</sup>

The first letters were written by Lady Mary in 1713-14 to her husband Edward Wortley when she was a young mother semi-abandoned in the countryside while he

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<sup>215</sup> "You made me cry 2 hours last night, I cannot imagine why you use me so ill, or for what reason you continue silent when you know at any time that your silence cannot fail of giving me a great deal of pain, and now to a higher degree because of perplexity I am in, without knowing where you are, what you are doing, or what to do with myself and my dear little Boy, however being persuaded there can be no objection to it, I intend to go tomorrow to Castle Howard, & remain there."

pursued his political career and commercial interests as coal mine owner.<sup>216</sup> The later letters from 1746-56 were written to her daughter Mary (later Mary Stuart, Lady Bute 1718-94)<sup>217</sup> who she did not see for twenty years during her (self-imposed) exile and paradoxical freedom in Italy. Both series illustrate absence and longing and the early writing is full of passion and the sense of a (conflicted) personal relationship. She writes eloquently of her frustration and pain,

You made me cry 2 hours last night, I cannot imagine why you use me so ill, or for what reason you continue silent when you know at any time that your silence cannot fail of giving me a great deal of pain.<sup>218</sup> (Fig 5).

The later letters reflect her own projected image of her daughter and unseen grandchildren. This 'ghost' or fabricated family mirrors my own undiscovered/rediscovered birth family whose real histories and lives are forever elusive. Max Frisk identified these as 'hereditary ghosts'<sup>219</sup> and it is posited that there is a "spectral presence of birth family in the adoptee",<sup>220</sup> which may be helped through visual records. In common with Lady Mary I had no visual referents to the missing family. This is a situation that is specific to someone subjected to the closed adoption system when all traces of the birth family are obliterated rather than later practices where links to the birth family are common.<sup>221</sup> This sense of an elusive/ intangible ghostlike presences is realised in the final installation with projections through layers of semi transparent silk.

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<sup>216</sup> in 1726 Edward Wortley became a founder member of the Grand Allies, a North Eastern coal cartel. He was an MP for Huntingdon and Ambassador for the Ottoman Empire, 1716-18.

<sup>217</sup> In 1736 she married John Stuart 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Bute, Prime Minister 1762 and became Mother to 6 daughters and 5 sons.

<sup>218</sup> National Archives, Harrowby Manuscripts Trust, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) corresp., notes (59 vols.), literary MSS (c140 items) and papers vols., 74-81.

<sup>219</sup> Max Frisk, *Identity Problems and confused conceptions of the Genetic Ego in Adopted Children during Adolescence* (Acta Paedopsychiatrica 31, 1964), 6-12.

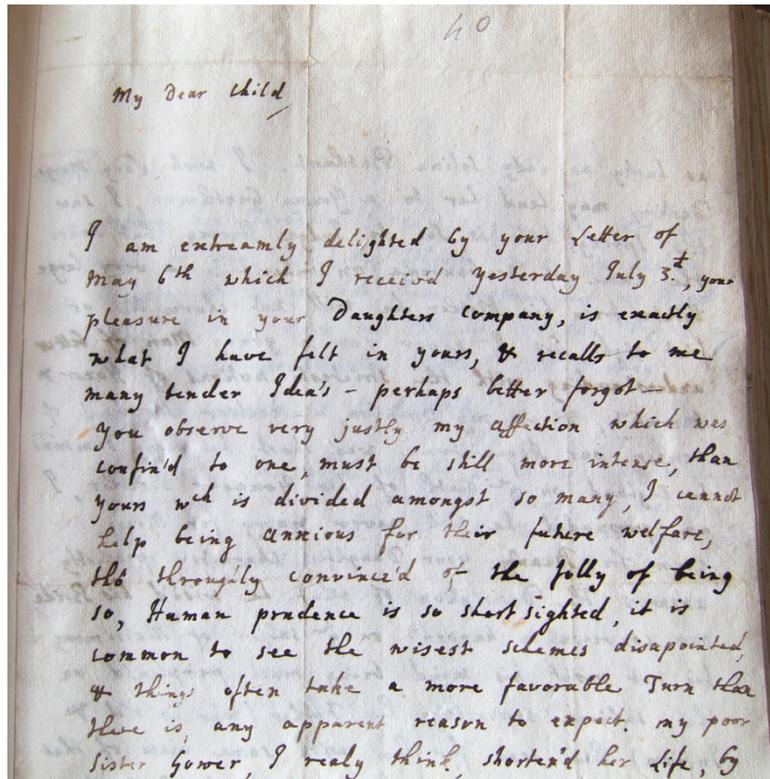
<sup>220</sup> Betty Jean Lifton, *Ghosts in the Adopted Family* ([Psychoanalytic Inquiry, A Topical Journal for Mental Health Professionals](#), Volume 30, - Issue 1: [The Adoption Journey](#), 2009).

<sup>221</sup> The closed adoption system was discontinued in England in 1972.



3.6: Trial projection, *Dear Child*.

In 1746 Lady Mary was living in Gottolengo Italy in semi-retirement. There she made a garden, raised silk worms and wrote many letters to her daughter Lady Bute. All of these elements are echoed in the installation. Lady Mary also became an abandoning mother, she was increasingly estranged from her son and only later bonding at a distance with her daughter.



3.7: Detail letter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1746-56, Harrowby Manuscripts, National Archives.

In this letter she infers that her daughter is an only child, her son is conveniently lost.

Your pleasure in your daughters' company, is exactly what I have felt in yours, and recalls for me many tender ideas- perhaps better forgot- You observe very justly my affection which was confined to one, must be still more intense, than yours which is divided amongst so many, I cannot help being anxious for their future welfare, tho' thoroughly convinc'd of the folly of being so, Human prudence is so short sighted, it is common to see the wisest schemes disappointed, & things often take a more favorable Turn than there is, any apparent reason to expect. my poor sister Gower, I really think, shorten'd her life, by

This is signified in the video the *(M)other* through the gesture of cradling the absent child.

The considered orthography of her later letters are in marked contrast to the open expressive style of the earlier ones as she reinvented herself as a free agent in charge of her own destiny with advanced theories about the education of girls.

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<sup>222</sup> National Archives, Harrowby Manuscripts, Trust Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), corresp., notes (59 vols.), literary MSS (c140 items) and papers vols., 74-81.

However in correspondence with other exiles, especially the Jacobite Sir James Steuart,<sup>223</sup> she wrote of her isolation and distance from the aristocratic milieu where she had once shone. This subtextual duality in the letters to her daughter creates a particular tension in addition to the many silences due to war and the vagaries of the postal service.

### BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND FILMING



3.8: Trial visual, Pierrepont Memorial Tomb, Borbach Chantry, West Dean. Ancestral home of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

In order to develop a more in-depth response to the letters which informed the final artwork I travelled and filmed in several key sites in England and Italy. This included Middlethorpe Hall where the early letters were written, Castle Howard where she fled with her young son in 1713, Lovere and Gottolengo. These journeys provided an understanding of her isolation as travelling even short distances in the

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<sup>223</sup> As a Jacobite exile he only returned to Scotland in 1763 and was pardoned in 1771. Lady Mary's letters to him date from 1758.

early 18<sup>th</sup> century was challenging and often dangerous in poor weather when carriages frequently overturned.<sup>224</sup>

### **UN DOMAINE A SOI/ A PLACE OF HER OWN<sup>225</sup>**

Under the 18<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal system Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was denied agency even as an aristocratic woman. She was dependent on either father or husband for support and as an aristocrat was not able to publish freely or make money from her own work. This still has some contemporary relevance. She was only able to act freely during her exile in Italy and created a garden in Gottolengo. This represented what Virginia Woolf would later call *A Room of Ones Own*,<sup>226</sup> the place and space of creativity and dreaming.

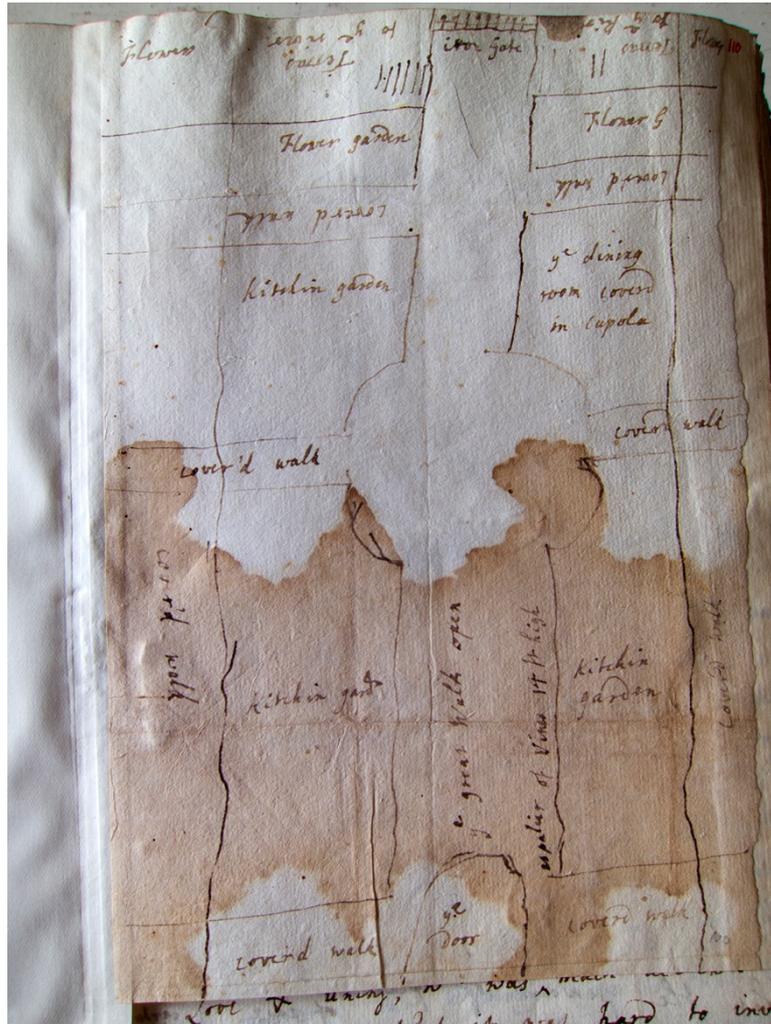
Her hand drawn plan of the garden found in the Harrowby archives forms an important part of final installation.

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<sup>224</sup> Robert Halsband, ed. *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Vol. 1: 1708–1720. (1965), Robert Halsband, ed. *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Vol. 2: 1721–1751. (1966).

<sup>225</sup> Ève-Marie Wagner. *Un jardin en Avignon (1743-1746) : Lady Mary Wortley Montagu et la création d'un domaine à soi*, In ( XVII- XVIII. Bulletin de la société d'études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. N°49, 1999), 341-359. doi : 10.3406/xvii.1999.2114 . This also relates to an earlier personal space, a tower in Avignon.

<sup>226</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Vintage Classics, Random House, First pub. London: Hogarth Press, 1929).



3.9: Sketch of Garden in Gottolengo, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1746, Harrowby Manuscripts, National archives.<sup>227</sup>

<sup>227</sup> National Archives, Harrowby Manuscripts Trust, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, (1689-1762) corresp, notes (59 vols), literary MSS (c140 items) and papers vols. 74-81.



3.10: *Dear Child*, Installation, London Gallery West,2017.

### ***THE (M)OTHER: THE EXILE: THE PERFORMER.***

The three videos in the final installation relate to particular events in the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu which have specific but overlapping personal significance. The *(M)other* sequence relates to her role as abandoned and abandoning mother, the *Exile* explores solitude and identity and the tension between agency and isolation.

The *Performer* represents life as part of the beau monde and the reparative nature of the circular movement made by the girl child as she responds to the loss of the mother as identified by Irigaray.<sup>228</sup>

The mask referencing Lady Mary's time as an exile in Italy when she used one to disguise her smallpox marked face also symbolises the double or hidden identity of the adoptee<sup>229</sup> and the potential freedom this may offer. Irigaray also identifies the

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<sup>228</sup> Luce Irigaray 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis' in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. G.C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press,1993), 98.

<sup>229</sup> Betty Jean Lifton, *Journey of The Adopted Self: A Search for Wholeness*, (1994) 49-50, also *Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience* (1979),8,34-38.

mask and masquerade as a positive strategy for developing a more unfettered space.<sup>230</sup>

In these video sequences there are slippages between identification and objectification, identifying simultaneously with the lost child and the cradling mother and with the circling dancer or the unseen partner and the solitary woman viewed and viewing who walks over coals. The contiguity of wedding silk and coal symbolises both privilege and constraint. Lady Mary benefitted from the oppression of the coal miners<sup>231</sup> but was also constrained by her gender and the counter-intuitive silencing of her voice during her lifetime due to her class.



3.11: *Dear Child*, Installation, London Gallery West, 20017.

The three videos were shot in slow motion against a black background and floor. This is replicated in the final installation with black drapes covering the walls. The

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<sup>230</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is Not One*, tr., Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) also Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray; The Politics of Art by Women* (London, New York: L.B. Tauris, 2006) 42.

<sup>231</sup> Edward Wortley's wealth was derived from the Durham coalfields. Montagu, Edward Wortley (1678-1761), of Wortley ( Yorks. | History ... [www.historyofparliamentonline.org](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org) > Research > Members > 1690-1715).

lighting plan was developed to suggest an 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century chiaroscuro painterly effect with pools of light or tightly focussed spotlights used to illuminate key moments and gestures. The painting of *The Newborn*, by Georges de La Tour,<sup>232</sup> was referenced for colour and lighting of close up sequences and for the particular response of mother to child. The silk costumes worn by the dancer were loosely designed in response to sumptuous 18<sup>th</sup> century Turkish- inspired overdresses worn by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the painting by Jonathan Richardson 1726.<sup>233</sup> The use of a wind machine during the filming of the dance sequences enhanced the shimmer and flow of the silk echoing the painted fabric. The circular movements were devised with reference to the rhythm of Buselik Beste 'Her Gördüğü Periyeye Gönül Müptela Olur' by Itri. The final sound is recorded on one video which is then looped to create a meditative space.

#### THE USE OF INTERPRETIVE DANCE

*Dear Child* used interpretive dance to explore the fluid relationship between the different personas adopted by Lady Mary in her letters which reflect the labile status of the adoptee. The three short sequences the *(M)other*, the *Exile* and the *Performer* were choreographed in response to key strands found in the letters. They were refined during a series of workshops with the dancer and a number of simple gestures and movements were developed which acted as metaphors for both the various life stages of Lady Mary and the experiences of the adoptee. Each sequence is framed by absence, of a child in the *(M)other*, a partner in the *Performer* and the self, reflected in the black mirror, in the *Exile*.<sup>234</sup> While each sequence is discrete the gestures are interrelated and overlap to create different synergies in the final installation. The use of interpretive dance was influenced by the affective work of practitioners of New Dance including Emilyn Claid<sup>235</sup> and the pioneering work of

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<sup>232</sup> Georges de La Tour, *The Newborn*, 1649 (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, Rennes, France, <https://mba.rennes.fr>).

<sup>233</sup> Jonathan Richardson, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 1726 (private collection Earl of Harrowby).

<sup>234</sup> This references use of the black mirror in other work and the Claude Glass.

<sup>235</sup> Emilyn Claid, *Yes? No! Maybe . . . Seductive Ambiguity in Dance* (London: Routledge, 2006).

Pina Bausch with the Tanztheater Wuppertal and her use of the personal experience of the dancer in improvisations.<sup>236</sup> I had a brief experience with New Dance and Contact Improvisation with Emilyn Claid at the X6 new dance collective studio in Butler's Wharf.<sup>237</sup> I had recently given birth and my improvisation was about the experience of stepping back into my own body and being present in the moment.



3.12: Hannah and Reuben, 2015.

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<sup>236</sup> Royd Climenhaga, *A Theater of Bodily Presence: Pina Bausch and Tanztheater Wuppertal*, in Nadine George-Graves ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater* (London, New York :Oxford University Press, 2015),213-235.

<sup>237</sup> Claid, *Yes? No! Maybe . . . Seductive Ambiguity in Dance*, the X6 legacy,53-60.

In order to replicate this embodied experience and as part of the symbolic work of mourning loss through gesture and ritual I first filmed the dancer, Hannah, in my studio holding her young son. This maternal gesture was recreated for the video *(M)other* and became the cradling of an absent child in a slow solitary circular dance. It is a repeated action of absence and longing which is briefly interrupted by a gesture of resignation.<sup>238</sup>



3.13: Charles Jervas, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 1715. (Chawton House Library)

So the loss may be constant but always contained. Griselda Pollock<sup>239</sup> identifies this use of an affective movement/moment in the film by Chantal Ackerman, *Tomorrow We Move*, 2005, when a gesture, a caress between the artist and her mother is reworked into a scripted piece and transforms the “lived burden of history” of the

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<sup>238</sup> Based on detail of an oil painting by Charles Jervas, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 1715 (<https://chawtonhouse.org>).

<sup>239</sup> Pollock, *After-affects / After-images; Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, 335-40.

older woman who experienced the concentration camps. This reparative gesture can be seen as suture between a conflicted past and a transformative present. My own use of gesture could be seen as an acknowledgement of the loss both of and by the birth mother. In Ackerman's film the gesture appears to "crystallize a shapeless haunting past",<sup>240</sup> in contrast mine gives shape to the haunting itself, which is multiplied through the projection. This is related to the concept of ghost families lost in adoption, "these ghosts spring from the unresolved grief, loss, and trauma that everyone has experienced. They represent the lost babies, the parents who lost them, and the parents who found them."<sup>241</sup>



3.14: Details, *Dear Child*, installation, London Gallery West, 2017.

The other sequences used in *Dear Child* emphasise different stages of loss and reparation. The *Exile* explores the search for the (lost) self in the black mirror, the touch of the lost child/mother through the tactile sensuousness of raw silk, and the sense of abandonment through the precarious steps over coal into the void.

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<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, 339.

<sup>241</sup> Betty Jean Lifton, *Ghosts in the Adopted Family* (Psychoanalytic Inquiry, Routledge, 2009), 30:1, 71-79. DOI: [10.1080/07351690903200176](https://doi.org/10.1080/07351690903200176).

The movements for the *Performer*<sup>242</sup> resemble a courtly dance as the dancer slowly whirls from darkness passing through pools of lights towards the camera. This sequence is as much about the shadow as the light and the sense of a flickering and half seen presence which reflects an unstable identity. Although the dancer still dances alone she has a celebratory response to the freedom possible with a hidden identity.



3.15: Detail, the *Performer*, studio shoot, 2015.

### THE CIRCLE

Two of the dance sequences, the *(M)other* and the *Performer*, use circular movements which relate to the the loss of the child /mother and the reparative nature of the gesture. This reflects those gestures of the girl child posited by Luce Irigaray<sup>243</sup> as her response to the absence/abandonment of the mother and entry into the symbolic. These circling movements can be related to both loss and restitution and the fluid sense of inside /outside space experienced by the girl child

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<sup>242</sup> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu spent a significant amount of time in Venice in 1739-40 and 1756-58. The mask worn by the dancer was bought in Venice in 2015.

<sup>243</sup> Luce Irigaray, '*Gesture in Psychoanalysis*' in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. G.C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 98. Also in Teresa Brennan ed. *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2002) 133.

in contrast to the binary response of the male child in Freud's description who throws and retrieves a reel, an object identified by Freud as symbolising the mother and used by the child to gain control over absence. As the girl child shares a similar body to the mother Irigaray posits that her entry into the symbolic is not related to otherness but of identification with the mother so when she is absent the child will try and recreate a feeling of comfort by turning or dancing in a circle. This is not only to protect her from the drastic effects of loss but also "the dance is also a way to create for herself a territory of her own in relation to the mother."<sup>244</sup>

The dancer as (*M*)other is potentially performing the movement, "which protects her from dereliction, from immediate effraction, from depression, from loss itself."<sup>245</sup> While the dancer as *Performer* without-a-partner can be seen as creating a "territory of her own", simply in relation to herself rather than the mother or even as a symbolic representation of a "domaine a soi." (domain/space of her own)

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<sup>244</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Gesture in Psychoanalysis*, 1987e 112, translation modified 1993g; 97-98, quoted in Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, 129.

<sup>245</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Gesture in Psychoanalysis*, translated by Elizabeth Guild, in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Teresa Brennan (New York: Routledge, 1989), 133.



3.16: Detail, *The Exile*, studio shoot, 2015.

### THE VOID

The concept of the Void is central to both personal experience and the development of the dance sequences. It is also connected to circular movement through the notion of spinning out of control which may occur in response to trauma. In his research on the later effects of infantile trauma Henry Krystal references this circular movement as an indicator of extreme distress on abandonment. He notes that,

“The infant searches for its mother in concentric circles of increasing radius, vocalizing in a way as to provoke pity and caring responses.”<sup>246</sup>

This centripetal action is the obverse of the protective action of Irigaray’s girl child, indicating the loss not only of the mother but potentially of the self, which leads directly to the void at the heart of traumatic loss.

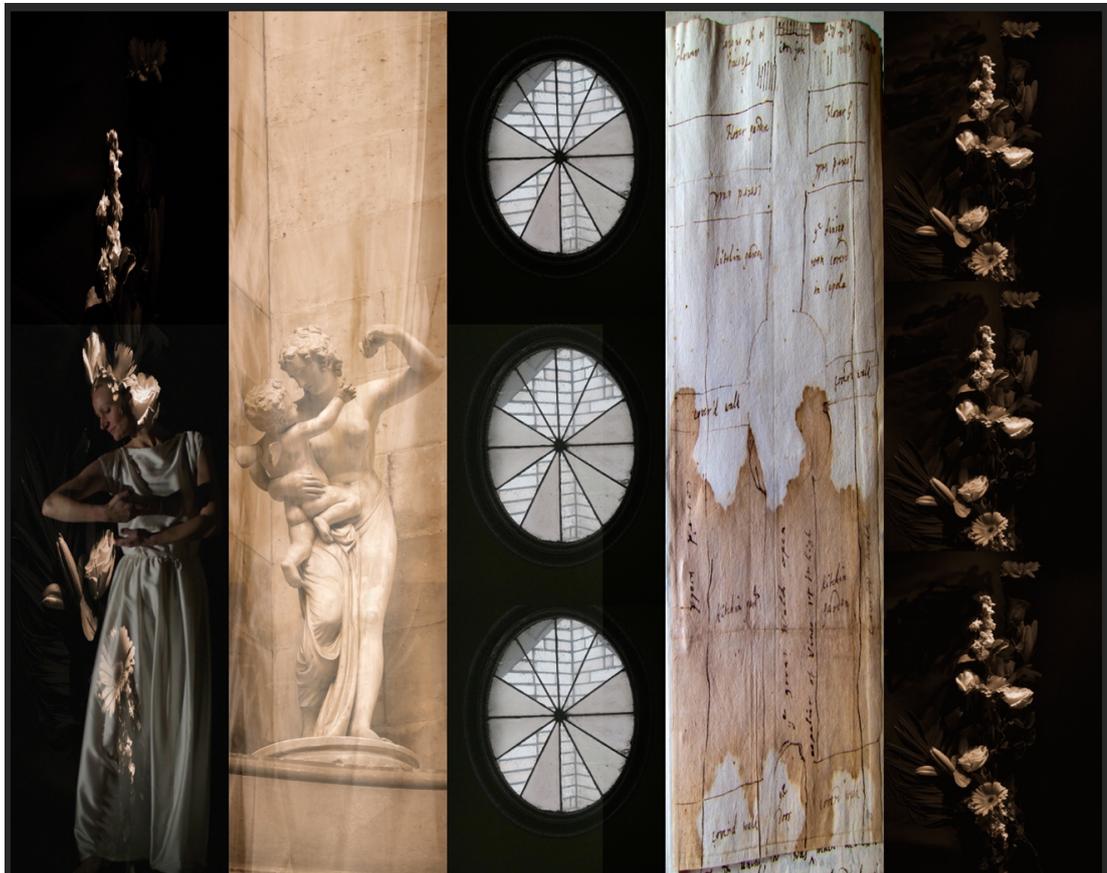
Within the dance sequences there are moments which encapsulate this tension between control and abandonment as the dancer as *Performer* whirls slowly from darkness through pools of light to finally drop a silk handkerchief onto coal and in the other screen walks over the coals into the darkness.

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<sup>246</sup> Henry Krystal, *Trauma and Ageing; a Thirty Year Follow up in Trauma Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 79.

This sense of the void directly reflects my own experience. As Caruth has identified trauma may result in psychic numbing<sup>247</sup> and “no trace of a registration of any kind is left in the psyche, instead, a void, a hole is found.”<sup>248</sup>

I was the parcel  
passed from hand to hand  
never knowing who would catch me  
or if I should fall into the darkness and be  
lost<sup>249</sup>



3.17: Mock-up of silk panels for installation, 2016.

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<sup>247</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma and Experience*, and Dori Laub, *Truth and Testimony; The Process and the Struggle*, in ed. Caruth, *Trauma Explorations in Memory*, 6.

<sup>248</sup> Henry Krystal, *Trauma and Ageing; a Thirty Year Follow up* in ed. Caruth, *Trauma Explorations in Memory*, 6.

<sup>249</sup> Jini Rawlings, *The Void*, from *Screen Memories*, installation, 1998.

## SILK AND VEILS

The mousseline silk panels are digitally printed with photographic copies of significant images related to the life of Lady Mary. These comprise a handwritten letter by Lady Mary, the sketch of the garden in Gottolengo, swags of flowers, referencing the flower paintings of Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750),<sup>250</sup> skylights in Wortley Hall and a statue of Psyche and Eros as mother and child, echoing the dancer cradling the absent child in the *(M)other*.<sup>251</sup>



3.19: *Dear Child*, Installation set up.

At a material and conceptual level silk is a key component of the final installation. There are references throughout Lady Mary's letters ranging from the early request for lustring (silk) from her sister Lady Marr married to a Jacobite exile in Paris to the

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<sup>250</sup> Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750) was one of the few successful professional women painters of her time with an international profile. Her works are held in the Rijksmuseum, the National Gallery, Fitzwilliam Museum and National Museum of Women in the Arts Washington, et al.

<sup>251</sup> Wortley Hall and Castle Howard, where Lady Mary stayed for safety after being left alone with her young son in York in 1713, were photographed during my research journey.

silkworms she raised on her farm in Gottolengo. Both silk cocoons and skeins of raw silk feature in the video and all the costumes are made of silk, white wedding silk for the (M)other; covered by a saffron wild-silk overskirt for the Exile and burnt umber wild-silk overskirt for the Performer, in addition to the semi-transparent mousseline silk used for the hangings in the final installation. The tension between luxury and labour is hinted at in the changing relationship between the winding of skeins and the shimmer of the costume. Silk is both an exceptionally strong and simultaneously fragile material, dependant on death for its creation with the potential for many different manifestations and symbolic meanings. With the transformation of the cocoon into woven silk It seems an appropriate material for suggesting a fluid identity. In *Chains: The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 2003, Liang Shaoji extends this trope of fragility and strength with an intensive examination of the role of silk and the relationship between nature and manufacture.<sup>252</sup>



3.20: *Dear Child*, Installation, London Gallery West, 2017.

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<sup>252</sup> Exhibited at Frieze London Art Fair, 2017.

## THE INSTALLATION

Ghostlike haunting; *unheimliche*.<sup>253</sup> The three asynchronous videos loops are projected side by side through 3 layers of printed silk panels, each layer is offset and comprises 3 separate images. This creates a fluid space where images appear or disappear and/or are in process of becoming. There are continually changing relationships between images and movement creating subtly different meanings. The veils of printed silk which hold traces of the image of the dancer as *(M)other*, *Performer* and *Exile* are a way of exploring /transforming the experience of dissociation explored in earlier chapters The surrounding darkness and slowness of the overlapping movements and the multi-layering reflects a visceral response to the slippages identified by Kirmeyer as, “the sliding of tectonic plates that undergird the self.”<sup>254</sup> The images slowly degrade through the layers leaving a ghostly trace on the black surround. This combination creates a fluid ‘borderspace’,<sup>255</sup> which can be explored by the spectator as they move between the layers.

The layout and symbolic and imagistic exploration of memory and history relates tangentially to the installation by Chiharu Shiota, *Labyrinth of Memory*,<sup>256</sup> mentioned in the Introduction. Encountering this artwork was a profoundly affecting experience, the large industrial space, formerly a sugar warehouse, was woven with spider webs of black thread, revealing/concealing, protecting/ensnaring lines of long hanging white dresses. The tension between material fragility and psychic weight was intensified by a changing relationship to the physical space as the installation was explored.

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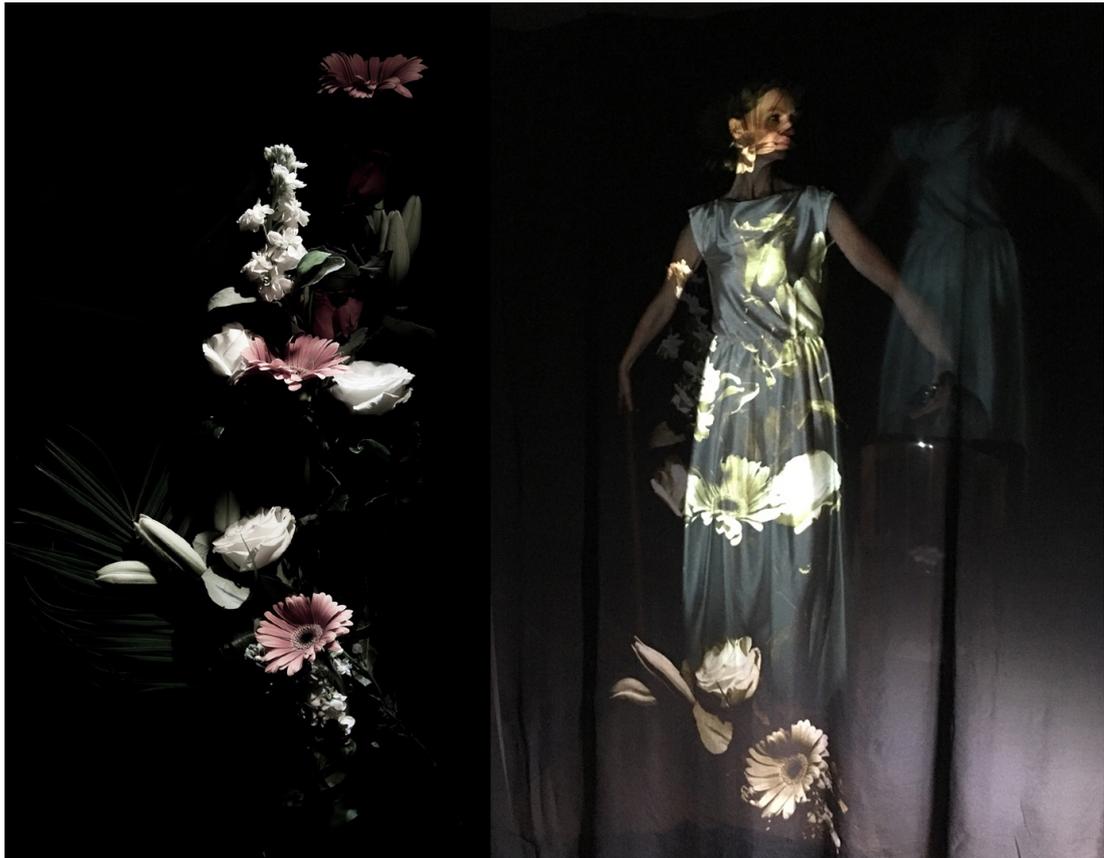
<sup>253</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, 1919. *The ‘Uncanny’. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, 217-256.

<sup>254</sup> Kirmeyer, *Landscapes of Memory in Tense Past; Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, eds. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, 181.

<sup>255</sup> Bracha Ettinger in Pollock, *After-affects / After-images; Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, 343.

<sup>256</sup> Chiharu Shiota, *Labyrinth of Memory* ( La Sucrière, Lyon, 2012)

The concept of Metramorphosis developed by Ettinger is particularly resonant as ... “the process of change in borderlines and thresholds between being and absence, memory and oblivion, *I* and *non-I*, a process of transgression and fading away. .... limits, borderlines, and thresholds conceived are continually transgressed or dissolved, thus allowing the creation of new ones.”<sup>257</sup>



3.21: *Dear Child*, trial Installation.

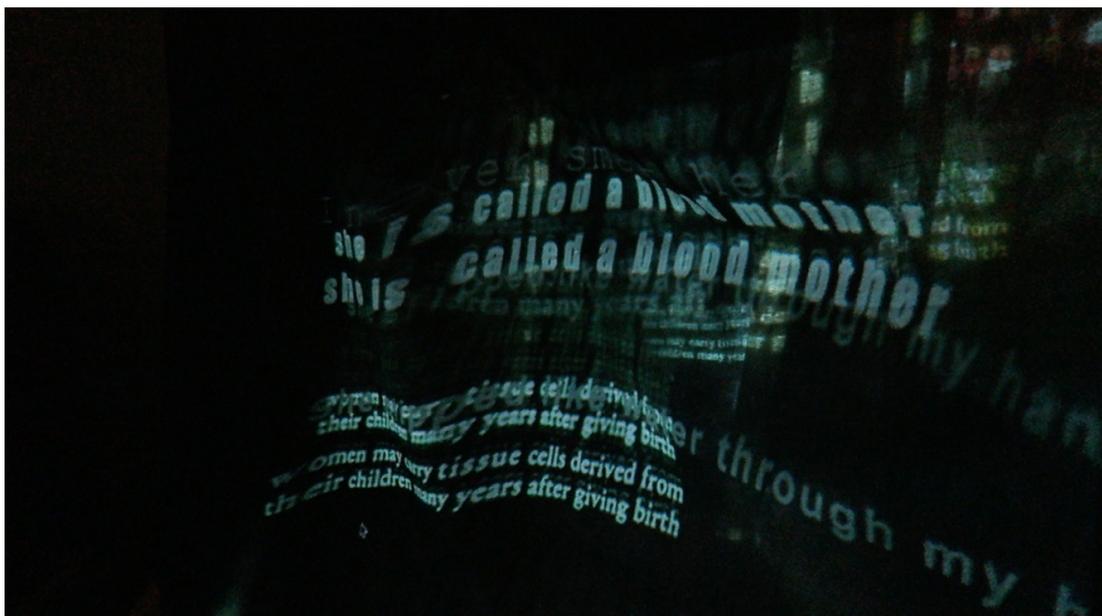
### **DEAR CHILD: CONCLUSION**

In conclusion much of the work around the after effects of trauma in relation to the creation of artwork draws on responses to post holocaust or migrant experiences. While this can be relevant to the post adoptive experience there is a separate strand which focuses on the fracturing of intimate familial relationships and the

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<sup>257</sup> Bracha Ettinger, ‘*Matrix and Metramorphosis*’, in *Differences*, ed. Griselda Pollock (Special Issue: *Trouble in the Archives*, 4, 1992), 201.

consequent fissures which shape identity. Part of the intentionality of my work is to explore these interstitial spaces and make installations that re-use 'real' events and 'narratives' to reflect instability and address the positive effects of fluidity that results from histories under erasure. My work has consistently taken an innovative approach in translating and using a personal response to the dis-locating experience of late discovery of adoption to produce artwork that exists outside of a narrowly defined issue based or therapeutic arena. 'Dear Child' can therefore be seen as a deeply personal piece which focuses on a mother/ child dyad and reflects the inner sense of abandonment and isolation of the adoptee as well as the reparative possibilities of performance. It can be figured as an exploration of dissociation but it can also be experienced as something quite distinct which can be freely interpreted by each spectator.



3.22: *She is called a Blood Mother*, trial projection for *Dear child*.

## CONCLUSION

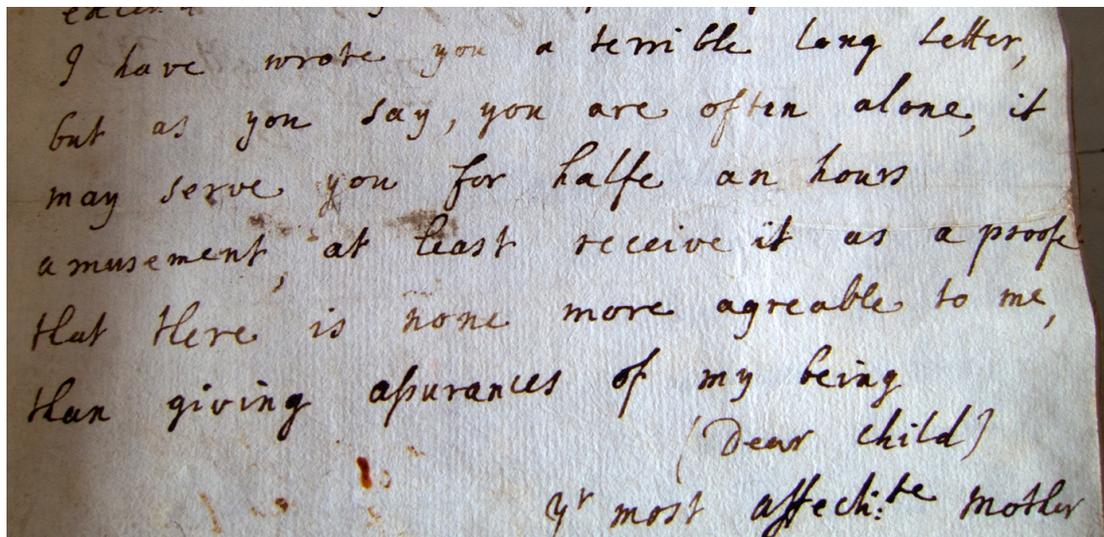
In this practice-based thesis, I explored a number of different ways in which the post traumatic experiences relating to late discovered adoption have been creatively transformed as a series of video and mixed media installations. The commentary traced the experiential methodology used in the development of the artwork and focused on the specific use of original archives and the physical journeys that enabled an embodied response to historic narratives of migration, exile and otherness. It reflects the role of controlled chance within the practice led research and situates the artwork in relation to other artists/practitioners including Louise Bourgeois, Susan Hiller and Christian Boltanski.

The portfolio of artworks were contextualised within a broad critical framework, which is inflected by an understanding of theories around adoption and identity and the different ways in which object loss and abandonment play a key role in later creative development. The writing described ways in which the search for the lost object/mother/identity is related to the search in the archives when the process itself becomes the trigger for change and new poetic synergies are made possible. To this end, concepts such as those developed by Ettinger and Irigaray, which make sense of the haptic nature of maternal loss, were directly related to my use of interpretive dance in the later artwork *Dear Child*.

The writing identified the practical methodology used within the installations to reflect the dis-location and outsiderdom of historic subjects and echo personal experiences of dissociation and dissonance. This includes the development of a specific use of acausality and asynchronicity within video projections to simultaneously reference historic narratives while denying a single sequential reading, which reflects the multi-faceted experience of de-centred identity. It has also shown how sculptural layers of etched glass/ mirrors and silk were used to echo the liminal status of the adoptee and suggest different narrativities.

There are a number of other late discovered adoptee artist/practitioners who make work that is directly based on their personal experiences and many other artists who make work in response to trauma, personal or political some of whom also work closely with archives. Unlike the former my work is not directly

autobiographical. I would suggest that the artwork inhabits a liminal space, which means that it can be read in many different ways with or without knowledge of my personal status. Although some of the stories touched on are about loss and abandonment this may not be apparent to the viewer. The intention is to make work that can be viewed and re-viewed with different experiences each time. This PhD research project has been an opportunity to trace one of those 'storylines.' It has also provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on my practice, revisiting past work in order to take new directions. For recent installations including *Dear Child* I have worked closely with a dancer/performer and explored more personal responses to archival research and I intend to extend this area of my practice while still retaining a core interest sea and landscape. Although this research has focussed directly on the effects of late discovered adoption on my artwork I am interested in exploring the creative transformation that can occur with any traumatic shock. At a time of great political change it seems important to develop a positive attitude to the unexpected.



3.22: Detail, letter Lady Wortley Montagu, 1746-56, Harrowby Manuscripts, National Archives.

## ADDENDUM, REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

### ADDENDUM 1

#### OTHER INSTALLATIONS PRODUCED SINCE 1998

- 1998/9. *She Slipped Like Water Through My Hands*, text-etched glass, mirror.  
1998/9. *Screen Memories*, mixed media, 3 channel video.  
2000. *Illegitimate Daughter*, text-etched glass, mirror light box.  
2001. *Kitchie Deems to NAAFI girls:100 years of Illegitimacy*, mixed media, single channel video.  
2003. *Gone into the Workhouse*, glass, mixed media, single channel video.  
2003. *The Ocean Between*, text-etched glass, single channel video.  
2008. *Tri-angulation*, black glass, 3 channel video.  
2008. *As the Crow Flies*, black glass, Perspex, 3 channel video.  
2009. *Longmuir/Laighmuir*, aluminised glass, single channel video.  
2013. *CUSP*, aluminised glass, digitally printed silk, 3 channel video.  
2013. *Abri*, mixed media, single channel video.  
2014. *Amy, Emily, Emma and The Four Times of Day*, Aluminised glass, single channel video.

### ADDENDUM 2

The particular (maritime/migration) journey started before I became Artist in Residence in the archives of the National Maritime Museum in 2005.

*Gone into the Workhouse*, (2003) a site-specific installation in the medieval church of Old Romney, commissioned as part of Art in Romney Marsh, referenced the migration of agricultural labourers to Canada in the 1842 as well as an orphaned girl sent into service from the workhouse. *The Ocean Between*, exhibited in *The Voyage Out*, Dock Museum, Barrow in Furness (2003) used texts, photographs, archives and location filming in Canada to link the emigration of my birth mother, Elsie, in the 1950s and the 19<sup>th</sup> century journey of girls from Miss Ryes Home for Destitute Girls in Peckham to Our Western Home in Niagara-on-the-lake.

These earlier pieces also used projections through layers of glass and '*The Ocean Between*' also used etched text taken from archives.

The shoreline as a potent space signifying both possibilities and loss was also explored in *Tri-angulation* 2008. This installation was initially exhibited in the ArtVaults season in Southampton. The videos were filmed in different coastal locations in England and Scotland, referencing migrant journeys to Canada and India and the North Sea coastal trade in Aberdeen when young sailors just sailed from port to port, losing all sense of home.

In '*Abri*', an installation made during *Ici et La*, a cross border residency in Dunkerque in 2013, the beach is a potent memory site of WW2.

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