Daniel-Boetker-Smith *Regeneration Game*
Untitled #H08-26-002, 2008

John Nassari *In-Between*
Film still

Stephen Smith
Photographs From The Somme
Tree-Trunks, North East of Albert, 1999

Front cover: Matthew Pontin
Pseudo Memories: A Question of Travel
Eiffel Tower, animation still, 2008

University of Kent | School of European Culture and Languages

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PHOTOGRAPHY & CULTURAL MEMORY

Four Contemporary Photographers:

Daniel Boetker-Smith – *Regeneration Game*
John Nassari – *In-Between*
Matthew Pontin – *Pseudo Memories: A Question of Travel*
Stephen Smith – *Photographs From The Somme*

Exhibition catalogue
Colette Wilson
Autumn 2008

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Exhibition curated and catalogue
introduced and edited by Colette Wilson

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Colette Wilson, September 2008

Contributors

Daniel Boetker-Smith is an Australian academic and artist. He is currently Programme Leader of the BA(Hons) Photography in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Chester in the UK. He has exhibited his photo-work and published his critical writing internationally. His chapter on the work of Chris Killip, 'Looking', is to be published this year in a book entitled *Art & Imitation* by Hofstra University, USA. In his spare time Daniel Boetker-Smith is a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University supervised by Dr David Sweet and Prof Pavel Büchler. His PhD research entitled *The Crime Seen: Dialogues between Abstract Painting and Contemporary Photography* is concerned with the relationship between photography and painting and the themes of gesture, looking, and mark-making that connect the two disciplines. He is writing about the work of three artists in particular, the Australian photographer Bill Henson, the Belgian photographer and filmmaker Marie Francoise-Plissart and the American painter Christopher Wool. His is also a member of the 'Centre for Practice as Research in the Arts' at the University of Chester. For more information and to view examples of Daniel Boetker-Smith's previous work see: http://www.cpara.co.uk.

John Nassari is a Senior lecturer in Refugee Studies at the University of East London. He is interested in refugee identity, memory and narrative and formation of refugee lives in visual practice. He is Chair of the Programme Committee for the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM). He runs an online resource called PhotoInsight, which is dedicated to multi-disciplinary research in the field of forced migration. He is also an artist and curator, and has exhibited internationally, most recently with Ania Dabrowska at the Four Corners Gallery, London and with Josh Van Prang at the Town House Gallery, Cairo, Egypt. Recent publications include, 'The difficulties of archives: representing refugee identity' in Kate Goodnow, ed., *Museums, Refugees, Participation and New Media*, Berghahn books: New York/Oxford (forthcoming 2008), 'Digitising Palestinian identity: Technobiographies and the problems of representation', *Journal of Media Practice*, Intellect, 2008, and 'Postmemory blues: the predicament of arriving and returning', in Stephanos Stephanides, ed., *Cultures of Memory, Memories of Culture.* Cyprus: Nicosia Press, 2007.

Matthew Pontin is a documentary and fine-art photographic practitioner based in Cornwall since 2005 when he graduated with an MA Photography from University College Falmouth. He exhibits nationally, last year in *Distance Learning* at G39 (Cardiff) and *The World is Ours* at the Bargate Monument Gallery (Southampton), alongside developing his research exploring contemporary human mobility and subsequent travel imagery (published in the University of Alberta journal *Space and Culture,* vol. 11, issue 1, 2007). Matthew Pontin was artist in residence at CCANW (Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World) at Haldon Forest (Exeter) where he developed a film recording the journey of felled timber. In 2008 he continued to experiment with moving image, having been commissioned by South West Screen to work on the *TOR* programme, supporting the production of an environmental documentary *re:think* which was screened at The Watershed (Bristol) during June. He also works extensively within education and has delivered various photography projects and has lectured at University College Falmouth, Truro College, Creative Partnerships, Real Ideas Organisation, ISCA College and various schools. He is currently working with students at the Plymouth College of Art & Design developing work to be exhibited during the Hidden City Festival. Matthew Pontin is also a founding member of CAN Project (Cornwall Artist Network), a non-profit making group established to initiate collaborative community arts projects within the region, and currently delivering *Embark: Ferry Art* where artists exhibit on board the unique setting of the King Harry Ferry. For more information see: www.visulate.org and www.canproject.org.

Stephen Smith was educated at the University of Kent and the San Francisco Art Institute and has worked in England as a freelance commercial photographer since 1996. His photographs have appeared in a number of publications including *Socialist Worker*, *ID* and *Steam Railway* magazines, and the *Sunday Express*. His solo exhibitions in the UK include: *Civic Centre* at the Viewpoint Gallery Salford (1997), *Approaching Runway 2* at the Civic Centre, Knutsford (2000), and *Photographs From The Somme* at the Museum of Lancashire (2006). He was a founder member of REDEYE, the photographers' association based in the North West of England.

Colette Wilson is a lecturer in the Department of French at the University of Kent. Her research interests are in the fields of French literature of the nineteenth-century, cultural memory, history and politics, the visual arts and photography. Her recent publications include: *Paris and the Commune 1871-78: the politics of forgetting*, Manchester University Press, 2007, and a specially edited number of the *Journal of Romance Studies* entitled 'The Well-travelled Lens: studies in photography and cultural encounter, memory and identity', 2008, 8:1(Spring). Her current research focuses on French representations of Egypt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She also teaches on the MA in Cultural Memory and convenes the seminar series 'Photography: Theory, Practice, and Debate' at the Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies in London.

PHOTOGRAPHY & CULTURAL MEMORY
An introduction to the exhibition

Colette Wilson

While its range is vast, the major concern throughout all memory work is how societies and individuals construct their identity and give meaning to their lives through what they choose to remember or indeed to forget. Since the 1980s, in what often feels like an increasingly fragmented, fast-moving world, and when there seems to be an 'acceleration of history', to borrow Pierre Nora's expression, much has been written about memory, of its uses and abuses (Nora 1989:7). For Nora, however, there is no such thing as spontaneous memory, instead we must 'deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarise bills because such activities no longer occur naturally' (1989:12). This apparent 'collapse of memory' is attributed to the rapid move towards 'democratization and mass culture on a global scale' and without taking defensive action and exercising 'commemorative vigilance', Nora believes that history would sweep memory away. Taking his cue from Maurice Halbwachs, the French social scientist who first coined the term 'collective memory',[1] Nora posits that there is a fundamental opposition between memory and history:

> Memory is life, borne by living societies in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformation, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. (Nora, 1989:8).

In her book *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam war, the AIDS epidemic and the politics of remembering,* Marita Sturken gives a more nuanced interpretation suggesting that while cultural memory can be distinct from history, it is nevertheless essential to history's construction, and that cultural memory and history should thus be seen as 'entangled rather than oppositional' (1997:4-5). Sturken's definition of 'cultural memory' provides the overall context for the *Photography and Cultural Memory* exhibition:

> Memory forms the fabric of human life, affecting everything from the ability to perform simple, everyday tasks to the recognition of the self. Memory establishes life's continuity; it gives meaning to the present, as each moment is constituted by the past. As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity.
>
> What does it mean for a *culture* to remember? The collective remembering of a specific culture can often appear similar to the memory of an individual – it provides cultural identity and gives a sense of the importance of the past. Yet the process of cultural memory is bound up in complex political stakes and meanings. It both defines a culture and is the means by which its divisions and conflicting agendas are revealed. To define a memory as cultural is, in effect, to enter into a debate about what that memory means. This process does not efface the individual but rather involves the interaction of individuals in the creation of cultural meaning. Cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history. (1997:1)

It is memory in its various guises (private and public, individual and group) and its entanglement with history (oral, familial, state-sanctioned, minority…) that the artists contributing to *Cultural Memory and Photography* collectively seek to explore. However, the series of images created by Daniel Boetker-Smith, Matthew Pontin, Stephen Smith and John Nassari, can each, in their own way, be read not only as a function of cultural memory, but also as the means by which memory is itself created and represented. For photographs, as Elizabeth Edwards reminds us, 'are made to hold the fleeting, to still time, to create memory […] In their relationship with their referent, their reality effect and their irreducible pastness, photographs impose themselves on memory' (1999:122).

Daniel Boetker-Smith's series of images entitled ***Regeneration Game*** constitute a response to the regeneration, some might say over sanitization, of Manchester's city centre, a process which finds its ultimate expression in the city's shiny new Urbis exhibition centre. In its celebration of all that is bright and innovative in art, music, and fashion as well as in its evocations of highly selective aspects of Manchester's past (such as the city's forgotten football team Manchester Central, for example), the Urbis centre, along with many anonymous airports, railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, and large retail outlets of our 'supermodernity' fulfils all the requirements of the 'non-lieu' (non-place) as identified by Marc Augé:

> If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place […] supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory', and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position. (Augé, 1995:77-8)

Non-places like the Urbis centre, however, never completely erase the places they replace; they are 'like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten' (1995: 79). In seeking out the marginalized, but nevertheless enduring vestiges of Manchester's past, such as the Chethams Library for example, and in looking out for the city's other lives and narratives, Boetker-Smith discovers some of the

1 The term 'mémoire collective' (collective memory) first appears in Halbwachs's *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1994[1925]) but its full definition appears in his later work, 'Mémoire et société' published posthumously in 1949 and republished as *La Mémoire collective* (1997[1950]:131-32).

quieter, forgotten layers of the urban palimpsest which are often to be found not far from the Urbis centre itself. The resultant large, powerful black and white images, inspired by photographs of actual or constructed crime scenes, seek to provoke and challenge the viewer to look more carefully beneath the textured surfaces of the seemingly banal objects and interior spaces on display. Boetker-Smith cites Weegee, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Archives, and the work of New York City based artist and photographer Christopher Wool as influences on his work. But one can also detect the ghostly presence of Eugène Atget whose scenes of *le vieux Paris* (bygone Paris) were also famously likened to crime scenes by Walter Benjamin (1979:256), as well as the Surrealist's predilection for the *objet trouvé* and the surprising perspective or photographic distortion, and André Kertész's or Edward Hopper's silent stairwells harbouring memories and secrets that we shall never decipher.

The relationship between memory and the city are also a concern in **Matthew Pontin**'s ***Pseudo Memories: A Question of Travel***. This time we are transported to Paris where the Eiffel Tower provides a key focus for an exploration of the interrelationship between photography, memory and travel/tourism, both real and virtual, individual and collective.

Photography, as we know, has developed in parallel with tourism from the nineteenth century to our own time, offering 'indisputable evidence that the trip was made, that the program was carried out, that fun was had' (Sontag 1979: 9). Photographs, as Sontag notes, 'give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they feel insecure […] most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter' (1979:9). Pontin's images capture both the glamour and the kitsch of tourist travel photography.

Drawing inspiration from the anti-hero of Joris-Karl Huysman's *À rebours* (*Against Nature)* who travels to London without leaving the comfort of his Parisian suburb, Pontin similarly privileges artifice over nature and true experience, and constructs his own virtual journey to Paris. Often working with existing tourist snaps and glossy advertisements, images of the city seen through or reflected on to glass surfaces, Pontin purposely blurs the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, between his own photographed (and thus 'remembered') visits to Paris, and the memory images created by and of others which he superimposes on to his own.

With **Stephen Smith**'s exhibit, ***Photographs From The Somme***, we move into the realm of postmemory as played out on the landscape of the First World War's most famous battle, remembered for its appalling loss of life (some 420,000 British, 200,000 French, and nearly 500,000 German casualties). Smith's grandfather was one of the men who fought in and survived the battle, though not without visible (and no doubt invisible) wounds. It was his grandmother, however, who relayed his grandfather's story to Smith as a young boy, a story which later fused in his own mind with the memories constructed by iconic documentary film footage and still images of the trenches. Marianne Hirsch's definition of postmemory gives voice to experiences such as Smith's:

> Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. That is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. (Hirsch, 1997:22)

Smith's desire to connect with the past, however, does not lead him to seek out stone memorials, cemeteries or museums, but the material landscape of the Somme itself. As his series of thirty-two black and white images (displayed in the Keynes Gallery) show, the modern-day landscape of the Somme bears no trace of the carnage that took place there in 1916, the French government in an act of Nietzschean 'active forgetfulness' having ensured that the fields of battle were returned to their original function and that the bombed-out towns and villages were reconstructed in such a way as to deny the battle had ever taken place (Nietzsche, 1996:39):

> Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic. It is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting. (Nietzsche, 1983:62)

Such forgetting and its attendant desire for a continuity with the past before it was brutally ruptured is not an uncommon reaction on behalf of survivors of war or revolution (Halbwachs, 1997: 133-34).

Smith's *Photographs From The Somme* are born out of a personal desire to connect somehow with his own family history but also out of a need to make sense of and reconcile the officially sanctioned history of the Great War and its iconic visual representation with a present-day material landscape seemingly devoid of any recollection of the past.

Finally, **John Nassari**'s video project ***In-Between*** is an exploration of the intersection between cultural memory, exilic memory and the artist's own inherited/postmemories as a British-born third generation Greek Cypriot. Nassari takes as his starting point a painting commissioned in the 1980s by his father's cousin Photis who was forced into exile following the Turkish takeover of his village in Northern Cyprus in 1974. The painting, based entirely on Photis's memories of the home and village he left behind, was initially a way of exorcising a personal traumatic experience of loss and exile, but the picture soon established itself as an important aid to the construction of the whole family's group memory and identity positioned within the wider political and historical context. The painting, along with Nassari's grandparents' oral histories formed the basis by which the

young Nassari was in turn able to construct his own narrative of origin and identity. Eventually undertaking a journey to Northern Cyprus, Nassari was at last able to form a direct relationship with his grandparents' village, and to posit postmemory alongside physical reality and its artistic representation.

The exhibition *Photography and Cultural Memory* thus touches on many of the key issues relating to the construction and photographic representation of memory at the beginning of the twenty-first century and, as such, forms a fitting companion piece to the international conference *Cultural Memory: Forgetting to Remember/Remembering to Forget* held at the University of Kent in September 2008.

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Augé, Marc (1995) *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated by John Howe. London and New York: Verso.

Benjamin, Walter (1979) 'A Small History of Photography' in *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott and Kingley Shorter. London: Verso.

Edwards, Elizabeth (1999) 'Photographs as Objects of Memory' in Marius Kwint and others, eds. *Material Memories*. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Halbwachs, Maurice (1994[1925]) *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Edited by Gérard Namer. Paris: Albin Michel.

Halbwachs, Maurice (1997) *La mémoire collective*. Edited by Gérard Namer. Paris: Albin Michel. First published as 'Mémoire et société', 1949.

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Nietzsche, Friedrich (1983) 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' in *Untimely Meditations*. Edited by J.P. Stern. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nora, Pierre (1989) 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', in *Representations*, 26(Spring), 7-24. Translated by Marc Roudebush.

Sturken, Marita (1997) *Tangled Memory: the Vietnam war, the AIDS epidemic and the politics of remembering*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Regeneration Game

Daniel Boetker-Smith

This work is entitled *Regeneration Game*, a title borrowed from Mark Crinson's 2002 article *Urbisville* in which the ideals of contemporary urban regeneration are critiqued.[2] Crinson takes the Urbis centre located in Cathedral Gardens, Manchester as an example of a 'homogeneous city-type' and accuses it of being ignorant of Manchester's subtlety – Urbis, he says, is 'impatient of the forces of history, of the city's glacial changes, of its quieter moments.' Urbis' location, directly next to Chethams Library, becomes all the more evocative given Crinson's argument. Chethams, founded in 1653, is the oldest library in the English-speaking world and was the meeting place of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, when the two regularly met in Manchester in the 1860s.

This series of images (of which three are shown here) is an attempt to visualise an experience of these two cultural memorials. Rather than photographing the buildings directly, these photographs respond to recounted memories and received narratives that are generated by these spaces. These images are also a result of my own wanderings in these spaces. I am a wanderer but unlike Baudelaire's *flâneur* I am not a detached viewer. I find my role similar to that of a very different figure from Baudelaire, the *chiffonnier* (ragpicker).

> One sees a rag-picker go by, shaking his head,
> Stumbling, bumping against the walls like a poet,
> And, with no thought of the stool-pigeons, his subjects,
> He pours out his whole heart in grandiose projects.[3]

I sift through places and objects and experiences as I wander, I look to take advantage, I make mistakes, I get my hands dirty, I leave traces of myself and I take things with me.

These photographs re-enact the look of 'crime-scene' photographs. The use of this genre has something to do with the notion of memory in its most basic form. The fallibility of memory and the fallibility of photography as a recording tool are introduced here but not resolved. I have photographed in domestic spaces, hotels, libraries, street corners and galleries in, and in the immediate vicinity of Chethams and Urbis. These locales, these *sites*, are photographed in an attempt to study this ideology of created 'urban capital' and its seeming refusal or 'glossing over' of other, more intricate and elusive narratives of place and memory. The images delve into past and present narratives and experiences of these *sites* (my own and other people's) to examine the continual erasure and reconstruction of place and memory. The notion of evoking marginalized narratives and of referencing local

2 See **www.metamute.org/en/Urbisville**. (Accessed 02/03/2008).

3 Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Vin des chiffonniers' from *Les Fleurs du mal*, translated by William Aggeler (1954) in *The Flowers of Evil*. Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, p.179.

cultural memory draws in the visual and textual influence of the *crime* and specifically the crime-scene. As I have said the influence of crime-scene photography is at the forefront of this project influenced by Weegee, the LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) Archives, and Christopher Wool. The repetitive and laborious photographing of spaces in this work is fixated on the capture of details of incidents that have passed – moments, actions, interactions, beginnings, ends. The crime-scene photograph attempts to show the aftermath of a moment – it can only speculate about what happened in that instant. It attempts to supersede memory. The moment the crime-scene photograph captures is always an inadequate moment after the crime itself has happened – it is both a showing and a non-showing. Crime-scene photographs are taken because our memory is inadequate, we may forget what we see, we may miss a detail or we may create and fictionalise events at a later date – the image on paper becomes 'proof', it is a legal document. We know of course that this is patently untrue, that photographs do lie and have been doing so since the invention of the medium; the act of photographing (and these photographs presented here) are the result of an act that is culturally informed, these photographs derive from the personal experiences and memories of a photographer true and untrue.

References:

Baudelaire, Charles (1954) *The Flowers of Evil*.
Translated by William Aggeler. Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild.

Crinson, Mark (2002) *Urbisville*. www.metamute.org/en/Urbisville

Daniel Boetker-Smith – *Untitled #C08-09-004*
2008 – 40"x30" Epson Inkjet print from 8"x10" negative

Daniel Boetker-Smith – *Untitled #H08-26-002*
2008 – 40”x30” Epson Inkjet print from 8”x10” negative

Daniel Boetker-Smith – *Untitled #W08-06-004*
2008 – 40”x30” Epson Inkjet print from 8”x10” negative

Pseudo Memories: A Question of Travel

Matthew Pontin

My current photographic practice and subsequent research investigates the interdependent relationship between travel and photography, and how these are linked by the notion of 'memory'. Often working with existing travel imagery and using cultural histories and memories revealed in the photographic snapshot, I aim to examine the overlap between 'actual' and 'virtual' travel experiences, exploring ways of detaching memory from the frustrations of permanence that the holiday photograph attempts to achieve – making images that are about a potential for forgetting rather than the hope of preserving the past.

This specific interest in how memory, with specific reference to the photographic image, shapes our travel experiences emerged after reading Joris-Karl Huysman's *À rebours* (*Against Nature*) (1884). The author, through his central character Des Esseintes, explores how illusory experiences can form part of memory and he demonstrates this through the substitution of reality with constructed simulations rather than actual physical experience.

Reading Huysman's novel led me to collaborate with agoraphobia sufferers in order to explore the idea of virtual travel and virtual experiences, via the imagination. Des Esseintes frequently avoids real experiences in favour of 'virtual' experiences based on knowledge from books and images: 'Travel, indeed, struck him as being a waste of time, since he believed that the imagination could provide a more-than-adequate substitute for the vulgar reality of actual experience' (Huysmans, 1959: 35).

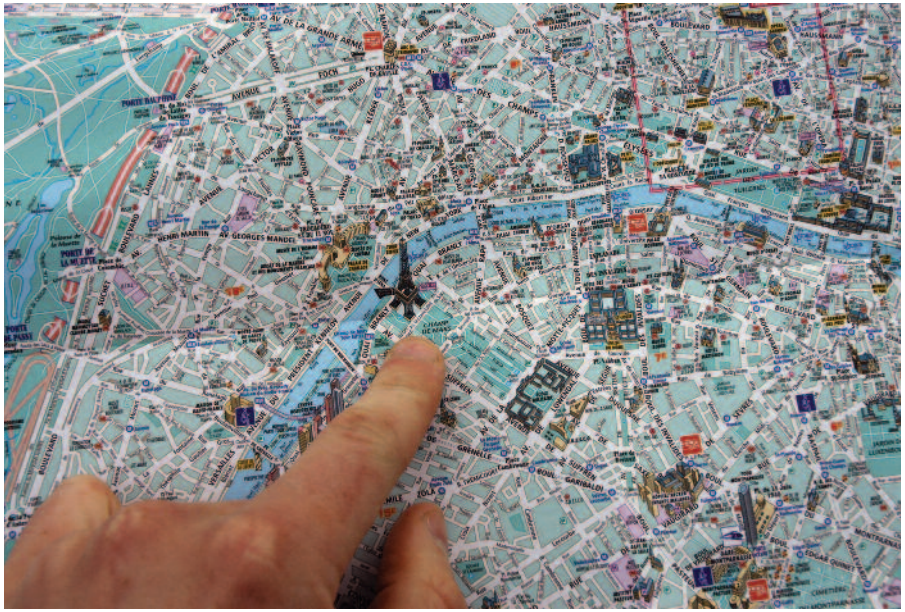
One particular animation included in this exhibition reworks other people's travel experiences by using web image searches to develop a time based piece that explores tourist photographs taken in front of the Eiffel Tower, the tourist destination *par excellence*. This film displayed on a monitor sits alongside a sequence taken from a static point where figures enter and leave the scene, occasionally stopping to photograph the Eiffel Tower visible in the background. The second film reveals my actual presence in the city, which is further acknowledged in a triptych revealing an ambiguous journey to discovering this iconic tourist attraction.

Reference:

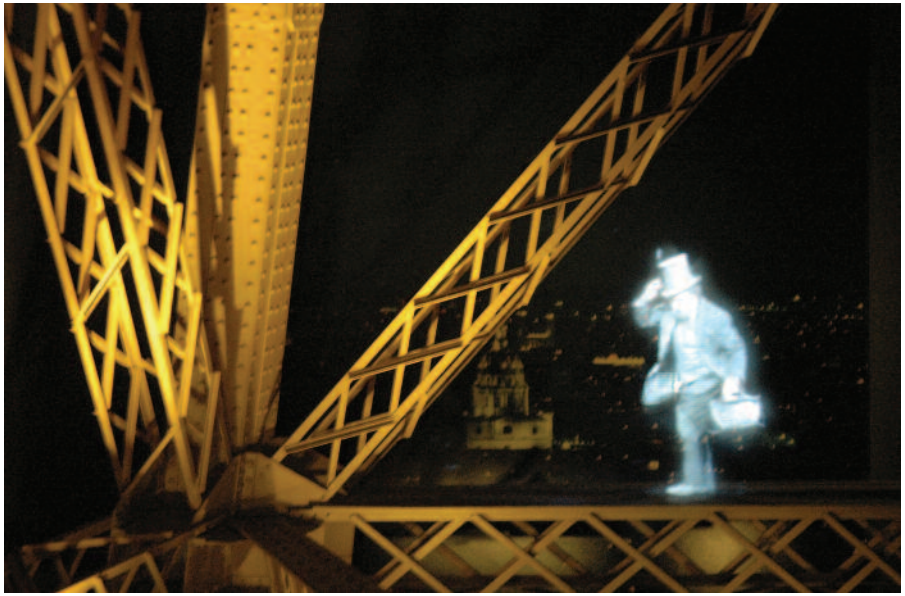
Huysmans, Joris-Karl (1959) *Against nature*. Translated by Robert Baldick. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Matthew Pontin – *Questions of Travel – Eiffel Tower*
2008 – animation still

Matthew Pontin – *Questions of Travel*
2008 – animation still



Matthew Pontin – *Return to Paris, Map*
2008 – animation still



Matthew Pontin – *Return to Paris, Tower Hologram*
2008 – animation still

Matthew Pontin – *Return to Paris, Tower Reflection*
2008 – animation still

Photographs From The Somme

Stephen Smith

When I was thirteen one of my English teachers, in an attempt to convey something of the experience of the trenches, recommended we dig a hole, fill it with water and sit in it for twelve hours. Some weeks later I came top of a spelling test. My prize, flung across the classroom, was a tatty old binocular case, a relic from the First World War. Five years before, in 1974, I had caught glimpses, on Sunday afternoons, of the BBC's *The Great War*; stentorian voiceover, angular music and black and white images that seemed to come from another world.

Even then at the age of eight, I knew my grandfather had fought and been wounded in the war. He never spoke of it but his wounds were visible. My grandmother said he had been wounded on the Somme and that he had been stuck out in no-man's land.

Driving back from Strasbourg, in December 1998, I decided finally to satisfy my curiosity. I would visit the Somme, it would only add an extra day to the trip and the Mercedes, I told myself, would probably hold out.

After completing a Master of Fine Arts degree at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1995, I returned to England the following year and my work since then has been about the landscape; about appearances and contingencies, about the photograph as document and about the land as a place where events may come to pass and play themselves out.

Begun at the end of the twentieth century, *Photographs From The Somme* is the product of my visits to the Somme over a seven-year period and is a continuation of the exploration of these themes.

Though better known for the eponymous battle, the Somme today is an area of northern France dominated by, and dependent upon agriculture. This is not an agriculture of pastoral intimacy and husbandry, however, but one driven by technology and European Union directives. *Photographs From The Somme* documents this present-day agrarian landscape and its infrastructure.

As I embarked on this project, I was overwhelmed by the place as the site of an appalling past in which I had a very small stake. I tried to imagine what had been and searched for material evidence. I was following in the footsteps of thousands before me. However, once I moved beyond this initial reaction, it was the appearance of the landscape as it is now that began to hold my attention.

As I photographed, it became apparent to me that the notion of cultural memory and the iconic imagery associated with the Great War were influences in the making of the photographs and the ways in which they might be interpreted. Indeed, such considerations are vital for a fuller reading of the photographs. I became concerned with the interrelationship between cultural memories, collective myths, official national histories, and personal family history. As Marita Sturken states, 'personal memory, cultural memory, and history do not exist within neatly defined boundaries' (1997:5).

Photographs From The Somme is my attempt to confuse the Somme as it is today with the myths and memories that 'The Somme' signifies. (I use the term 'confuse' here in the sense of fusing two things together to increase complexity.) It is not about the seeking out of remains such as pieces of barbed wire and pill-boxes, or remnants from the battle itself, rather it is about the way in which the mundane – roads, signs, buildings, fields and so on – might evoke an appalling past constructed from documentary footage, photographs, programmes such the BBC's *The Great War*, feature films, novels, poems, oral histories and memoirs. My concern is how the appearance of this modern agricultural landscape might intersect with an idea of what 'The Somme' looks like in the collective European/Western or British/French imagination.

Paul Fussell (1975) and Geoff Dyer have written at length of memory, meaning and the Great War and of the ways in which art, literature and rituals of remembrance have, in the years since the war ended, constructed its meaning. Indeed Dyer, in *Missing of the Somme,* suggests that the War 'had been fought in order that it might be remembered, that it might live up to its memory' (2001[1994]:15). It is an appalling idea but one that might now be admitted.

After the War the French, in an act of classical certainty, rebuilt the towns and villages in their previous image and, after bulldozing them, returned the fields to their former function. The battlefield was covered over. After all, in the classical world, agriculture was the best cure for human folly and war.[4] But might it be that on the Somme, contrary to this, modern agriculture – vast, technologically driven – ceaselessly bears us back to the first great modern war of the twentieth century?

References:

Dyer, Geoff (2001[1994]) *The Missing of the Somme*. London: Phoenix Press.

Fussell, Paul (1975) *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sturken, Marita (1997) *Tangled Memory: the Vietnam war, the AIDS epidemic and the politics of remembering*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

4 Virgil's *Georgics* (37-30BC) may be read as a plea for the swift restoration of agriculture in the aftermath of the Roman civil wars in the first century BC. War, in the case of the battlefield, not only destroys the infrastructure of the countryside it also demands that young farmers become soldiers, so leaving the land neglected.

Stephen Smith – *House, Fricourt*
2001 – 9”x7” RC print, black and white

Stephen Smith – *Near Fricourt*
2000 – 9”x7” RC print, black and white

Stephen Smith – *Bales, Maricourt*
2000 – 9”x7” RC print, black and white

Stephen Smith – *Tree-Trunks, North East of Albert*
1999 – 9”x7” RC print, black and white

Stephen Smith – *North of Bapaume*
2001 – 9”x7” RC print, black and white

Stephen Smith – *Plough, near Peronne*
2000 – 9”x7” RC print, black and white

In-Between

John Nassari

My father's cousin Photis arrived in Britain in 1974, as a Greek Cypriot refugee.[5] He left his home and village of Rizokarpaso which is situated in the northern peninsular of Cyprus. The village was taken over by Turkish soldiers and while Photis's parents remained in the village under Turkish rule, Photis and his sisters left and became exiles.

My grandparents came from the same village, though they arrived in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s, as economic migrants. Stories of the village of Rizokarpaso formed a large part of my family narrative. It was always an important reference point for home, a central focus of where they and we (the generations after) were from.

In the mid-1980s, after nearly ten years of exile, Photis began a project of recuperation, of reclaiming and remembering. Having been forced to migrate, Photis, like many refugees, found the continual disconnection from his home an extremely painful, separating experience. One way of managing this experience was to commission a Greek artist in Manchester to paint a pictorial representation of the village and his old home which was also the village's restaurant run by his father. What is so remarkable was that the painter was instructed to paint it from Photis's memory.

For my grandmother and great grandmother, Photis's project awoke nostalgia and narratives of return. Although they had migrated years before, a family debate began. At first representing the memory was a slow, patchwork process, a mismatch of fragments and disjointed images, which they tried to thread and weave together in sketches and drawings.

After six months, the fifteen-foot painting of the village of Rizokarpaso was complete. Photis's home (Uncle Luis's restaurant) formed a small part of the painting but a big part of the narrative. Everybody talked about how great the restaurant was and how people from surrounding villages would go there to eat on special occasions. The painting was so big that it took up the entire wall in the lounge. The painting and the narratives of Rizokarpaso brought me to consider my home to be in Cyprus, not an actual lived experience that I could go back to through my own memory, but rather somewhere I could relate to through their memory. I spoke about the place as if I had lived there too.

In 2002 I made a film of the village. The images here, the painting and my film, offer a way for Photis and I to speak about our migration experience to each other without actually speaking about it. It is as if the experience of leaving home for Photis and my third-generation postmemory of home, unable to be fully explored through speech, has been rendered audible through images which empty out the possibility of fully verbalising that experience. [6]

The village has stood as a defining image of home for most of my life, not only as a real configured scene in the painting, but also in relation to my family's stories and my postmemory. As I prepared to visit it I was convinced that I would find myself in a place almost totally foreign, bearing no relationship to the memory of the place that had been woven for me. I was already resigned to this idea that my postmemory would not match the 'real' village and I would be left with a vacuum or absence, something which is often experienced by those who go back. Instead, what I found was a world as fathomable and real as the stories and images that represented it.

I went to my family's village for the first time in 2002. I went across for a day from the South, the Greek Cypriot side, using my British passport and travelled to the village in the North. When I arrived it felt as though I had stepped into my uncle's memory so similar was the 'real' village to the family's pictorial representation of their memory. But also, so powerful was the work of postmemory that I found I was revisiting my own memory. I remember thinking: 'Oh, yes, that was how I remember it.… And oh, that's changed.' However I knew I was arriving for the first time; at the same time I was returning. This contradiction, I would argue, is the experience of postmemory, which like my return to the village of Photis's childhood, also offers the possibility to contradict and contest the memory that forged it; it is precisely the point that I remember and don't remember at the same time that makes postmemory so different from memory. I remember my family's memory and with that comes certain responsibilities, but I know that I don't remember and this allows me to engender postmemory with irony. The reason for my visit to the village was partly to explore the politics of my uncle's and my grandparents' memories and the representation of those memories in the painting. However, I also needed to consider my relationship to my own postmemory of the village.

My family remembered in fragments, with black and white photographs which then became fixed as a unified memory by the colour painting of the village. But, my memory was different. I remembered through their memory – the painting and stories.
My memory of the village was formed through their collective and consensual memory, the image in the painting was reached as a result of many discussions and disagreements. My memory carried the nuances, fragments and accents of their memory, but collided and fused with my own lived experiences of being a third-generation Greek Cypriot in Watford who doesn't speak Greek.

5 My thanks to Nicosia Press for granting me permission to publish this edited extract from my article (2007) 'Postmemory blues: the predicament of arriving and returning,' in Stephanos Stephanides, ed. *Cultures of Memory, Memories of Culture.* Cyprus: Nicosia Press.

6 The concept of postmemory has been used to describe the experience of those who have grown up dominated by stories of past traumatic events (Hirsch 1997: 22). An important characteristic of postmemory, according to Marianne Hirsch, is that it is a powerful kind of memory, precisely because its relationship with an original event or object is mediated not through recollection, but through imaginative development, investment and creation (Hirsch 1997: 22). There is always a generational distance that differentiates postmemory from memory, and connects postmemory with history, through deep, personal association.

Vangelis – *Painting of the village of Rizokarpaso*

John Nassari – *In-Between*
Film still

I carried with me the responsibility of remembering, of keeping the memory alive for the coming generations. One purpose of the family's memory and my postmemory was to remember where we are from and not to forget which is something my grandparents encourage. My film conveyed this responsibility. I filmed the village and, importantly to me, Photis's home, from the same perspective and angle that had been used in the painting. My film represents the village in parts, in windows that reveal and pan across the village street, sometimes overlapping and connecting, sometimes leaving gaps and fragmenting the street. I used film because my experience needed to be represented with more movement and possibility; my postmemory was different from their memory with its static and bound image of the village home. The different constructions of our visual texts reflect the differences between what I consider to be their memory, articulated through the narratives and the painting, and my postmemory which, through the film, substantiates the past's reality while indicating its inaccessible distance.

When I arrived there I built a new relationship with the village, which I recorded through my film. However, I am always aware of my postmemory and my feelings of responsibility, emotional and sentimental at times, while I remember and re-present. My film work incorporates these different situations. I inflate, romanticise and sentimentalise the home, which represents my postmemory of it. While building a new relationship with the village, I distort its perspective, precisely because of the past migrational stories and the painting; I minimise the church and amplify the 'home', an effect of postmemory. The home was a small part of the painting, but a large part of the 'stories' of home. My film intensifies the representation of the family home, which, I argue, is an effect and responsibility of postmemory. The contradiction of knowing and not knowing is represented through my video piece through fragmented windows, creating scenes which are timeless, collagist, fractured.

References:

Hirsch, Marianne (1997) *Family Frames: photography, narrative and postmemory.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.