

## **INTERVAL**

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Stride Gallery

### **Trudi Smith**

If memory could be made into a tactile, sensuous, physical object, what would it look like? It might look like a photograph. One might even go as far to say that it would look like a photograph folded and refolded, bent upon itself, cut, layered, and then folded again. In the process of folding one could imagine that certain details in the photograph would make up the visible exterior, other details would be hidden in the folds, and this can be likened to the process whereby an event is remembered. Memory rises to the surface of a mind, while other details are forgotten. In a failure to wholly memorize the past one might find folds, and in the partial recall that is memory, one might find an exterior surface. The process of recalling and refolding produces an intricate and ever-changing and varying terrain.

Photography is not only used as a metaphor to illustrate the process of memory, but it is conflated to stand in for memory. After all, the invention of photography radically altered how we remember. Photographs are perceived to have power to tell the truth about some moment the way that it happened, and they began to be accumulated for this reason. Photographs were harnessed as prostheses to memory.

The place whereby this memory is accumulated is the archive. Archives are collections of moments compiled and constructed into an ordered sensible history. Photographs fill archives, and likewise archives are the haunting grounds for images. Photographs in an archive, collected and catalogued, bear witness to some event that happened. They are fragments that bear witness to the inability to memorize a history (Foucault 2001). Out of lived experience they form a record of that experience. Ranging from temperature-controlled government record facilities to eccentric personal collections, archives are the storehouses of memory, and of a collective and particular past.

Lynda Gammon's ever-growing archive is made up of photographs of spaces and places that she has visited over the past decade. Beginning as black and white Polaroid images detailing interior spaces, including filled shelves, walls, lamps, windows, and doors, Gammon manipulates these photographs, re-photographing them, enlarging, darkening, cropping and cutting them in an effort to remember the spaces and places that she herself bore witness to. Drawing upon this archive and mixing it with building materials such as foamcore and cardboard she produces new spaces. These are aggregate works made up of photographs that have been folded, cut, and glued together to produce places that seem to reference architectural models.

I am interested in how Gammon brings together the memory of the past by using her archive of photographs of spaces, into the promise of a future by referencing architectural models, as a way to converse about sense of place. Place is not just a setting, but it is produced out of lived experience. A sense of place is a process of accumulation – as Lucy Lippard explains, “an intersection of nature, culture, history, and ideology form the ground upon which we stand” (1997:7) and this ground is not fixed. In this way, place is never a given but is something we continually make and re-make as we live in the world.

Gammon's constructions offer important departure points for how place is not fixed, but is constantly in the process of being created and broken down. The activity of making these places is, for Gammon, a way to trigger memory of a moment of her own creation, the point at which

she tripped the shutter of her camera. Now separated from the moment in which she participated by space and time she returns to the images, she folds, bends, cuts and glues, and, in her words “documents the attempts and failures to create this momentary coherence”. These new coherent spaces, where the works coalesce, touch down for the duration of exhibition. In this way she brings forth her own personal memory to form a new space. Like place, the single photographic moment is transformed by Gammon into complex, ever-changing terrain, one that is about the process of remembering itself.

The sense of place that Gammon promotes through her fragile assemblages suggests a state of barely there and the possibility of collapse. There is a tension in the scenery elements between scale, dimensions, and the mixing of two and three - dimensional space. Gammon builds assemblages that are suspended on the gallery wall and that demands the viewer move close in (and closer still) to explore the works by peering, peeking, glancing, and moving around the edges. There are hidden elements beneath and between layers of cardboard and foamcore. Folds seduce the viewer. The pleasant anticipation of figuring out the space and place is transformed into a radiant tension generated by a refusal to deliver a sense of place that makes sense. These are fragments, like the photographic archive itself, and are about the process of the artist recalling a space by re-working the archive into a new form. Because of this, the viewer is invited into the enticing process of puzzling and trying, into the temporary architecture of memory. And to accept this process of making a sense of place is to agree with and participate in the demands of the non-fixity of place.

The past - represented by the photographs and the archives - is folded into the future potential of the architectural model. The architectural model is of the future as it references a proposal or plan. Yet the model maker fails to follow through on the plan. Instead, once the exhibition is over, Gammon takes apart the installation and returns the photographs to the archive where they will be called upon the next time she works to remember the places she has photographed. And while her work about photographs, archives, the making of space and place form a distinctive pattern, it is the work done between and amongst the constellation, whereby her accomplishment is at its most powerful. In the process of creating her own sensible history, Gammon builds a new shape and possibility for what memory might look like.

References cited:

- Foucault, Michel 1972 (2001). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London:Routledge.  
Lippard, Lucy 1997. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of place in a multicentered society*. New York: The New Press.