

Recollecting, Remembering, Regaining: The Lost Object Project

Sarah King

ORCID Number: 0009-0000-3444-7642

Output Type: Conference Contribution

Output Date: 2025

Output Details:

20 min Presentation [author accepted abstract and presentation slides attached]

8th "Memory, Forgetting and Creating" International Interdisciplinary Conference, online, 23-24
January 2025 [programme attached]

Conference organised by InMInd Support, Gdańsk, Poland

The Lost Object project, initiated in 2021 after a residency at Brisons Veor, explores the intricate relationship between memory, loss, and repair. Inspired by Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, Freud's concept of the uncanny, and Mary Douglas's idea of "dirt" as matter out of place, the project examines the duality of our bond with lost objects—both cherished and rejected. Kristeva's assertion that the lost object is "not an actual person but an internal object" underscores the project's exploration of the fragile boundary between subject and object.

At its heart, Lost Object is a meditation on care and repair. Through acts of remembrance and mending, the project uses fragile, abject materials—such as human hair, fabric, medical paraphernalia, and acupuncture needles—to address themes of presence, absence, and transformation. Found materials, like rags and artefacts washed ashore, serve as metaphors for loss and incomplete histories. Fabric-wrapped stones, for example, symbolise the ocean's care, mirroring the human impulse to preserve and protect.

This process of collecting and caring for objects forms a scaffold of memory, blending the personal and universal. Items like family hair, a child's first locks, and soap from a lover's bath evoke moments of intimacy and loss. These artefacts, simultaneously familiar and strange, explore the intersection of materiality and memory, inviting reflection on the impermanence of life.

Influenced by Gaston Bachelard's notion that memory transitions into history, the project embraces the deeply personal narrative of "her-story." By engaging with loss as an active process, Lost Object reconstructs relationships with the past, exploring the cyclical nature of forgetting, preserving, and transforming. Through acts of mending and self-reflection, the project highlights the enduring power of care as a means of navigating fragility and reclaiming connection with lost memories.

Recollecting, Remembering, Regaining: *The Lost Object Project*

Sarah King



Supported by Arts University Plymouth Research & Innovation





'Cast off 17' 2020 hair on embossed fabriano



'Find' 2020



Studio space, Devon, UK



'Signature of intimacy', human hair and mirror



'Expelling', 2020, fabric, gesso, acupuncture needles



'Twins' 2020, fabric assemblage



'Balance' 2020, fabric assemblage



'Caught II', 2021,
Fabric, found rags, installation, work in progress
Brisons Veor Residency April 2021



Brisons Veor, Cape Cornwall, 2021



'Dressing rocks', 2021,
Fabric, found rags, rocks. Intervention, work in
progress
Brisons Veor Residency April 2021



'Dressing rocks', 2021,
Fabric, found rags, rocks. Intervention, work
in progress
Brisons Veor Residency April 2021



'the sign she wears around her neck', 2021,
Fabric, found rags, installation, work in
progress
Brisons Veor Residency April 2021



'The security of a listening touch' 2021,
2m high x 0.5m wide



*'I am no longer the lining of your coat',
2021*



'not entirely oneself', 2021



'Repair I' &
'Repair II', 2022,

40cm x 20cm



'Vestiges', 2022



bodybag, 2024, Pilot, Fine Art staff show in PS1



Veiled sight, 2024, Pilot,
Fine Art staff show in PS1



(detail of) Veiled sight, 2024





unfoldings, 2024, cabinet gallery, AUP



unfoldings, 2024, cabinet
gallery, AUP



Bibliography

Bachelard, G. (1958). *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press.

Bachelard, G. (1958). *The House and the Universe*. (Original work published in French).

Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge.

Fer, B. (2000). *Memory: Documents of Contemporary Art*. MIT Press.

Freud, S. (1919). *The Uncanny* (translated by David McLintock). Penguin Classics.

Foster, H. (2004). "Not Quite How I Remember It: The Attempt to Disrupt the Present While Working Through the Past." *In Hal Foster's Compulsive Beauty*. MIT Press.

Irigaray, L., (1992) *Elemental Passions*. New York: Routledge

Kristeva, J. (1982). *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Columbia University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (2004). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. University of Chicago Press.

Hesse, E. (1977). *Eva Hesse: Sculpture*. The Museum of Modern Art.

Recollecting, Remembering, Regaining: *The Lost Object Project*

Sarah King



Supported by Arts University Plymouth Research & Innovation



Slide 1:

My name is Sarah King, and I am a Senior Lecturer and Course Leader for Fine Art at Arts University Plymouth, as well as the Co-convenor of the Memory, Site and Artefact research group at Arts University Plymouth.

Today, I will present a case study of a project I have been working on for over 4 years, called *The Lost Object*. This project began in 2021 during a residency at Brisons Veor, Cape Cornwall, in the UK.

Slide 2: The work is rooted in the field of memory and the ephemeral moments and strange realisations that arise from it, exploring object materiality, the uncanny, and attempts to mend the impossible.

This project centers on the intricate relationships we form with memory, loss, and repair, drawing on ideas from Julia Kristeva, Gaston Bachelard, Sigmund Freud, Luce Irigaray, and others. At its core, it's about how we navigate fragility—within ourselves, our materials, and the objects we cherish or discard.

Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space* (1958), posits:

"What we call memory today is not memory, but already history. The so-called rekindling of memory is actually its final flicker as it is consumed by history's flames. The need for memory is a need for history."

Slide 3: Or, I would rephrase the term *his-tory* as *her-story* here, my story, a woman's story. Many of these parts of the story are quiet drivers, however, it is important to acknowledge and name them.

My story—a story of an artist, a woman, a partner, a mother, a young widow, a young grandmother, an academic. It is a story of intense love, pain, and loss.

Inspired by Kristeva's concept of abjection, Freud's uncanny, and Mary Douglas's notion of "dirt" as *matter out of place* (1966), my work explores how objects can embody presence, absence, and the passage of time. As Kristeva writes in *The Powers of Horror* (1982):

"The lost object is not an actual person but an internal object," highlighting the deeply personal and symbolic connections we form with things.

Slide 4:

The uncanny, as Freud describes it, occurs when the familiar is made strange. In my work, materials like hair, bandages, and found fabrics evoke this feeling of the uncanny. These objects are deeply familiar in a personal sense, yet once removed from their usual context—such as hair once attached to a body or fabric that's washed up on the shore—they become unsettling. They embody a sense of absence and presence at once, making us confront the strangeness of our attachments to them.

The uncanny helps to explain how memory and loss are experienced in the work, as objects and materials trigger these complex emotional responses of both recognition and estrangement.

I was—and still am—interested in how there can be a scaffolding of memories: how we remember and forget, how we choose what and how we remember, and how objects can allow recall of words and actions, as Paul Ricoeur calls it in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004):

"the pitfalls of the imaginary for memory,"

"suddenly made strange by a chance incident."

So, when are these chance incidents for me? They are discovered through my methodology, often in the finding of objects and materials, but also in the making. By *making*, I mean thinking, reading, and working with materials and objects. A lot of making happens when I am thinking. Sometimes, there are long periods of no action—no physical interaction with materials and objects—but somehow, the work is still being made inside me. This ability to pick up my practice and leave it to rest for periods of time is a strong thread in my methodology.

This work—titled, *Signature of Intimacy*—explores abject material explorations of hair, attempting to mend the impossible, the passing of time, and the natural separation felt between a mother and her son as he becomes a man. The transition from boy to man, memorialised through the act of cutting childhood locks, creates a keepsake of the strangely and secretly familiar.

Slide 5:

A central concern of the project is abjection. Kristeva describes it as the liminal space between subject and object—where parts of ourselves, once integral, are cast off and rejected. Abjection manifests in my choice of materials: human hair, discarded fabrics, and medical paraphernalia like bandages and acupuncture needles.

"Abjection," as Kristeva writes, refers to the rejection of parts of ourselves that we find revolting or disturbing. In my work, materials like human hair, medical paraphernalia, and found fabrics represent this abjection. They are both intimate and unsettling, as they once belonged to someone or something, yet now they are abandoned or "out of place." By working with these materials, I examine the tension between care and rejection, inviting the viewer to confront the boundaries of what is accepted and what is cast aside. This is reflected in the act of reassembling or "repairing" these objects, symbolizing the attempt to mend something that is both familiar and disturbing, lost and found."

Mary Douglas's idea of "dirt" as matter out of place is also significant. Hair, for instance, is deeply personal yet unsettling when removed from its context. These materials evoke discomfort and intimacy, reflecting the tension between care and rejection.

The project investigates the duality of love and hate associated with loss, emphasising the act of creation as a means to navigate fragility. Central to this inquiry is the symbolic order surrounding gathering, caring, and repairing, engaging with materials that embody the uncanny

and the abject.

Slide 6: Memory and Assemblage A key part of *The Lost Object* is creating a scaffold of memories through found materials. Another aspect of my methodology is collecting—collecting objects imbued with personal and universal significance. These collections embody the intersection of memory and forgetting, as Hal Foster describes in *Not Quite How I Remember It* (2009):

"the attempt to disrupt the present while working through the past."

The act of assembling fragments becomes an effort to repair the irreparable, embodying both presence and absence.

Slide 7:

Found Fabrics and the Sea These fabric assemblages are pieced together. There are pairings, mismatches, working with found materials. The fabrics I work with are washed up on specific beaches along the South West coast of the UK. The journey of the fabric is of interest here—the turmoil of being tossed in the sea, and the trace the journey leaves on the fabric.

Kristeva offers some useful words here:

"The subject feels both love and hate towards the object, love because [she] cannot do without it, and hate because [she] has been undermined by its loss" (Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 1982: p.60).

The journey transforms the garment, losing its original identity and becoming unrecognisable through the turmoil of its journey. Through the practice of collecting, the project reveals the haunting quality of incomplete histories, where each artefact is examined for its connection to the uncanny and the abject. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Freud and Bachelard, the work invites glimpses of meaning through intimate rituals within the making process and the cyclical nature of gathering from coastal sites.

Fabric assemblages created from these materials reflect the turmoil and transformation they've undergone. The sea's role in caring for and reshaping these objects parallels the human impulse to preserve and protect, even as we confront loss.

In an essay titled *Not Quite How I Remember It*, Hal Foster talks about "living on," and analyses the difficult attempt "not only to disrupt the present, but to work through the past" (p. 20).

Slide 8: Green rocks

During my residency at Brisons Veor, I was struck by the green, moss-covered rocks revealed at low tide. The moss seemed to dress the rocks, as if wrapped, as if dressed, offering a natural metaphor for care and repair.

Slide9:

Dressed rocks

Inspired by this, using the rag as a metaphor for the lost object, I find, I gather, and then I care for. However, as Julia Kristeva states in *The Powers of Horror* (1982),

"The lost object is not an actual person but an internal object" (p. 60).

I started to dress the rocks that were not dressed in moss. I wrapped and covered them. This act of gathering and caring is a way of mending.

Slide 10:

Documenting this process—returning fabrics to the site, wrapping rocks with intention—deepened my connection to the landscape and its cyclical rhythms of loss and renewal

Slide 11: Larger Works and Body Relationships As the project evolved, I challenged myself to create larger works, exploring the relationship between objects and the body. Pieces like *The Sign She Wears Around Her Neck* delve into themes of memory and identity, questioning what we hold onto and why. Some works evoke haunting questions about their origin and history. As Ricoeur asks,

"Who haunts whom?"

These objects, found along the South West coast, seem imbued with stories, shaped by their environment and the tides that return them to us.

Slide 12: I've explored the act of wrapping the body itself. Large-scale works like *The Security of a Listening Touch* invite an intimate relationship with the materials, enveloping the self in layers of care and repair.

Slide 13: Other works, such as *I Am No Longer the Lining of Your Coat*, borrow titles from Luce Irigaray's writings, infusing them with poetic reflections on loss and transformation.

Slide 14: Repair and Erasure Repair is a recurring theme in *The Lost Object* project, as is its counterpart: destruction. Works like *Repair I & II* grapple with the desire to fix what seems irreparable, reflecting Eva Hesse's assertion that

"Art and life are inseparable."

Slide 15: Conversely, pieces like *Vestiges* enact erasure, challenging the permanence of memory and material.

Perhaps this is an intuitive response to internal processes—getting the inside on the outside.

Briony Fer calls this a process of working through, describing "working through" as a psychoanalytic term—tracing the emergence of paths or conversely blocks on the way (*Documents of Contemporary Art: Memory*, p. 24).

Slide 16: Veiled Sight and Bodybag This work engages in a process of self-reflection, almost as if it is seeing itself.

Slide17: This introspection emerges through the use of mirrors, fragments, and layered materials, which invite both the viewer and the work itself to contemplate their relationships with memory and loss.

Slide18: The materials and gestures used—whether wrapping, repairing, or erasing—become acts of introspection, allowing the work to embody and interrogate its own presence and meaning. As Ricoeur writes, these chance encounters—these "suddenly made strange" moments—are where memory and history collide, shaping the future of *The Lost Object*.

Slide 19: Unfoldings *Unfoldings* is a smaller body of work within *The Lost Object* Project.

My acts of fixing, caring, and taking care have an intimate reach. Here, I am gathering, altering, and storing family hair, soap from the bath of lovers, hair from a child's locks from the coming of age, stones given from a place of intimate importance, resulting again in the careful scaffolding of memories.

Slide20: Memorialising multiple moments and experiences, there is a delicacy and vulnerability of some artefacts that are hidden—too precious to be shared.

Slide21: Where others are faced with seeing themselves, the use of the mirror in *Unfolding* and the previous work *Veiled Sight* are important, where the work can see and reflect on itself.

Unfoldings is another intimate enveloping of the self in an intuitive and empathic practice.

Three threads have emerged through this project: recollecting, remembering, and regaining.

Slide22: References - move on quickly to final slide

Slide23:

- *Recollecting* speaks to the act of gathering—not just materials, but fragments of ourselves and our histories.
- *Remembering* that memory is not static. It is shaped by chance, altered by time, and layered with meaning. In this project, the objects I work with become vessels of memory—embodying presence and absence, and intimacy.
- *Regaining* is the act of transformation. Through repair, an act of resilience, a way of navigating loss and reimagining connection.

In *The Lost Object*, I've found that these three acts—recollecting, remembering, regaining—are not linear. They are cyclical, overlapping, and deeply intertwined.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome your questions or reflections.

8th MEMORY, FORGETTING AND CREATING International Interdisciplinary Conference

23-24 January 2025
(online)

THURSDAY, 23 January 2025

11.00 AM – 2.00 PM: Conference OPENING and Session I

Chair: **Wojciech Owczarski** (University of Gdansk, Poland)

Wenyu Zhang (Renmin University of China)

The Remodeling of Japan's National Disaster Memory: Centered on the Kanto Earthquake Abuse Incident

Alexandra Preitschopf (University of Salzburg, Austria)

Forgotten Authors, Suppressed Voices: Early Anti-Soviet Dissidents in Interwar France and Their Struggle Against Oblivion

Anastasiya Sudyk (Jagiellonian University, Poland)

Managing a Contested Past: Selected Commemoration Campaigns in the Ukraine's National Calendar in the Years 1991-2024

Yadviha Lukashyk (Independent Researcher)

Non-Action and Indifference: Abandoned Cemeteries

Marzia Dessi (The European Graduate School [EGS] Saas-Fee, Switzerland)

"They're eating the cats and dogs" or, Hate Immigrants, Love Their Food: Garlic Eaters, Dog Eaters, and the Rhetoric of Immigrants Cultural Food Memory

Antonio J. Pinto Tortosa (University of Malaga, Spain)

Failed Denationalization: Foreign Intervention in Haiti as a Tool for Reinforcing National Populism And Violence

2.00 PM – 3.00 PM: BREAK

3.00 PM – 6.00 PM: Session II

Chair: **Alicja Bemben** (University of Silesia, Poland)

Alicja Bemben (University of Silesia, Poland)

Forget, Create, Move on: Identity Labour in Dementia-Affected Individuals

Viktorija Rimaitė-Beržiūnienė (Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania)

The Positive Aspect of De-Sovietization: The Visuality Post-Soviet Monuments

Berfin Özlem Erden (Biruni University, Türkiye)

"Remember me": The Ghost Figure as "Rememory" in *Hamlet* and *Beloved*

Serena Bonaldo (Eberhard-Karl University of Tübingen, Germany; Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy)

A Spatial and Temporal "Pre-City": The Vor-Stadt Concept in Wilhelm Raabe's *The Birdsong Papers* (1896) and the Papers as Testimony of a Multidimensional Transformation

Julia Topór (Jagiellonian University, Poland)

"Every love story is a potential grief story": Literary Renditions of the Role of Memory in the Grieving Process

Victor Callari (University of São Paulo, Brazil)

Postmemory and Trauma in Miriam Katin's Graphic Memoir

6.00 PM – 7.00 PM: BREAK

7.00 PM – 10.00 PM: Session III

Chair: **Colette Morrow** (Purdue University Northwest in Hammond, USA)

Hannah Clare Jellen (Independent Researcher)

"Sleep today, O early fallen": Memory, Grief, and Nationbuilding in the Music of the American Civil War

Agata Sowińska (University of Silesia, Poland)

Memory of Walls: Nazis at the Wawel Royal Castle

Vivienne Tailor (Independent Scholar)

Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* and Shun Medoruma's *In the Woods of Memory*: Honoring Okinawan's Human Right to Authentic Memories of their World War II Double Marginalization

Colette Morrow (Purdue University Northwest in Hammond, USA)
Collective Forgetting and Remembering in Akwaeke Emezi's *Pet*

Alice Guéricolas-Gagné (Independent Artist)
Paper Rafts: A Fictional Hypothesis on Memories that Replay Themselves

Gonzalez-Espresati Clement (University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA)
La Princesa Montonera: Postmemory Against Trauma Porn

FRIDAY, 24 January 2025

2.00 PM – 5.00 PM: Sessions IV

Chair: **Margaux Collin** (University of Reims, France)

Rohini Zakaria Oishee (East West University, Dhaka, Bangladesh)
Scarce Memory and Fabricated Imagination: Difficulty of Identity Formation for an Immigrant Child in Akhil Sharma's *Family Life*

Israt Jahan (East West University, Bangladesh)
1947 and Bangladesh: Memory, Amnesia, and Representation on Screen

Margaux Collin (University of Reims, France)
Nat Turner's Reclaimed Legacy: Reframing Memory through Film (*The Birth of a Nation*, 2016)

Sarah King (Arts University Plymouth, UK)
Recollecting, Remembering, Regaining: The Lost Object Project

Yaron Katz (Holon Institute of Technology, Israel)
The Terror of Memory and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Examining Collective Trauma and Historical Continuities

Gabriela Konieczna (Independent Researcher)
Incomplete Memories and Ambiguous Relationships: How Young Women Construct Narratives, Justify the Lack of Commitment, and Struggle to Let Go

5.00 PM – 6.00 PM: BREAK

6.00 PM – 10.00 PM: Session V

Chair: **Bonnie Cross** (Valencia College, USA)

Angelika Michalik (Jagiellonian University, Poland)

Hiroshima: The Specificity of the “Capital of Peace”

Moira Armstrong (Rutgers University – Newark, USA)

“Another generation’s portraits of grief”: Memory and Memorialization in the “New York Times” from 9/11 to COVID-19

Velebita Koričančić (Anahuac University Mexico; National Autonomous University of Mexico)

The Overwriting of Graffiti Art in Mexico City: Contested Erasure in Visual Urban Communication

Donna Lynn Tillotson (Queen's University, Canada)

Shaping Collective Memory in *Small Things Like These*

Bonnie Cross (Valencia College, USA)

Gathering the Fragments: Selfhood and Agency Renewal in Neuronarratives of Alzheimer's Disease

Samy Ouzerrout (Independent Researcher)

The Art of Forgetting: A Journey through Memory, Learning, and Artificial Intelligence

Joanna Nowicka (Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences in Wałbrzych, Poland)

Creating Micro-Enterprise Memory: The Role and Importance of AI Tools in a Business Perspective

Barbara Gabriella Renzi (Berlin School of Business and Innovation, Germany)

Memory, Forgetting, and Creating in the Arbëreshë Community: A Journey through Cultural Identity and Musical Evolution

10.00 PM: Conference CLOSING



InMind Support

Conferences, Seminars and Workshops



InMind Support
Conferences, Seminars, Workshops

Gdańsk, 24 January 2025

Certificate

This is to certify that **Sarah King** attended our 8th International Interdisciplinary Conference "Memory, Forgetting and Creating" held online on 23-24 January 2025 and presented a paper: Recollecting, Remembering, Regaining: The Lost Object Project.

On behalf of the Organising Committee

Prof. dr hab. Wojciech Owczarski