

“I still can’t get rid of those images...”

A charming foundation myth explains the impetus for visual art through the tale of a young woman in ancient Corinth who captured the profile of her lover by drawing the shadow thrown by his reflection onto a wall in firelight. She wanted to keep his image in his absence. Her father, a potter, cast the lines in clay and created a three dimensional likeness. This romantic story is not so very far from the truth of what may be the first drawings ever made: outlines of hands found in an Indonesian cave and made over 35,000 years ago.

Alongside the hand outlines, the earliest works of art are the images in caves, familiar to us all now, of wild animals. By definition these were drawn from memory and exaggerate certain features, probably those that most fascinated or scared the hunter-artists. The reasons for recording these beasts may be religious or practical but the images are drawn from memory in firelight, reduced in scale and re-imagined with materials to hand.

The legend and the archaeology might both suggest that visual art arises from a desire to trap reality and keep a true image in perpetuity. But imagination, an unpredictable form of creativity in which we think of or remember ideas then attempt to improve and capture them, has its own parallel mythology.

When the Muses were first recorded in Ancient Greece, there were only three of them. Later, when the full canon appeared – the nine women who inspired music, poetry, dancing and so on – Memory had been upgraded from merely one of the muses to the mother of them all: mother of all the arts. Memory was a skill and refinement that played a powerful role in the classical and medieval worlds for orators, priests or philosophers and another legend is always used to explain the history of the art of memory. A Greek poet was invited by a nobleman to recite a verse at a banquet. The subject was the heavenly twins Castor and Pollux. When the poet finished his client refused to pay more than half the fee taunting him to claim the balance from the twins. Two strangers are then announced asking for the poet who leaves the chamber only to find no-one there. But inside, the chamber collapses killing all the guests and destroying them so completely that no-one can be identified for burial. Except by the poet who recalled exactly where every guest was seated: this accurate recall was his gift from the twin gods.

Returning briefly to a cave, the most famous of all is probably that of Plato’s theory in *The Republic* where he describes a cave in which people have lived in chains all their lives, facing a blank wall. They can only watch the shadows of objects on a kind of conveyor belt, lit by a fire that lies behind the prisoners and thus the reflected images appear projected on the wall. The shadows are as close as the prisoners get to seeing or understanding reality. Plato wanted to ban artists from his ideal republic and his pupil Socrates believed that the easiest way to create was simply to carry a mirror around and then you would be able to reproduce everything and anything, but – by implication – without any real knowledge or understanding. But Plato does seem to admit that while a carpenter makes a useful bed and a painter (or a poet or dramatist) simply imitates the image, there may lie in that imagined bed accidental truths, understandings and new explanations.

The human race is content to allow only a small proportion of the population to be its visual artists but recalling images is central to most of us. And, for many of us, our visual memories can provide us with a personal playlist, usually on shuffle, for the everyday. We seem to depend both on accuracy and embellishment of memory for our view of ourselves.

A.R. Hopwood’s *False Memory Archive* is an art project in which anonymous members of the public, although they include his own mother and himself, submit memories that others or their own

common sense have later (often much, much later) proved to be impossible. Hopwood issued an invitation to submit memories and then has chosen to reproduce these, unedited but ordered, so that a whole crazy story, from pre-birth to all kinds of death, is told in kaleidoscopic detail: *"The picture of it is clearer in my mind than memories I know are real."*

Hopwood's work is in a long tradition of modern art that employs and acknowledges public participation. He also contributes to the tradition of art in which found words build up and are changed into *"something rich and strange"* like the underwater transformation from human skeleton to coral and pearls that Shakespeare describes in *The Tempest*. A malevolently mischievous version of this is Angus Fairhurst's sound piece *Gallery Connections* (1991–6; Tate) where Fairhurst connected two fashionable art gallery employees on the telephone, ringing each of them himself and holding the receivers together in enforced dialogue. "Hello! Hello?" As neither party grasps the point of the conversation confusion degenerates into anger. More recently, artist John Newling based himself in York and asked passers-by the question 'What Do We Really Want?' in order to research and re-present what a '21st Century Eden' would look like.

Hopwood can also be seen to respond in part to the open request by the influential American artist Allan Kaprow in the 1960s that art should be concrete and of the everyday. Kaprow defines this as using *"paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies"*. Hopwood brings the detailed realities of contributors' memories into play in the False Memory Archive as a richly cumulative experience. Because, however false the recall - brilliantly and sparsely exemplified in *"I remember running away from the hospital as a new-born baby"* - perhaps what made it a "memory" is the simplicity of the desire to hold on to the very personal picture for as long as is viable.

One of the words that contributors often use is a variation on "vivid": *"I vividly remember as a child jumping off the top bunk bed in my room and flying around the room."*

Vivid, meaning full of life as well as clear, energetic, bright and colourful, is perfectly expressed by one contributor: *"But the memory feels like truth - shiny colours and crisp edges."*

To hold on to the images while feral reality nibbles away, the contributors refine and edit memories with great skill: *"I grew up as a wildly imaginative child in a 200-year-old house and remember finding a dead Confederate soldier under our massive porch one summer day."*

Hopwood's archive can only hint at the painful process of uncomfortable realisation as those edges break away and the colours begin to blanch: *"Playing with my brother on a bitterly cold, but bright & sunny winter's morning. Spinning the merry-go-round as fast as I could for him. My brother shrieks with - at first - delight & then panic as his grip slips and he tumbles towards me. Seeing the look on his face as I catch him before he hits the ground. A scared but elated smile... (I am an only child.)"*

When I read the entries I often feel an instant empathy with many writers even if I share none of their "memories". I certainly don't remember running away from the maternity hospital but I can easily see me doing so –abandoned blanket, nappy, pink bracelet, down a hill in Low Fell. No-one is chasing me, I feel gleeful and I like the fact that I added those bits. It is the pure oddity of the notion that invites me to test it out in my mind's eye while, if a more cogent memory was described (if a father collected a mother and new-born in a car), I would probably see it as more or less universal and not try to join in.

There is much poignancy in many of the false memories where detail is piled on in a manner that seems to plead with us to agree that it simply must or certainly should have really taken place: *"I*

remember my Dad watching soccer on the TV sat in his armchair, punching the air and yelling: "Yes!" at Clive Allen's second-minute goal in the 1987 FA Cup Final. The cup final takes place in May; my father had died in April".

Hopwood has edited the memories into sections or chapters that lead us through life stages and adventures and beyond, in each direction. It is surreal, tragic, sweet, funny, sad, colourful and, ultimately, really quite believable in many places because an almost-memory must feel like an almost-truth. Moreover, it must have some arresting image or brief story that unfolds otherwise, surely, it is simply something recalled in error. I have just reached into my pantry for some particular tea but I have run out of it; I now remember the last time I saw a packet which was in fact in my mother's kitchen. I got it wrong but it was only a small glitch of housekeeping and recall, not profoundly false. And while universal, not in the slightest bit interesting.

Within the false memories gathered here are many approaches to falsehood and wrongness. Some memories have been elided, exaggerated, borrowed or stolen; many have a basis in yearning; others describe photographs or stories recounted; sources are books read or film seen and parts appropriated to fit a gap or improve a section in the auto-biopic. These are not deliberate lies as they are strongly believed by one person at least – the wrongness is just a matter of facts in the incorrect place. False and wrong do not seem the right words here, being too condemnatory. The stories clearly itch and trouble many of those who have, just about, accepted that their lovely or comforting or odd memory is just not shared or real. It remains theirs but has no validity.

One writer had left her email address and a very detailed tale. She had searched, researched, dug around the internet and archives for years; she could find no proof of her (adult) memory so no-one believed her: *"It all started with an innocuous conversation with my husband on holiday about Dan Aykroyd.... I remembered reading it in the Evening Chronicle, sat in the chair of my grandparents' kitchen on a late afternoon in the late 90s. My husband wanted proof and my memory of my grandparents' kitchen, and even that the article was on the left hand page, probably around page 10/12 of the paper just wasn't enough..."*

A Scottish newspaper archive had gone online since her last search so, when I looked, I found the evidence and lifted the burden of proof for her. Or did I? She replied: *"Even just up to a few weeks ago I had another search... Now though, most of the results trace back to me asking others!!! (Can I just clarify that I only do Aykroyding from time to time!)"*

So what do I do now? Follow up message boards from 8/9 years ago? Invite Dan for tea again?" The art of memory became highly sophisticated in the Renaissance and a Memory Theatre was designed. Its creator described the entire theatre resting on Solomon's Seven Pillars of Wisdom. On the pillars rest the planets which rule cause and effect. In ascending order from the planets are six more levels representing a more or less gradual development from nature towards art. The first two, including The Cave, are the most elemental where creation first began but by the time we get to the top, art and mankind are revealed.

A.R. Hopwood's False Memory Archive is the culmination of his research into False Memory and in particular the rich visual element of academic study into the subject: *"I went to the zoo at Regent's Park and it was in black and white."*

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