

Dissertation Proposal - In this digital age, where images destroy memories, are future generation's fate an age where we no longer remember and instead rely on documentation?

(...are future generations destined to no longer remember...)

Consider the question (and that the proposal starts with it!). It's quite dramatic and unequivocal, but also suggests strong opinion and purpose.

BA Photography in the Arts

Word Count: 2253

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Introduction

Within my dissertation I will be exploring the idea of memory. I've always had an interest in this theme due to having meningitis as a nine-year-old. As a result of the disease I lost many of my childhood memories and since then have found memory an enigmatic yet appealing subject. I find myself puzzled by memory, not just in my own case of memory loss but also by the idea of dementia and self-constructed memories which are just a few examples of what I plan to research and engage with, partly in this proposal and in my dissertation. I also propose to look at the value and the fragility of memory.

Now, we have looked at anecdotal introductions before. We are presented with a personal angle that draws us in. You don't need to shoehorn in a story – it is just one of the methods available. This also has a clarity of purpose – 'I am setting out to do this'. Of course, with such a straightforward laying out of purpose, we might be disappointed if they don't achieve those aims.

Memory

Memory is such a broad subject and there are numerous theories surrounding the several ways it functions. After researching a selection of memory theories, I came across the idea of confabulation. Confabulation which* is defined as a memory error where one has distorted memories about oneself or the world without the conscious intention to deceive. The idea of a false or constructed memory is a subject I aim to look at intently. This also links to the theory of Unsuccessful Remembering which is when one has the issue of figuring out whether the information that one remembers originates from actual experience or from another source, for example imagination (Reference). However, according to M.Johnson (False Memories and Confabulation, 1997) memories that derive from experience are most likely to be thorough but include little or no information about the cognitive operations. *Whereas memories that derive from imagination are the opposite, which

is to say that memories deriving from imagination, are less detailed and include a lot of information about the cognitive operations. This link between imagined memories shows how easily it can be achieved. Furthermore this also reveals how fragile memory can be. I will expand on this point in my next key word; Fragility.

In preparation for this proposal I looked at the work of Damian Sutton and researched his book (*Photography, Cinema, Memory*, 2009) this book and Roland Barthes' (*Camera Lucida*, 1993) advanced my knowledge of the relationship that memory has with photography. They both discuss the idea of the photograph assisting a memory as well as it being a hindrance. "Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" This quote taken from *Camera Lucida* (p.g 91) argues the point that a photograph destroys memory, instead we remember the image. Moreover, a memory can convert into imagination as one may create a 'memory', or an imagined scene to compliment the image, sub-consciously or not. In Damian Sutton's, (*Photography, Cinema and Memory*) he quotes Henri Bergson- "Without text to accompany them, without pages to frame them, and most important, without other images to nourish them they force us to confront the process of interpretation." This idea of how we remember or interpret our experiences is something I want to explore further in my dissertation and delve into the research and philosophies of those like Henri Bergson. Furthermore this vulnerability of memory allows us to appreciate the value of memory, another main aspect I plan to put forward in the proposal.

In this proposal I would like to address the ideas I mentioned briefly in my introduction. As I go onto research the fragility of memory I'd feel I would be performing a disservice without looking at the likes (good example of overly casual prose. Use "conditions such as..." etc.) of dementia and Alzheimer's. When studying the idea of Alzheimer's we have to first understand the concept of how the brain works and associates with memory. It's believed that memories are formed in the brain by neurons connecting and firing off together, rehearsing, remembering and so growing stronger, stabilising a connection (R). However, as brain cells die these connections become harder to form. This being said, the cause of Alzheimer's and the way we form memories are mostly unknown. Alzheimer's in essence is the progressive decline and mental deterioration of the brain. One of its affects is that it robs people of their ability to remember. Without forming clear new memories and slowly forgetting old memories they lose their personality, this is hypothesized as the reason many patients develop such different traits and take on a new persona. In my dissertation I hope to develop on this theme and look into the theories surrounding the disease and its relationship it may have with photography.

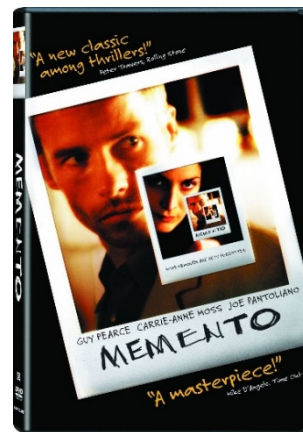
Although not entirely consistent and accurate, this is well written, with a clear prose style that reveals the subject in an engaging manner. In some instances, we are not yet clear about the subject and how this essay functions in relation to the introduction, but we are only part way through.

Fragility

In Henri Bergson's book (*Matter and Memory*) (p.g 34), he looks at the interpretation of perception and how it relates to our remembering. He says, "What you have to explain, then, is not how perception arises but how it is limited, since it should be the image of the whole, and is in fact reduced to the image of that which interests you." Bergson puts forward the idea that we concentrate on what we would like, and not necessarily 'the whole', filtering out that which we wish not to include, whether that be background information or a sourness we prefer not to look back on. This choice we make of how and what we perceive, compliments the idea of the photograph replacing a memory. Family portraits or holiday photos are often forced, which is to say a child or

whoever is stressed to smile or say cheese for the camera. This may lead to the misremembering of one's current state when the image was taken. Perhaps without the photographs existence the subject would remember their emotional state for what it was or on the other hand they may forget the day completely. Again, it's this idea of how we remember and what we remember which ultimately effects our reality and essentially makes us who we are. Therefore, if a memory becomes fragile and one misremembers or edits a memory then it's our very existence and being which can be affected due to the fragility of memory.

I was urged to pursue this idea of fragility after watching Christopher Nolan's 2000 film (*Memento*.) The film's take on memory and experiences are a brilliant example for this section. Without going into too much detail about the film, Leonard, played by Guy Pearce, is searching for the man who raped and killed his wife. After an attack on his wife he suffers a head injury leading to **Anterograde amnesia (R)**, defined as a loss of the ability to create new memories after the event that caused amnesia, leading to a partial or complete inability to recall the recent past, while long-term memories from before the event remain intact.



Memory's not perfect. It's not even that good. Ask the police. Eyewitness testimony is unreliable. The cops don't catch a killer by sitting around remembering stuff. They collect facts, they make notes and they draw conclusions. Facts, not memory. That's how you investigate. I know. It's what I used to do. Look, memory can change the shape of a room. It can change the colour of a car and memories can be distorted. They're just an interpretation. They're not a record. They're irrelevant if you have the facts. (*Memento*, 2000)

I include this film, not for its beautifully written plot but for how realistic this representation of a real condition is. Whether the memory is positive or negative can completely alter the way something is remembered. We fill in the gaps that occur within our memory, in order to allow a narrative to exist. We see examples of these two points in the film which leads me onto what's known as Flashbulb memory, defined as a highly detailed, exceptionally vivid 'snapshot' of the moment and circumstances in which a piece of surprising and consequential (or emotionally arousing) news was heard (R). For example, many people can recall where they were, what they were doing etc, when the news about 911 was aired (*we know what he's talking about but it would be better to replace too much brevity with the 'the September 11 terrorist attack in America'*). Memories can be valued regardless of positive or negative emotion, I hope to examine the value of memory later in my proposal.

Loftus and Pickrall (1995) conducted a study to determine if false memories could be implanted via suggestion. Twenty-four subjects aged eighteen to fifty-three were asked to remember childhood events presented from family members. One scenario, however, was fictionalised. It was a story where the subject was lost in a mall at the age of five, they were told they had been lost for some time until finally being aided by an elderly woman who brought them back to the family. Only sixty percent of the twenty-four subjects recalled all the true stories and interestingly twenty-nine percent recalled the false memory. They concluded that it was possible to verify memory through family. However, it is hard to **settle (decide, prove, conclude, determine, extrapolate etc.)** that this was an actual false memory instead of a distortion of another time being lost. Despite the inconclusiveness memory can be altered, misremembered or created. It is this idea of fragility I find myself most interested in and perhaps when considering my conclusion, and the question I shall pose, will concentrate on this theme.

Looking at the idea of constructed memories reminded me of Déjà vu. A phenomenon **of which its (that's)** occurrence cannot yet be explained. It may not relate heavily to the fragility of memory but it certainly highlights how little we know and why we think we know it. A common theory that attempts to explain Déjà vu looks at brain development as well as the correlation between age and the manifestation of Déjà vu. It is believed that Déjà vu does not occur until the age of eight or nine and is most frequent during one's adolescent and into their twenties. It's theorized that there is a disconnection with the unconscious process of our experience and our conscious process of that experience. Perhaps the improper conscious understanding of an experience is disconnected from the correct sub-conscious interpretation. This maybe creates the odd feeling one experiences that we call Déjà vu. Again, there is little that is understood with Déjà vu but is definitely something I'd like to develop in my dissertation. **(Bergson has already been mentioned but, as he wrote about the phenomenon, you would expect a reference.)**

Value

We value our memories, recalling fondly on good times, remembering those who are no longer with us. Danielle Delph explores the idea of her mother and herself growing up together, seeing if they would have been friends. She titled the piece 'If I Had Known My Mother Back Then.' She photo shopped herself into her mother's childhood photos and talks about how many people wonder if they had been friends with their parents had they grown up together. Danielle went through images to find pictures of herself and mother at the same stage of their life in order to better the photographs. Her mother made the interesting point that it felt like déjà vu, as if the events had happened.

This series of images reminds me of Roland Barthes mediation on his mothers' death, despite Delph's mother being alive and well. Barthes has the hope of finding her via a photograph, after searching through images of his mother during the time he was alive, decided he had not found an image that spoke of his mother in the way he was looking for.



Barthes wanted to rediscover his mother in order to remember her the way that he had always seen her. The images of her before he was born would have been strange to him but despite this, he finds an old photograph, chipped and broken showing his mother when she was five years old outside her childhood home. Oddly enough it's an image that should seem so distant from his view on his mother which he chooses to look back at as he remembers her. He says "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like **w**innicott's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe." This quote allows us an insight **to** Barthes' mind, despite the presumed appreciation he has for the memory of his mother it seems overshadowed by a sense of grief and mourning. Yet, it still seems as if he values this memory, negative as it is.



Conclusion

I felt that this proposal kept finding its way back to the fragility of memory and the unanswered questions that surround this topic. There is not a factual question I can pose, answer and reach a conclusion not already discovered by someone else. I will certainly not be making scientific breakthroughs and so have opted to answer a theoretical question whereby I research Philosopher's thoughts for the future and incorporate the psychological hypotheses about memory in an attempt to answer the question I have posed below.

In this digital age, where images destroy memories, are future generation's fate an age where we no longer remember and instead rely on documentation?

The relationship between imagery and memory was another reoccurring theme in my proposal. Additionally, it complements the fragility of memory as the two are tied into the same theme of vulnerability. The thinking behind my question links back to the quote from Roland Barthes. "Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" Using this quote as the basis for my question, **parents take images now of their children every day, not a moment is missed (seems to have wandered in from another sentence)**. So when reminiscing on past experiences one may go and look for the particular image instead of simply remembering the experience. **By performing this (?-'by acting in such a way...')**, does one ever achieve the ability to properly remember?

Bibliography

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Memento (2000) Directed by Christopher Nolan USA Newmarket Films

Well done _____. This is a coherently written essay covering a complex subject with evidence of very good research and thoughtful prose.

Your feedback details for each assessment component, is as below:

Engagement with Literature Skills (weighted at 20% of the total mark)

- *Show your engagement with relevant and credible literature.*
- *Use discussion, critique and referencing to demonstrate your awareness of suitable theories and concepts.*
- *Apply your referencing skills clearly and consistently.*

You have used an appropriate range of relevant materials to support your proposal ranging across, science, fine art, film and philosophy. There is evidence of a close examination of your selected material and a good understanding of complex ideas.

Knowledge and Understanding Skills (weighted at 30% of the total mark)

- *Manage and organise your research information into the given framework.*
- *Show your knowledge and understanding of the principles and theories of your topic.*

Use analysis, discussion, and bibliographic referencing to show your knowledge of relevant research and scholarship.

The level of analysis is very good. You could be more precise when looking at neuroscience in comparison to the philosophy of memory as you have spotted the link between the two, but it is good that you are willing to explore the similarities and contradictions inherent in the two.

Cognitive and Intellectual Skills (weighted at 30% of the total mark)

- *create links and relationships to theories and practices that apply to your chosen keywords;*
- *critically evaluate and analyse the relevant theoretical and practice-based discourses;*
- *conclude by outlining and justifying the research question (or questions) that have come from your exploration.*
-

You are making interesting and speculative links between these different areas supported by good research. There are interesting discussions related to how memory works as a device within the film, *Memento*, compared to the artwork of Danielle Delph and how these relate to Barthes' writing and Bergson's philosophy.

Perhaps you could have included more about how these ideas would be expanded into your dissertation and how you formulated your question.

Practical Application Skills (weighted at 10% of the total mark)

- *Assimilate and apply the required rules and criteria of the given format to your text;*
- *Organise information into a coherent framework which identifies a range of concepts and theories and discusses their merits and limitations;*
- *Consistently apply referencing conventions to suit the required format.*
-

A well-structured proposal that could include a bit more about where you intend to take this, but coherent all the same. Referencing is well used throughout.

Transferable Skills for Life and Professional Practice (weighted at 10% of the total mark)

- *Present your text professionally, applying attention to the conventions of English language and grammar.*
- *Communicate your ideas in a coherent and consistent style with due consideration to the reader/audience.*
- *Apply your writing knowledge showing a command of writing structures, such as sentence structure, paragraphing, and appropriate and explicit use of visuals to enhance communication.*

Generally, very good writing style. Just tidy up some of the formal elements: for example, there is no need to place the title of Bergson's *Matter and Memory* in brackets as if it's a reference; you are just quoting the title. Also, provide a list of illustrations, rather than just referring to your chosen illustrations in the text.

Very good essay that promises an even better dissertation.

To access additional Study Skills support:

Email: studyskillsdistance@uwtsd.ac.uk (email for appointment)

Telephone: +44(0)1570 424947

Skype: [student.support.tsd](https://www.wuolfe.ac.uk/skype)

You can Click here for details on the current HARVARD version of the UWTSD Referencing Handbook <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/infoskills/referencing-handbooks/> link to open resource.

Task for 5/3/20

By now you should have started your proposal, certainly have found a subject area you want to explore, made some notes and considered the subjects viability as something that can be extended into the full 6,000-word Independent Inquiry module next year.

Write a potential question.

Write a brief synopsis (one paragraph) about your proposal – the what and why of how you want to frame your subject.

Bring a hard copy next week to put on the wall (I will be collecting these after as a starting point for future tutorials).