

M7X02024

Confirmative Praxis

Report

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1.0 Introduction

The work collated in this report will be the continuation of the Explorative Praxis project and will further consider the notion of childhood memories and solitude; how important they are, whether they are interrelated; why is or was a safe place necessary and a look is taken at how these are defined by theorists and explored by other artists.

The Confirmative Praxis module will investigate the link between selective isolation, memory and a place of safety through the medium of sculpture and in so doing this project aims to consider the connection we have with positive memories and how a piece of sculpture may reflect this memory or the safe place we all hold so dear.

This report will analyse the potential for one sculpture or artwork to be a bridge between the said memory, the safe place, and the present; through a visual interpretation or a trigger.

The physical properties of the sculptures will be considered and justification of the latest developments discussed alongside the inspirational artists whose work is pertinent to the growth of the project.

Some primary research was undertaken to gain a better understanding of people's memories and the results collated, discussed, examined, and applied to the project. At the same time, the implementation process of the discussed changes will be specified and consideration will be made as to how these needs were met through concept and materiality.

2.0 The *Hut*

Kearney states;

Just think of how the creative revisiting of a childhood room can provoke a sense of involuntary memory that renders the recalled image timeless and essential- the past suddenly transformed into a miraculous present as in the Proustian remembrance of the mother's bedtime kiss.
(Bachelard, 2014)

It is understood through contemporary neurological studies that our memory is formed in the cerebellum, amygdala, and hippocampus parts of the brain, it is a deep-seated compilation of facts and together with emotions; formed in the limbic system and the cerebellum; is a sophisticated, individualistic phenomenon; a primeval instinctive response. It is this response the *hut* aims to trigger. Below is the basic form of a *hut* without the specific memories added.



Hut (Basic form), 2019, concrete, resin, adhesive, 4.5cm x 4.5cm

There is not one word or phrase that equates to the intricate assemblage of memory and emotions that is unified by the complexity of an individual's brain, and so the *hut* has become representational of this. A *hut* is, therefore, a vessel of emotional comfort, a poignant moment in time, that resonates a moment of stillness and serenity, a keeper of the past, a moment of synthesis; a sculpture that is lived when observed. Marcus Aurelius stated, "Man seeks for seclusion in the wilderness....a

dream you have cherished.....nowhere can a man find a quieter or more untroubled retreat than in his own soul.” (Marcus and Staniforth, 2004, p.28)

Henri Bergson (1914) wrote about the distinction between the past and the present, whilst understanding the continuity of time; his books; *Dreams* and *Matter and Memory* extensively cover the subject. He sought to establish that “if memory is a form of duration, then it is one with the impetus of consciousness itself” (Bergson, 1914).

After some consideration, it seems as if Bergson is saying that memory is not in the brain but in time, but that time is not a real thing, but a duration, so we can assume that nothing can be ‘in’ anything. A hut memory, therefore, imports the past into the now and a single moment of understanding, of being.

George Eliot wrote;

Our past still travels with us from afar. And what we have been makes us what we are. (Gunn, 2013)

So memory can no longer be seen as inert, it has a reason, a purpose, and a desire to emerge into our consciousness whenever it is called upon. It is not just a psychological recollection and nor is it a simple former present, it is a rhisomatic network; a network of *huts* of our past and an interrelation of the past and the present, a desire for the sublime to impress our mind with awe, veneration, and cravings for a euphoric *hut* moment of escapism.

Huts reclaim our consciousness temporarily, a momentary pleasurable twisted hauntology, where the ghosts and memories of our past life embrace us.

Our emotions also have control over the cultural and environmental fragments of information that enter our brain before the semiotics come into play. Descartes’ Cartesian approach suggests that these emotions are distractions from the true meaning and understanding of the world and that we interpret this meaning incorrectly. Phenomenology, however, suggests that any meaning only comes to the

forefront of existence when it meets with our own emotions, and so this combination of actuality and emotion is what the world around us truly means. When we add time to this; not the Cartesian second by second time, but the phenomenological experiential time, we can establish a whole new understanding of the world. It is with this in mind that the project developed into a sculptural phenomenological approach.

So when we investigate solitude and isolation and bring it to the fore; Hammitt (1982) characterised solitude in the wildness as;

....a form of privacy in a specific environmental setting where individuals experience an acceptable degree of control and choice over the type and amount of information they must process. (Hammitt and Madden, 1989).

Hammitt (1982) went on to suggest there were five factors of wilderness privacy, of that emotional release and *resting the mind from anxiety and mental fatigue* were deemed to be the most important. The results from Hammitt et al. support this report's belief that people's need for solitude and calm is integral to their *cognitive freedom* (Hammitt and Madden, 1989). The *huts* depict *cognitive freedom* at not only a social level but also at an individual level; it is a freedom of mind, a visual reminder of the psychological solitude we all seek.

Below we can see the sculptural response of an interview with an individual, a memory identified, a relating object is chosen to reflect this moment, the object sourced and embedded into a *hut*.



'Listening to my tape recorder', 2020

4.5cm x 4.5cm

Deep Country by Neil Ansell (Ansell, 2012) continued this report's focus on the connection of solitude and isolation. He isolated himself for five years in the Welsh countryside to 'find himself' and in the end, he somewhat lost himself to loneliness. We can see distinct comparisons to that of *Walden*; with a lack of electricity, no running water or indoor plumbing, and in a dilapidated old shack he did more than just isolate himself, he almost tortured himself into solitary confinement. Nature and every species are described by Ansell, in loving but almost fanatical detail, but his isolation led to chronic illness and hospitalisation; it was a potent reminder of our mortality and vulnerability as well as the need for a balance of experiences. This book emphasised the reality, the depth of feelings, and gravity that each person's *hut* moment may hold. It is a powerfully important moment in one's life in controlled doses.

Solitude was an inspirational bedrock for this project. The notion of artistically creating a completely isolated environment; a fond memory, being totally alone, or the ability to render calmness upon oneself at any given moment; was a fascinating supposition. It is not necessarily the case that persons need to be in the literal wilderness and away from everything in total isolation to feel calm and so the *hut* has become a metaphor for a self-enforced aloneness, an individual controlling of the environmental setting, *cognitive freedom*, attainable tranquility. Solitude can be restorative for the body and the mind. The composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart said of solitude:

When I am, as it were, completely myself, entirely alone, and of good cheer—say, travelling in a carriage or walking after a good meal or during the night when I cannot sleep—it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly (Taffe, 2019).



Laying on Moss, 2021

Each *hut* was borne out of its owners' memory, each *hut* had a scene, an environment hidden from others. Above we can see one of the 'scenes' showing the *Laying on moss* experimentation shots.

With this in mind, we can surmise and look at what Hinds and Sparks (2008) said, that the more often people are exposed to the natural world, the more people demonstrate an emotional connectedness to nature, and therefore achieve self-efficacy which in turn directly aids them to develop a capacity to be alone and subsequently better manage solitude daily. This project was predominantly based in its original manifestation around the forms and structures of nature within the need for isolation and safety; the idea of a treehouse or a den was the original concept. Below are 2 previous incarnations of *huts*, not satisfied they represented the message effectively, experimentation continued.



Cloud Hut, 2019

Hut 2, 2019, Sculpting foam, wood, glue, paint, moss, 5cm x 2cm

But as the project develops it is clear that one person's natural *hut* hidden from the world is not another person's *hut* of safety but a place of fear. Further research was then required to establish exactly each individual's concept of a *hut*.



A nail in the door to keep me safe, 2021

Above the concept of fear and a hut moment was explored, *a nail in the door to keep me safe*. The *hut* had a rusty old nail embedded into it and the participant was to hold it in a way that showed she was safe but also confined. It was a memory she treasured, so a relevant *hut* was sculpted, but it was interesting how a moment of fear led to such a *hut* moment, now reflected on fondly by her.

Existentialism; a philosophy that highlights an individual's existence, freedom, and choice and can be the theory we use to define our own meaning of life in an irrational universe. We can consider these self-configuring moments as Fong (Crane, 2017) says, an *existentialist moment* with moments of mental clarity and inward-facing solitude. Fong reconfigured an idea from the late German-American sociologist Kurt Wolff, from his *Surrender and Catch* theory.

*When you have these moments, don't fight it. Accept it for what it is.
Let it emerge calmly and truthfully and don't resist it. (Crane, 2017).*

Fong went on to say, *“your alone time should not be something that you're afraid of”* (Crane, 2017).

Matthew Bowker, a psychoanalytic political theorist at Medaille College stated that being alone is a *deeper internal process and went on to say;*

Productive solitude requires internal exploration, a kind of labor which can be uncomfortable, even excruciating....It might take a little bit of work before it turns into a pleasant experience. But once it does it becomes maybe the most important relationship anybody ever has, the relationship you have with yourself. (Crane, 2017).

This is not to say we should remove all stimuli around us to achieve effective solitude or to get to our *hut* but to say that we can all reach our solitude by reaching for our internal *hut* moment and so becoming more in control of our emotional well-being.

It was established that the natural environment can be an influencing factor in people's affinity for solitude; it is not always the case. Secondary research on Social Media was used to form a compilation of dialogues depicting over 70 individuals' safe places, memories, or wilderness moments.



Facebook post, September 2020

Among these were the predicted answers such as; *“I had a treehouse in the big oak tree”, “under the quilt” and “camping in the woods”*, but there were some curious and

engaging replies; *“a nail in the door kept me safe”, “the wall was pebble-dashed with tiny spiky stones and moss growing on it”* and *“a gold-lined eggshell I could sleep in”*.

The research showed that the proposed line of inquiry; that everyone has an inner *hut*, to be proven right. It was established that amongst moments of escapism and memory, the connection to nature played an intrinsic part of tranquility and many peaceful *hut* moments.

It, however, became very apparent that each of us may have very different memories and experiences that would provide us with a cornucopia of *huts*, and this was to be the next challenging task to produce one solitary sculptural response for multiple perspectives to converge and to dissolve the boundary between theory and praxis and creating an equivalence between solitude and happiness/contentment.

The aim was perhaps to develop a disruption to the norms; that of ignoring the dominance that memories can hold and reformat the brain to refocus on control of emotions. The space between real life and the *hut* is a chasm but one which can be bridged through mediation. But, can it be done through the sculpting of one singular *hut*, the reading and the research suggests it can not.

The cubist structure of the *hut* was in response to the work not of Picasso but Georges Braque (1882-1963), the Czech cubist and known as the founder of Cubism who wrote about its ability to *condense an entire abundance into each view* (2016). To respond to this, the hut in its realistic form was reduced to its simplest form, removing complexities and details and emerging into a geometrical whole. Here we see a Braque painting; an interpretation of a pedestal table which



Georges Braque, Pedestal Table, 1913. (2020)

captures and celebrates contemplation but also maintains an emphasis on the structure. It is this method of simultaneous perspective and object fragmentation that led to the redesigning of the *hut* into its present form.

Previous research had led to the size of the hut being specified and material, structural research led to the *hut* being constructed of substantial or concrete-like materials in a reflection of the strength and dominating world we live in. The size reflected the desire for the memory to be recognised as a small and precious thing, a thing to be cherished, whilst the materiality defined by the requisite need for strength and safety was to protect it from external realities and or atrocities.

After much consideration and with the predetermined size of the *hut*, it was decided to sculpt each person's *hut*. A representational object, a reappropriation of an article would then be selected and incorporated into each bespoke *hut*, creating a series

characterising the said 'cognitive freedom' and reach the entry point for the viewer to enter the hut experience and get drawn into the piece and thus the relationship between them and the sculpture has begun in earnest.



Above are a selection of the sculptures made in response to the participants' statements, successes, and top left one of a few failures.

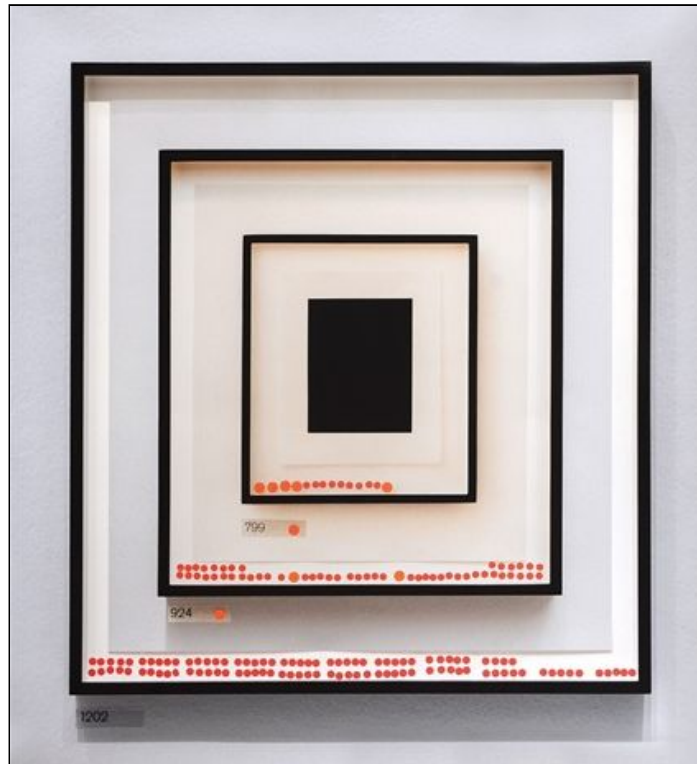
Tiziano Terzani a guru and journalist famously said before his death in 2004; *The only real teacher is not in a forest, or a hut or an ice cave in the Himalayas*, Terzani once said in an interview, *"It is within us"* (Povoledo, 2006).

The interconnectivity of the sculpture and the viewer is a crucial part of the work, it is the lived and the abstract converging, closing the spatialities and creating a sense of

place and self, a grounding; to almost embody the spirit and the moment. It is a strange combination of the past and the now, so far away from the current self but so intrinsically wrapped in one's being. The intimacy of the emotion thought and moment must create a period of immersion, ongoing thinking, a rethinking through the sculptural visualisation of the memory, a connective dialogue.

The multiplicity and potentiality of the *huts* need to be reflected in the final pieces/pieces of work, and so with the consideration of previous layered and textural works, a question was posed.

The process then developed from desiring a Mille-Feuille effect of layering of the sculptures, an impossibility one might think, but here we can give reference to Cornelia Ann Parker (born in 1956) best known for her inspiring sculptures and installation art, she works in a variety of mediums and collaborates with many artists but the piece that we give reference to is *Stolen Thunder (The Final)* 2019, which started life in 2012 when Parker took a photograph of a work by Tracy Emin, removed the artwork itself and printed an image of the frame and the sold red dots; thereby removing the emphasis on Emin's work and highlighting the sold dots and the frame; an act of jealousy and dissection and resurrection. This she repeated to produce the final piece we see below, and so it became a seed of an idea to develop this project beyond its current form. Parker fragments objects, even whole rooms, and reconfigures them into a visually challenging piece of work. The resurrection of the photos in *Stolen Thunder* emphasises Parker's fascination with the objects when we have finished with them, so it was this concept that led to the next development.



(Harrington, n.d.) Cornelia Parker, *Stolen Thunder (The Final)*, The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, London, 2019

After reading what Henry Moore said; “*The art of sculpture was for centuries enslaved....to a single line of ponderation. There is no intrinsic reason for such limitation*” (Read, 1975, p.197) and from these influences and the removal of the norms it opened the project to new possibilities.

The next question that arose from reading was that of the analytical psychology of Jung; were the *huts* a Jungian archetype? The reading caused much speculation but on further consideration, it was decided that a hut was not a state of being inherited from early human ancestors nor is it present in one's collective unconscious, it is complex in its foundation but Jung's principles although influential were not of paramount importance to this project.

The mythological theories of Joseph Campbell, however, and his *human experience* likewise brought about questions of *comparative mythology*, and his 1949 book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 2012) challenged the ideals of the *huts* in that we examined the suggestion that the *huts* narratives shared a fundamental

structure of memory and so were not so individualistic in their creation. But on reflection, although the unifying structures of the *huts* symbolises a complex mixture of memory and experience, present in us all, they do not comply with Campbell's monomyth in their entirety.

The *huts* aim is more in line with the Madonna and the child, a primeval memory of safety and an all-encompassing hug, a way to stabilise the equilibrium or just to cope with oppression.



Duccio, "Madonna and Child," ca. 1300

A depiction of the iconic Mother's hug

If a person is enduring horrendous conditions, tumultuous events, life struggles, or simply day-to-day challenges, the *hut* is a way of retreating into that much desired safe space. Throughout history, people have retreated, hidden, and withdrawn from peril, insecurity, or vulnerability. The life of Anne Frank was one of retreat and security, Waldens' was one of peace and societal withdrawal and so the *hut* can be identified as attaining the safety needs, love, and belonging need that Maslow's

Hierarchy of Needs identifies, but in an individualistic, singular, personal way within one's mind, similar in that sense to Frank and Walden. A mindful refuge.

The *hut* becomes a moment of *existential* freedom, that of control and as Martin Heidegger thought, a choice in which one can take oneself away and choose to visit memories. It may be seen as a fragment of time when we enter selfhood and the individual puts into action a hut or a being present moment. Likewise, Dasein (2019) makes us what we are, it is that interpretation that means we can choose to engage with our basic concepts and remove ourselves from a place or situation we find ourselves in. The phenomenology of time, whether the bored, anxious, or excited alter our experience of other fractions of time, so to be able to control oneself momentarily and withdraw to a *hut* is a mindfully powerful tool; by focusing on emotion for a moment, we can identify key factors of human nature and who we are.

The *hut* memory moment is a palimpsest that is individual and so to create a single work from this cornucopia of *huts*; a photo of each *hut* was taken, the images layered to create a single image in response to Cornelia Parker's work, but the opposite of her redact.



Title: **19**

A digital compilation of 19 hut sculptures layered to form a single image

As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past....they also help people take possession of a space in which they are insecure. (Sontag, 2005)

The photograph seen here was then reduced in size to fit the required pre-determined scale and set in its own *hut* sculpture. It has elements of Jung, Campbell, Walden, and of Parker, but in its own right it becomes the seen and the unseen, the multiplicity of many hut moments of memory, of pure joy and calm, secretly hidden once again, but clear for all to see.

So each image of the participant holding the *hut* is not just an image of the encounter between the photographer, the sculpture, and the participant, but an image of an event as it happens; so although the photographer is capturing the moment of revisiting the memory they are not intervening or experiencing it. It is a passive, tacit

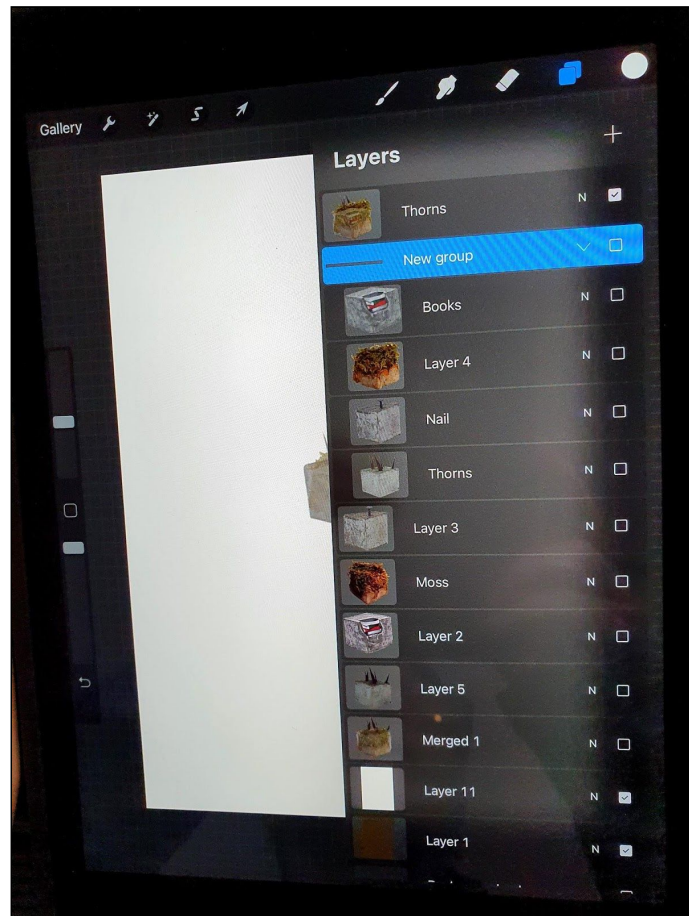
observation promoting further nostalgia; sentimental in themselves, laying claim to an alternative past reality.

The process was then repeated with the final 4 chosen *huts* and '4' was sculpted, along with the final '4' photographs of these participants in their own 'scenes'.





'4' Scenes, 2021, Prints were ordered of differing sizes, formats, and colouring and aged by hand to demonstrate the age and nature of the participants' hut moments.



'4' The creation



'4' Compilation, low opacity, printed photograph, 2021, 2cm x 2cm



'4', 2021

4.5cm x 4.5cm

Concrete, tile adhesive, paper, ink

And so finally, here is 4, it's a community of *huts* embedded in their own *hut*.

3.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, we have discussed Bergson's principles that memory is not in the brain but in time, but that time is not real, which to us means that the *hut* imports the past into the now, it is an interrelation of then and now. It is a physical phenomenological object and not just a psychological recollection; it is a trigger in the search for a euphoric *hut* moment of escapism, and experiential connection. Hammitt et al identified the need for this escapism and cognitive freedom at an individual level, the *huts* are formed in such a way they make individual connectivity between memory, solitude, in a physical form.

Ansell and Walden compounded the necessity for balance in isolation and time alone with our thoughts and memories; the importance of connectivity to now and to the past.

The *hut*, therefore, removed the need for literal isolation in the wilderness and became a metaphor for a self-enforced aloneness and attainable tranquility. Both fear and joyful moments led to a variety of sculptures being designed and created from participants' Fong style, *existentialist moments*.

The readings and the research undertaken, resulting in a multitude of responses led this report to believe that one single sculpture could not be formed to represent all responses and theories. After much consideration and visiting many artists' works such as Cornelia Parker 'Stolen Thunder' (2019) and Braque (2016) who wrote to 'condense an entire abundance into each view', a solution was considered and a Mille-Feuille style image created using ProCreate software layering several *huts*. The resultant image was then embedded into a single, cubist externally simplest form, creating an accumulated visional remembrance. This form responded to Tiziano Terzani's, 'It is within us' (2006) statement; those who know their memory is within will have a cognitive response to this piece, those that don't will respond with questions and wonderment to it; a grounding is formed, an intimacy, an emotion. It was established that phenomenology affects the way we experience the world, it is not something we can see or touch, but bringing that and time into the mix adds depth to a person's understanding of an object. It is this concept and understanding that led to the sculptures becoming more cubistic in their composition. To challenge the viewer's initial impressions and past experiences to determine their phenomenological dialogue. It was decided that it was not the place of the sculptor to provide a comprehensive descriptive detailed sculpture but to create an interesting one that the viewer perceives phenomenologically and is amorphous in a similar way that solitude is.

Is it Absurdism to desire a retreat or an escape from the world? The belief that human beings exist in a purposeless, chaotic universe has been proved wrong in this report's research; A precious memory is not a state of flux, it is now a reality that can be re-triggered through representation. A *hut* is a metaphor for life maybe and each

sculpture is a memory but also isn't a memory in which the viewer is to become a producer.

There is no final conclusive statement or end to this process, it is a constantly evolving project. More sculptures have been requested and so it is now the aim of this project to achieve '42' because it is the meaning of life!

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