

Final Report

‘Escapism’

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Introduction

Escapism- 'tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy' (OED, 2025)

This word strongly influenced this project's direction; it is something not often heard, representing a sense of place, yet the word itself brings its own presence. Its meaning resonates with people in one way or another, some more than others. For myself, it reflected my past back to me, times that were difficult and overwhelming, finding difficulty coping, and a need for some form of relief, a way to escape for a moment. This project is a reflection on my past, my childhood growing up with an abusive father around meant that the place where I lived was not always where I could call home. Instead, I found home in the areas I could escape, the places that made everything else disappear for a moment, my '*Escapism*' (OED, 2025). This project revisits those places, attempting to find how to best represent a park through the exploration of mixed media and fabric processes, hoping to illustrate my feelings and memory, not only with imagery but with the materials that represent them.

This report explores all that went into the project's development and how it has been influenced through Methodology and Inspiration. Exploring how those elements contributed to the overall outcome and link to this project's initial ideas. Exploring 'Hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202) and the work of Eduardo Cadava as well as the more significant elements of inspiration and assisted growth of this project such as the work of Edvard Munch, Jackie Mulder, Joanna Piotrowska, the film 'Up' (Disney, 2009), and a book by Xiang Yun Loh called Organised Scenery.

Methodology

Everywhere you look there are traces of the past, reflections from a life before your own, reminders of a different time. Every moment spent is another to be remembered as it becomes a part of history, a moment in the past as we never really live in the present. Something that happens now will become something that was, only seconds later. Memories, photographs, objects, stories, the place you call home are all filled with history, things that represent and reflect the past and all that comes with it, the good and the bad, haunting traces of what was. This can often be referred to as a haunting or ghosts due to the way it is an 'aura' or essence that comes off it; it is something that is there and has a presence without being physically present.

Hauntology

'To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration.' (Derrida, 1993, p.202)

'Hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202), a concept combining Haunt with Ontology, which was first introduced by Jacques Derrida in 1993, is a concept used to discuss the return of an element from the cultural past. Haunting or being haunted by something can be as simple as a recurring memory, and elements that are often referred to as ghosts due to the way they exist but are not a physical presence, 'to haunt does not mean to be present. When he references haunting, he is nodding to the 'ghosts' of the 'dead' futures that haunt the present, the futures that never came to be and therefore their having been there at all creates a recurring reminder of the essence of their existence.

Ontology; 'seeks the classification and explanation of entities. Ontology is about the object of inquiry, what you seek to examine,' (Hammond, 2017), an object of enquiry that you set to investigate further. Referring to ontology as a 'conjunction' and 'exorcism' further emphasises its meaning as both terms are actions that bring something into view, summoning it forward. Ontology is about seeking answers, so bringing something that cannot be seen into light, a 'conjunction'. The reference to and combination of Haunt and Ontology to manifest 'Hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202) refers to a return of something from the cultural past, shining a light on what has not been present.

This concept inspired the *Escapism* project through the exploration of the places from the past that helped me to find a way to escape what weighed heavily, as well as the experiences that I was going through. Addressing these places in the present and looking at them and their reflections from the past, the places that had been escaped to are a constant reminder of the past, not only the good, but also the bad. Every time I returned to these places, they were not only the reminders of how I survived those difficult times, but also those difficult times themselves. Revisiting those places brings up the 'ghosts' of the past and memories of what was, the good times that I had, walking along the paths and taking the journey through these places is like flipping through an old photo album, but instead it's a physical space that has more that makes you think 'I remember when I did this there'.

The *Escapism* project attempts to envision those spaces and capture the hauntological traces embedded there. It explores what materials and processes can be used to truly represent why and how these places help me to escape my mind, then and now, linking to Derrida's concept of 'Hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202), which addresses the past's reflection in the present.

Words of Light

'Nevertheless the return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting' (Cadava, 1997, p.11). Eduardo Cadava's Words of Light has always been an influential and inspiring body of writing regarding photography and the photographic image, reflecting its more profound meaning and relevance in the art world and everyday life. The above quote, among many other references and discussions in his book, intentionally or not links back to Derrida's concept of 'hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202). The above quote is taken from one of Cadava's discussions about how impactful and significant the photographic image can be. How they are a source of longing, reflections of the past that remind you of different moments in time, good or bad. He is more referencing the significance of something or someone photographed after passing or no longer being present, how their existence, their 'aura', and their presence live on through their visual documentation, the photograph. *'Nevertheless the return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting'* (Cadava, 1997, p.11) states that regardless of the status of what has been photographed existing still or no longer being present its having been there at all holds relevance. Its existence can always be present once more in memory and essence through the documentation, its proof of existence in turn takes the form of a haunting through its conjuration of its existence.

This expands upon Derrida's concept of 'hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202) through how it is a form of ghostly presence that haunts the owner whenever it is reflected upon. This is what is meant when he refers to 'haunting' as discussed in 'hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202), haunting/ghosts do not necessarily mean spectral figures but are more symbolic references to a presence that exists but not in a physical form. So even though something did exist and has happened, the only ways in which it can be

reflected upon are through its essence, the memory of the past that ultimately 'haunts' the present.

Cadava's and Derrida's links to what is meant by a hauntological presence is what the *Escapism* project is referencing. It reflects upon the past and its impact on the present through the photographic image. Despite the pictures not being taken at the time that is reflected upon specifically, as it happened years ago, they are relevant captured stills of the moment the past was reflected in the present. The photos were taken in the moment of return to the location, the purpose behind returning was intending to remember the past, the return to the place it began inevitably stirred up reminders of the past in the same way looking back on a photograph does in Cadava's statement. What is then captured is not the moment from the past but rather the moment the past returned to the present through its remembrance, the acknowledgement of its memory and existence. The photograph taken in that moment becomes its own reflection of the past as it becomes the documentation of remembrance, the reflective journey taken through the space. Documenting every time something was seen, heard, or felt in the moment that struck a memory of relevance, something worth remembering. The return to what was left there takes the form of a haunting through its remaining existence, even though it is not exactly as it was all those years ago, the foundations are still the same and still hold that history.

'There can be no passing moment that is not already both the past, present, and future in order for it to pass at all. This is why this eternal repetition does not mean "return of the same" but rather of what is never simply itself...If the eternal return therefore comes as the eternal repetition of alterity, we could say, somewhat elliptically, that the eternal return is the return of returning itself.' (Cadava, 1997, p.31)

Cadava's book also discusses the concept of 'Eternal Return' (Cadava, 1997, p.31), referencing other discussions made by philosopher Walter Benjamin. In the above quote, he addresses how the concept behind 'eternal return' (Cadava, 1997, p.31) is something that will live on eternally, a constant repetitive loop. *'There can be no passing moment that is not already both the past, present, and future in order for it to pass at all'* (Cadava, 1997, p.31). How we are in this moment in time, part of the past, present and future, in order for time to pass at all, as ultimately, without all those elements, we would be standing still, without past, present or future, time will cease to exist. Yesterday, this moment was the future; it was also the future only moments ago. The existence of the future allows time to move on. Past and present go hand in hand as the past is what happened minutes and even seconds ago, and you only live in the present in a second as once that second has passed it has become a moment in the past, so really the present is not truly present but merely the state before becoming past.

'This is why this eternal repetition does not mean "return of the same" but rather of what is never simply itself...If the eternal return therefore comes as the eternal repetition of alterity' (Cadava, 1997, p.31). Going on to address how 'eternal return' (Cadava, 1997, p.31) is the return of something in imperfect form, nothing duplicated or thought of is a perfect replica of something else, but somewhat similar to it. Just like remembering the past, memory in general can be vivid; it can record all the exact details and information. However, that memory is just a copy, a duplication of the event itself. It's a state of 'alterity', 'the state of being other' (OED, 2025) the embodiment of something other, or something else but not the thing itself. Someone's memory will change when reflected upon, it is never the full exact recollection, *'the eternal return therefore comes as the eternal repetition of alterity'* (Cadava, 1997, p.31), so the

‘eternal return’ therefore is a reference to the forever repeating ‘state of other’. Referencing how no matter how much something is repeated it will never be the exact thing itself but the copy of it. Memory is just a reflective documented copy of an event, but never the event in exact recollection as it is not the thing itself.

The concept of ‘eternal return’ (Cadava, 1997, p.31) paired with hauntological traces previously referenced are the foundations of the *Escapism* project. The park that holds the memory and traces of the past that haunt the present and future, as ‘*the return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting*’ (Cadava, 1997, p.11) and is the ode to ‘hauntology’ (Derrida, 1993, p.202). The return to those spaces brings up the past, however, no matter how many times they are returned to it is never exactly the same due to time passed, it is not only a forever changing natural environment but also never the same as the time visited previously, as that was unique to that moment. This means that the photographs documented are not just the symbolic reflections of the past as already acknowledged, but are also ‘eternal returns’ (Cadava, 1997, p.31). Just as my repetitive visits to the space and constant reminders of the past are eternal repetitions of something like the moment but never the moment itself, the photographs captured address and reference ‘eternal return’ (Cadava, 1997, p.31) as well.

Inspiration

This project's origins are close to home, and the inspiration behind it coming to be is personal, a story waiting to be told. Despite acknowledging the story and knowing how it should be portrayed, the how was still missing. It was a big thing to share and an even bigger place to represent, and not only did the emotion and meaning need to be put across, but so did the atmosphere that the space gave off. That atmosphere and 'aura' made the place significant, which is why that space held meaning above any other. So, doing justice to both the story and the space itself was extremely important to me. After a lot of research, I came across a range of artists and areas of inspiration that opened my eyes and helped me understand more ways to represent a story.

Edvard Munch

Starting this project, there was a hope to find other artists that worked with trauma, exploring how their trauma affected them and how they channelled that experience into their artwork, to tell a story or express what they were feeling and going through. One artist that has always been an inspiration is Edvard Munch; his work explores all of the above, expressing his feelings through his painting and often using his work to visually express his darker emotions such as fear, dread, loneliness and sexual longing.

'I walked with two friends then the sun sank. Suddenly the sky turned as red as blood...my friends walked on, and I was left alone, trembling with fear. I felt as if all nature were filled with one mighty unending shriek.' Munch (1893, quoted by Hoummos, 2022)

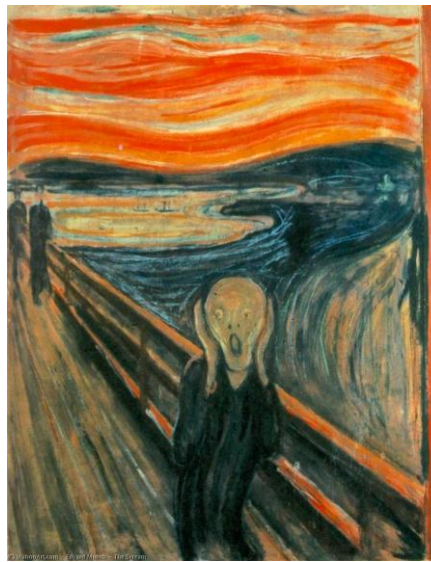


Fig.1 Scream, 1893

This piece of art (figure 1) by Munch is an expressionistic construction of an experience where Munch and two companions were walking along a bridge, and as shown, the two companions left him. The 'scream' is a visual representation of Munch's emotional state, the horror and fear of being alone caused him to scream a 'mighty unending shriek'. Despite it being literal in its ways of expressing an extreme emotion, it is also abstract and symbolic. It is a visual emotional reflection, surrounded by the significance and essence of that moment in time. Even though he is literally illustrating his series of events, the central figure and its surrounding background gives the viewer a sense of surrealism, almost a form of dream like state, visiting his nightmare, his hauntological memory. His work shows links to 'Hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202), in more than just being haunted by the memory itself, but through the way he created a form of freeze frame for the moment of trauma. So now he is both haunted by the conjuration and potential recurrence of memory as well as the paintings he created to express it. Experiencing the event repeatedly as a form of 'eternal return' (Cadava, 1997, p.31), reliving the same experience over and over to illustrate the event itself through his painting. An artefact that now lives on in a similar way to Cadava's references of hauntological traces surrounding the photographic image.

This is where the inspiration and links to *Escapism* came from, creating a visual representation of memory, a hauntological reflection of the past that allowed people to escape there with Munch. His use of colour and perspective allow you to be drawn in and feel and experience the moment as he does, through his use of visual representation. Something that the *Escapism* project hoped to achieve, taking into consideration the perspective, ways in which someone can escape to that moment, that memory with you, not a perfect representation, but creating a surreal dream-like state that allows people to feel in that moment as you do. Using the work to express a difficult moment in time is part of why Munch's work stands out as an inspiration for my *Escapism* project, why his work created a need to consider more than just telling my story but considering everything that goes into it.

That is what led me to consider the use of colour in my work, initially taking the photos in colour and then later transforming them to black and white. Illustrating the dark undertone of what was really going on behind the images, childhood is usually associated with bright colours and visuals, so having the photos be of a childhood experience and reflection without colour expresses the darkness and numbing undertone of emotion that I experienced. Munch used oranges, reds, yellows, blacks, greys and blues to express his feelings. Warm colours like orange, red and yellow are often connected to fear, anger, urgency and caution, pairing them with blue, which is usually associated and linked to sadness, then black and the darker colours linking to fear and negativity. Despite having more than one view for colour meaning, when they are all paired with the description, the figure and surrounding visuals, in this case, paint the picture of a negative experience.

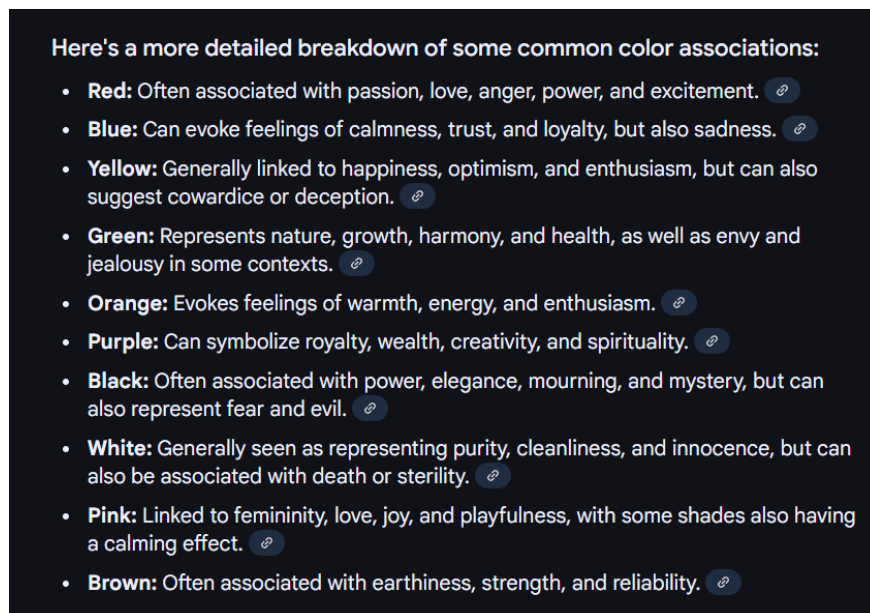


Fig. 2 Colour Theory for Designers Part 1: The Meaning of Color, 2021

Jackie Mulder

Evolving from the initial fabric experiments done at the start of Explorative Praxis, there was a desire to find alternative ways of exploring fabric processes to create an immersive space. To bring 2D images to life in a 3D way, to do justice to what was photographed and make a real sense of '*Escapism*' (OED, 2025). In a search for new ideas, I came across Jackie Mulder, a photographic artist who often uses mixed media with her photography to illustrate further what her work is trying to say. Not only does her work stand out and relate to my own, but so does the premise of her work.

Her work embodies creating a safe space as she refers to her art as 'her own safe world', (Contemporary Art Collectors, 2024). Each piece allows her mind to roam freely while working; she is wholly absorbed in her own creative space, 'similar to her childhood days of scribbling in her room', (Contemporary Art Collectors, 2024). Her work embodies 'escapism' (OED, 2025) as she uses her work as a literal and figurative form of 'healing'—a means of coping, as she always has done.



Fig. 3 Thought Trails, 2023



Fig. 4 Thought Trails, 2023

Similarly to Escapism, Mulder uses the landscape and nature to inspire her work. She often uses fabric to extend the narrative and uses it as a form of displaying her work. She uses a sheer silk fabric to print her images onto, not only that, but she layers these prints to create a 3D image, or to use the layering to play on perspective to make some aspects of the photos stand out above the others. This way of working made me think about my project and how I could push the boundaries of capturing a landscape. Thinking of more ways to capture the returning to somewhere over time through the use of layering imagery, capturing 'hauntology', (Derrida, 1993, p.202) through the traces of the imagery on the transparent material and 'eternal return' (Cadava, 1997, p.31) through diluted recollection of imagery.

Joanna Piotrowska

Upon researching ways and means of making the most out of photographs and materials, as well as how best to create an immersive space, I discovered the work of Joanna Piotrowska. Her work examines the human condition through performative acts, social experiments, and constructions using photography. The interest and link to Escapism comes from her project *'Shelters'* 2019, where Piotrowska asked different people to create makeshift shelters within a domesticated setting.



Fig. 5 Shelters, 2019



Fig.6 Shelters, 2019

'All of these arrangements are unstable and temporary, but their fragility is beside the point, because their purpose is symbolic. They are expressions of identity – of a childlike impulse to create, and a more grown-up will to survive. Less carefully planned than the domestic interiors of which they're a part, these enclaves represent something primal – a basic animal instinct to shield the self from unnamed threats.' (Shrinkle, 2019)

As quoted, this project was a form of social experiment to explore the response adults would give to being tasked with building a shelter. Going on to say that everyone involved channelled a childlike impulse of creativity when piecing together their fort, 'a childlike impulse to create'. This came from a stereotypical view of a child's den in that, within the domesticated setting, finding anything and everything that could be used to create a shelter/fort was nostalgic of a playful childhood task, and the shelters created reflected the appearance of a child's den. Despite the childhood reflection, it's stated that this could be an internal primal instinct surfacing as a means of survival, to create a safe space and shelter from 'unnamed threats'. Ultimately, the task and social experiment illustrated the way that creating somewhere to feel safe doesn't always have to be found within the 'carefully planned domesticated interior' of everyday homes, but instead can be found in a place you build for yourself, somewhere that you create with your internal gut instincts. Somewhere that feels right for you, not something perfectly planned, but somewhere that brings you comfort, in this case, as it would as a child.

This stood out to me when coming across her work. The whole concept behind the *Escapism* project is finding a way to illustrate the places that brought me comfort during times of difficulty and uncertainty. Somewhere that was a home for me when where I lived no longer felt like one. The idea of it being 'primal – a basic animal instinct to shield the self from unnamed threats' resonated and linked to more than just the need to find or create shelter to survive outdoors or in severe conditions, a shelter is more than that. People find ways of sheltering and finding comfort in more than just physical survival, but emotional survival as well, hiding in their room because it is safer than outside the door. Escaping to places that feel like home because they temporarily shelter you from the uncertainty and unstable situation you find yourself in. We find

shelter in things we do without even realising it, which is why Piotrowska's '*Shelters*' project meant more to me than the experiment at face value; its meaning went deeper than that. This could be what's meant by 'their fragility is beside the point, because their purpose is symbolic', an acknowledgement that these shelters are not permanent, they do not protect you from everything, and their existence is fragile. Yet it is what that 'shelter' means and does for you; its symbolism has strength and longevity and creates that element of comfort and protection.

'there's not much that sofa cushions and stacks of books can do to prevent a slow death by radiation poisoning. But Protect and Survive wasn't actually about protection or survival. It was an antidote to pervasive feelings of helplessness and fear – a way of keeping hope alive in the face of what were probably insurmountable odds.' (Shinkle, 2019).

This statement goes on to further emphasise the already mentioned symbolism behind the actions of building the shelters. The books, sofa cushions, and everyday objects were not a sufficient means of absolute protection or survival but rather an embodiment of symbolism, a metaphor for hope. An 'antidote' to the 'feelings of helplessness and fear' and the need to stay emotionally strong, a way of feeling as though you could do something when you felt you could do nothing at all. It's not about physical protection; it's the protection of your inner self because that's what is needed and can be controlled when you feel out of control. It is the need for comfort when something is too much, a means of both escape and security. 'It's the symbolism that has strength and longevity and creates that element of comfort and protection, ' and 'what it means to you.'

Adventure Book- Disney Pixar's Up

As this project revolves around the concept of 'escapism' (OED,2025) and things that helped me to cope during my childhood, there had to be a lot of thought and consideration into how the work would be presented, how the presentation could reflect more of the childhood experience. This was when the idea of taking inspiration from films became something that inspired the project's growth, in particular, the development of the book. Watching films helped to inspire my creativity and was another form of escape and comfort during difficult times, something still relevant in the present. It was felt that it could be a means of capturing nostalgia, reflecting childhood in a similar way to exploring the places I explored as a child. This led to the book's main inspiration coming from a favourite Disney Pixar film, 'Up' (Disney,2009), growing up watching Disney and Pixar meant that going down that route made sense. There is a book in the film called the Adventure Book, and it is like a scrapbook photo album of the adventures/life of the main character, Carl, and his wife, Ellie. The book is developed from childhood, it embodies their desires for adventure and escape from the real world, and instead of being a normal family album, it is a documentation of their adventures together, until Ellie's passing.

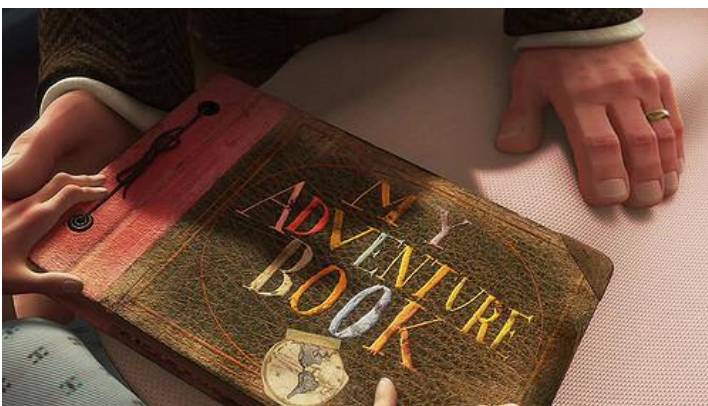


Fig. 7 Adventure Book, Disney's Up 2009



Fig. 8 Adventure Book, Disney's Up 2009

This book always meant something to me as I never had anything like that of my own. Childhood albums stopped being filled due to what we were experiencing, so creating an Adventure book to explore the journey and adventures taken through the park seemed a fitting source of inspiration for the book's aesthetic.

Outcome

When initially starting this project, my goal was to create a book, as I was inspired by a previous project that was one of the favourite things that I have produced. I hoped to achieve something similar using photographic paper experiments to create a new book paired with an installation piece. Despite the path changing due to the discovery of the above research, this outcome was unexpected and more than I could have hoped to achieve. It tells my story in such a way that it gives people the chance to become immersed in the park, the opportunity to 'escape' there with me, the main thing I hoped to achieve.

The installation piece, Shelter/Den

Not wanting to create an exhibiting piece that was flat and not doing justice to the intricacy of the park that I escape to, the installation piece evolved into a 3D shelter of comfort and safety. Inspired by the work of Jackie Mulder and Joanna Piotrowska, the final installation is a form of childhood den. A makeshift shelter comprised of four panels, two side pieces left and right, 1 top roof piece and one backing piece, creating a 'U' shape with the top panel. Piotrowska's social experiment for the body of work *Shelters*, 2019, drew me to experiment in this way. The concept behind *Escapism* is that the park close to me was somewhere I used as my shelter, my comfort when I needed an Escape, and the Shelters project is about the primal instinct of building a

space that you feel safe in. It was a symbolic representation of how sometimes the place you find comfort and security is within something that is not the day-to-day domestic home setting but rather a sense of safety and comfort that you build for yourself, out of the objects or elements that feel right to you. For me it was the documented park. Using the concept behind 'shelters' to physically illustrate the emotional space I created for myself made sense to me. A visual representation to tell the story and allow others to understand its significance.



Fig.9 Escapism, Left Side Panel 2025



Fig. 10 Escapism, Back panel 2025

The den that will be built comprises four images, one on each of the panels mentioned above, all showing a type of panorama of my journey through the space. The viewpoint from part of the path that I go down, in particular the part of the journey where I feel most at home, as each side of me is surrounded by nature, and I feel truly immersed. All that can be heard are the birds, the trees, the water and my own footsteps. That is the reason behind the four images; it shows when you start to hear the water (figure 9), when you hear the trees, when you start to see the possibilities that lie ahead (figure

10), the moment you begin the journey to feeling truly immersed and surrounded (figure 12). The scale of the installation and the images needed to be significant to produce the feeling of how large the space is and to provide the illusion that you are there too. I wanted people to be able to step inside the space as I do, possibly taking a minute to reflect.



Fig. 11 Escapism, Right side panel 2025



Fig. 12 Escapism, Top Panel 2025

The installation links back to the concepts discussed by Derrida and Cadava, acknowledging that the space documented was not a perfect recollection of memory but rather a hauntological reminder of the past. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the photographs taken are reflections of the past; they become the documentation of remembrance, the reflective journey taken through the space. The installation captures one of many 'eternal returns' (Cadava, 1997, p.31), so when printing the fabric, I never tried to make the prints perfect, I just let them print as they were. Whatever imperfections or distortions to the imagery that came from working in this way just further captured how memory is not a perfect recollection but rather a brief reminder, an '*eternal repetition of alterity*' (Cadava, 1997, p.31).

Escapism Book

The book, paired with the installation, was approached similarly to the installation itself, especially when it came to printing the pages on fabric. However, instead of it being the start of a journey, it is a documentation of the journey itself, images taken from the beginning of the path until the moment of leaving. The book takes inspiration from the film 'Up' (Disney, 2009), Jackie Mulder, and Xiang Yun Loh.

The book, being in a landscape format, was inspired by the adventure book from 'Up' (Disney, 2009), but instead of it being a compilation of images to make a form of photo album, the pages are full-bleed photos. This was to create the illusion of how big the space is when looking at the book, not wanting it to appear as a flat image on a page. Just as the adventure book was, Escapism's book is bound along the left-hand side with a bend for easier page viewability, using this binding method to reflect a photo album of memories, but illustrate a journey or more appropriately, my own 'adventures'.



Fig. 13 Escapism, Book pages, 2025

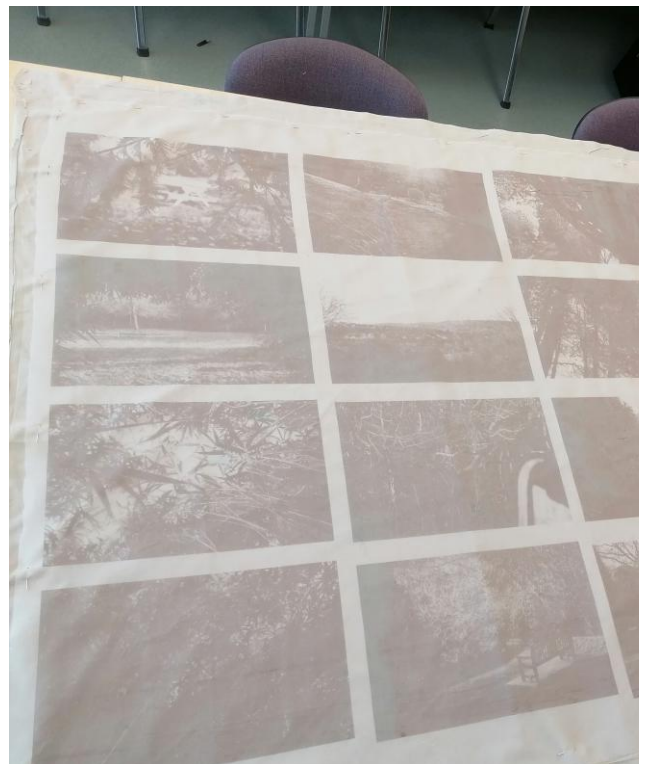


Fig. 14 Escapism, Book pages, 2025

Despite not using Mulder's methods to create an installation, they were considered in making the book. Using her method of printing landscapes onto transparent fabric that layer each other, just with the book instead of the pages being a 3D layering effect, they show a layering of memory from the park. Something that was inspired by Xiang Yun Loh's book *Organised Scenery*, a book of outdoor scenery made up of silk pages, each page showing through the next. The use of transparent material to illustrate memory also links to the idea of giving a physical presence to something that does not exist physically through a means of a material that is barely visible. Just visible enough to get a glimpse of the subconscious presence for others to witness. Another contributing factor to why the book was made in this way.

Both exhibiting pieces capture and illustrate 'escapism'(OED, 2025) in a beautiful way. Illustrating 'hauntology' (Derrida, 1993, p.202) and hauntological traces of my past from the viewpoint of my childhood self. Emphasising in their own way the repetition of going to the space through diluted recollection, embodying the concept of 'eternal returns' (Cadava, 1997, p.31).

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