

# **Painting as Poiesis: Encounters with the Merrion Centre**

Adam Stone

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

The familiar places we inhabit are overlooked ordinary localities, providing a backdrop to our daily lives, holding our memories, informing our identities and giving comfort by their continued presence. There are now growing concerns that these quotidian places are being overwritten by homogeneous “non-places” (Augé, 2008, p.63). Recognising this issue, this study focuses on the Merrion Shopping Centre in Leeds, a pioneering 1960s Brutalist-inspired retail development which represented a new type of shopping experience in the UK. One of the Centre's key innovations as a site of consumption, “designed for the efficient circulation of commodities” (Goss, 1993 cited in McDowell, 1997, p.266), was to incorporate a mix of shopping and entertainment facilities all on one site.

This study draws upon a breadth of theoretical and practical research in the fields of painting, photography, place, the everyday, the archive, memory and psychogeography. Its principal aim is to investigate in what ways painting practice, as part of a novel toolkit of research methods, might offer new understandings and an original contribution to knowledge of the complex spatiality of the Merrion Centre. To do this, the project uses paintings as a site of enquiry through which to interrogate the Centre as a place of history, individual and shared memory, retail fantasy, the uncanny and lived experience. Building on this research, the study then speculates on the potential for paintings from this investigation to advance from a metaphor or representation of place towards what Casey describes as the ‘re-implication’ (2002, p.234) of original place.

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## Chapter 1: Research Questions

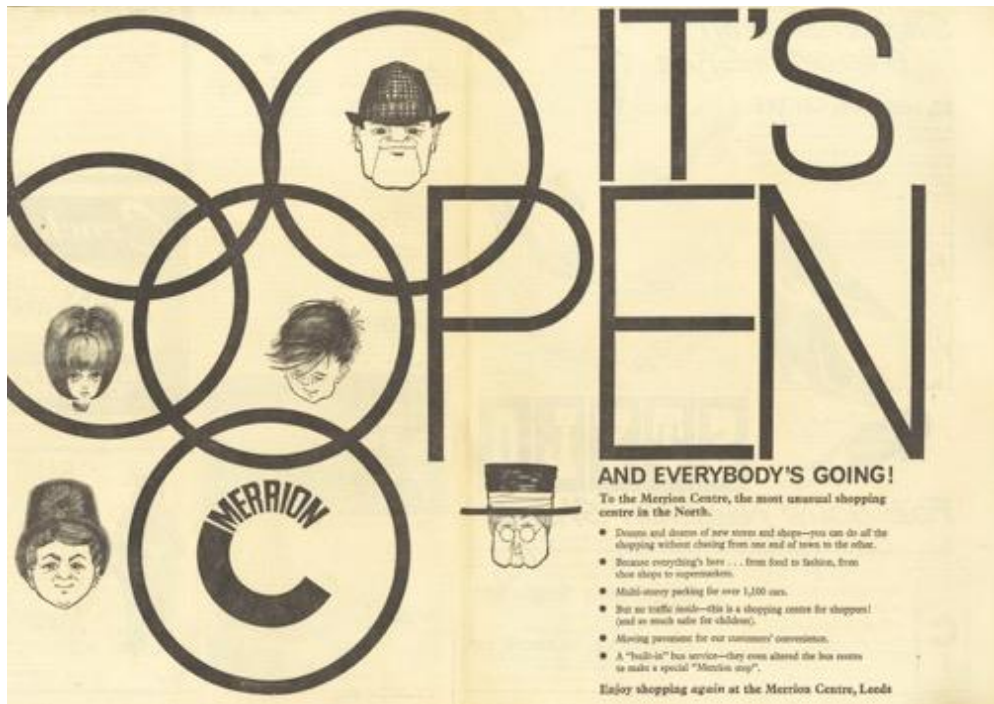


Fig 1. Advert for opening of the Merrion Centre.c1964 [Newspaper cutting]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 2. Merrion Centre [Photograph]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive

**FABULOUS NEW SOCIAL CENTRE COMES TO LEEDS**

**MECCA DANCING**

# LOCARNO BALLROOM LEEDS

**GALA OPENING BALL**  
FRIDAY, MAY 29  
8 P.M. to 1 A.M.  
Advance Tickets 10/-

**TWO GALA OPENINGS**  
MONDAY, JUNE 1  
**MECCA BINGO**  
ENTRANCE 10/-  
Dinner from 1.15 p.m.  
7 P.M. to 11 P.M.

**WEEKLY PROGRAMME**  
From MONDAY, JUNE 1

EVENINGS	Time	Event	Admission
Monday	7.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.	MECCA BINGO	3/-
Tuesday	7.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.	MECCA BINGO	3/6
Wednesday	7.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.	MECCA BINGO	3/6
Thursday	8.00 p.m. to 1.00 a.m.	PRIVATE PARTY NIGHT	Members 2/6, Non-Members 3/6
Friday	8.00 p.m. to 1.00 a.m.	MECCA BINGO	5/-
Saturday	7.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.	MECCA BINGO	7/-

**AFTERNOONS**

Day	Time	Event	Admission
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Tuesday	11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.	MECCA BINGO	1/6
Wednesday	11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.	MECCA BINGO	1/6
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Fig 3. Advert for Mecca Locarno Ballroom, Merrion Centre [Newspaper cutting]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 4. Mecca Locarno Ballroom, Merrion Centre [Newspaper cutting]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive.

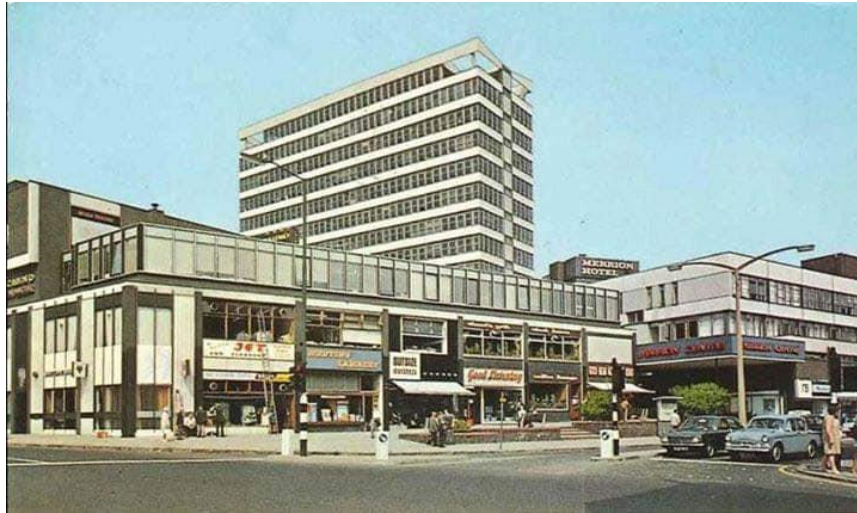


Fig 5. Kalsy,R. 2019. *Merrion Centre*. [facebook]. 2019. [Accessed 17 June 2021]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/>



Fig 6. Wilson, I. 2017. *Merrion Centre with 'moving' pedestrian footpath*, March 1964. [facebook]. 2017. [Accessed 17 June 2021]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/>



Fig 7. Leeds Library and Information Services. *Merrion Centre Pharmacy*. Circa 1966. [Leodis]. [Accessed 17 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.leodis.net>



Fig 8. Wilson, I. 2017. *1960s bus on modern day ramp into the Merrion Centre*. [facebook]. 2017. [Accessed 17 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/>



Fig 9. Leeds Library and Information Services. *Merrion Centre Mural*. 1966..[Leodis]. [Accessed 17 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.leodis.net/>



Fig 10. Stone, A. 2015.*Home Bargains*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 11. Stone, A. 2016. *Steps to second level*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 12. Stone, A. 2016. *Caution Cone*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre





Fig 13. Stone, A. 2017. Candy Fun. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 14. Stone, A. 2020. Prizm. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre

## **Introduction**

This study sets out to interrogate notions of place, the everyday and memory through painting-led practice research on the Merrion Shopping Centre, Leeds. Built in 1963, the Centre's Brutalist-inspired architecture and ambitious retail vision made it one of the most pioneering post-war redevelopment schemes in the country. To investigate the Centre's historical and current context and consider its identity as a place of memory and lived experience, the study will apply a novel, multi-stranded research methodology. It will seek to re-imagine the Centre's seemingly unremarkable presence and articulate its extraordinary character through this thesis and a series of new paintings developed as an integral part of the research. The paintings are strategically placed within each chapter and are examined and visually analysed in relation to the research questions and significant discourses within the investigation. In doing this, the study positions painting practice as central to the research, where it contributes new perspectives and understandings on the Merrion Centre and recognises it as a valuable research method in the study of place. The study is guided by five key research questions, which together, form its principal terms of reference. These questions have been instrumental in supporting the development of the new paintings and guiding the theoretical approaches sourced from varied disciplinary fields including painting, place studies and memory, fieldwork practices and archival research. In this regard, both the literature review and the contemporary artists against whom this practice is situated are embedded within each chapter, emphasising the vital correspondence between these key areas of research. Additionally, in relation to the structure of this study, the reader will note that prefacing each chapter is a visual essay which aims to offer an indication of what is to follow.

## **Chapter Overview**

Chapter one begins by reviewing the research questions, examining and expanding upon the central themes and concerns which are at the centre of this study. It then highlights the investigations key interest in embodied perception in relation to painting practice, fieldwork and the experience of place. It also touches upon important contemporary discourses on place and the everyday in relation to the

Centre and explores how walking and photography were vital methods within the investigation.

Chapter two establishes the reasons for choosing the Merrion Centre as the focus of this enquiry, contextualising the Centre's architectural significance as one of only a few Brutalist inspired buildings left in the city and reflecting upon personal memories of the site. It then provides an overview of the Merrion Centre's historical and cultural legacy within the region and the Centre's status as a multi-textured, heterogeneous site of consumption, subjectivity, memory and social exchange. It does this through a review of paintings from the study, archive materials, maps, models and varied contemporary discourses within the field of place studies, including work by David Seamon, Marc Augé and Edward Casey. It then gives an overview of the varied methodologies used within the study, giving a rationale for why they have been chosen and establishing their suitability for this research project. This includes an examination of spatial bricolage and schizocartography as complementary methodologies, capable of integrating the diverse ideas and concepts of such a complex urban site. It will also review autoethnography, as a method for examining place from personal and community perspectives and for interrogating painting practice through the experiences of other practitioners. This is followed by an overview of how the archive has been used to explore the Centre's history and to access fragmented memories from the site's past. Finally, it foregrounds painting practice as a generative methodology with the potential for creating new knowledge and understanding

Chapter three seeks to clarify the Merrion Centre's complex and contradictory spatial identity through reference to key theoretical discourses in place studies including the work of Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977), Relph (1976), Sacks (1988), Seamon (2018). It then explores the history of the Centre, establishing its importance as an innovative new spatial form and pioneering retail environment. It also interweaves analysis of paintings with archive materials (including photographs and reviews from various online communities), to construct a richer understanding of the site.

Chapter four examines fieldwork carried out during the study with an emphasis on the psychogeographic practices of walking and documenting the site through photography. In relation to this, Roland Barthes suggests there is an unspoken dialogue between ourselves and the spaces we inhabit which is felt and enunciated, “simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it” (Barthes 1997, cited in Richardson, 2017). This study, building on Barthes ideas, puts forward a case for walking as an embodied spatial practice which when combined with performative painting practices, can produce paintings which offer new interpretations of place. Here, the notion of performative practice follows Barbara Bolts understanding of the “dynamic material exchange ...between objects, bodies and image” (2004. p.8), through which artwork moves beyond representation and signification. In addition, as part of a wider discussion on the multi-textured spatial qualities of the Centre, this chapter includes personal accounts of experiences from visiting some of the hidden areas within the Centre, including the heterotopian space (Foucault, 1986, p.25) of the derelict Merrion cinema, the uncanny temporality of the Merrion Mini-market and the absent presence found within the abandoned Merrion hotel.

Chapter five focuses upon the paintings produced during the study, interrogating, through visual analysis, how notions of representation, memory and temporality operate within painting practice. It also outlines how photography in relation to the index and the optical unconscious (Benjamin, 1935) has supported this study in revealing and expressing new qualities of place. This analysis will also demonstrate how the important theoretical observation on place, discussed in earlier chapters are enmeshed within the paintings and investigate further the potential for these paintings to become a place in which the Merrion Centre resides.

Chapter six examines which kinds of memory operate within both the Centre and the paintings. This will include a review of the Merrion Centre as a ‘lieux de mémoire’, with reference to the work of Pierre Nora and an analysis of Dylan Trigg’s concept of the familiar unfamiliar, in relation to onsite fieldwork. It will also consider Nora’s notion of individual and cultural memory in the Centre’s archives as well as locating the absent presence of ghostly hordes (Edensor, 2004, p.837), within the modern ruins of the Merrion Hotel. This chapter also explores the optical unconscious

(Benjamin) as a way of revealing dormant or hidden memories from historical and recent photographs of the site. It will reappraise the photograph as both aide memoire and proxy for memory and review the importance of embodied and material memory through activity in the field and in the studio.

To conclude this investigation, chapter seven will draw together the key findings of this enquiry, analysing the outcomes in reference to the research questions. It will begin by reviewing the significance of the Centre as a subject for study in relation to its historical context and architectural legacy. It will then frame the investigation in relation to other contemporary artists and research on place through painting. It will also discuss the paintings from this study in relation to various exhibitions in which they have been shown, and consider in what ways this has prompted new ways of thinking about the Centre and provide a clear explanation of the ways this study contributes original knowledge to the contemporary field of painting place.

### **Research Questions**

This investigation is guided by five key questions which relate to central themes within the research practice including fieldwork, photography and memory. The questions are as follows:

- (1) What is the particular understanding that the embodied practice of painting allows of 'everyday' place?
- (2) How might the process of painting contribute to the broader cultural narratives of place?
- (3) How might the use of photography within a painting practice meaningfully support the artist's understanding and interpretation of locality?
- (4) How might psycho-geographical approaches, in combination with artistic and theoretical ones, contribute to an interpretation of place?
- (5) What kinds of memory are revealed through this research?

### **Embodied Practice**

Analysing the questions sequentially, the notion of 'embodied' in question one references phenomenological concerns which emphasise the sensorimotor activity of the body as vital to perception. In relation to this, research in place studies

acknowledges embodied, multisensory experience as central to gaining an understanding of our environment (Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011, p.6). The environmental behaviour theorist David Seamon, drawing upon Merleau-Ponty, David Morris and Edward Casey, builds on this argument to suggest, “we are enmeshed in the world, which, simultaneously, is enmeshed in us” (Seamon, 2010, p.3). Seamon describes this spatial relationship as a conjoining of body and environment which gives each meaning and creates “a larger synergy of place” (Seamon, 2010, p.8). These ideas are central to this investigation because in this study, walking, being in place and experiencing the site were instrumental activities towards the development of the paintings.

Questions one and two also examine the Merrion Centre through the theoretical lens of the ‘everyday’ and ‘place’, terms which were to be central to the investigation, as the Centre has many of the spatial characteristics identified within both fields of study. For this reason, the research included a review of the following theorists: Marc Augé (2008), Walter Benjamin (1932), Edward Casey (1998), Michel De Certeau (1984), Tim Cresswell (2015), Michel Foucault (1986), Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, Tim Ingold (2000), Henri Lefebvre (1975), Lucy Lippard (1997), Doreen Massey (2015) and Dylan Trigg (2012). Each of these offered valuable insight into the Centre’s spatiality, including the embodied tactics and subversions of social conduct found within public and private spaces, the deep reciprocity between ourselves and our environment through materialist notions of embeddedness and material flow, the relational significance of the local to identity and memory and its wider impact on social, political and economic situations.

Theories on the everyday, such as those of Michel De Certeau and Lucy Lippard, generally perceive the quotidian as a “lived actuality” (Highmore, 2002, p.27) interweaving our habits and routines as a backdrop to our daily lives (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2007, p.1). Employing a psychoanalytical lens, Freud recognised a repressed strangeness underlying the trivialities of the everyday, whilst Marx and Benjamin wrote of the ‘phantasmagoria’ of modern life in which commodities achieve a mysterious and coercive liveliness. Notoriously elusive, it appears the closer we scrutinise the everyday, the further it slips from our grasp, for it is a lived experience as much as a theoretical concept. As Gosetti-Ferencei notes, to observe

the everyday is to step away from it and only see its reflection, whilst to conceptualise it reduces its subjective qualities (2007, p.2). The everyday is perhaps at its most visible during extraordinary times in our cultural history such as, the upheavals of war, or as more recently experienced, the disruptive impact of a global pandemic. The current crisis highlights the fragility of the quotidian experience, demonstrating how quickly it can be de-stabilised and then reconstructed in a familiar yet unfamiliar way, causing disorientation, unease and a sense of the uncanny. In this respect, this study is a timely investigation into our cultural understandings of place and the everyday, during a period of unprecedented shifts in our cultural behaviour and daily experiences.

The paradoxical sensory nature of the quotidian make traditional methods of critique problematic. In the search to articulate the felt experience and fleeting sensations of daily life, other forms of representation such as painting offer an alternative approach. This attentiveness to the ordinary and everyday can be found in the work of many contemporary artists including the painters Narbi Price, Graham Crowley and George Shaw, whose work will be discussed further in chapter five in relation to the paintings within this investigation. Price, in his most recent watercolour series 'Lockdown Paintings', examines the "subtle interplay between the mundane and the out-of-place" (Price, 2020, p.ii), when focussing on the strangeness of taped off public benches during the pandemic. In contrast, Crowley "subvert[s] the ordinary" (Tucker, 2020 cited in Turps Banana, p.9) by making familiar everyday subjects unfamiliar through an oil-based glazing process in which "the imagery is summoned out of the paint – not imposed upon it" (Crowley, 2020 cited in Turps Banana, p.11). Meanwhile, George Shaw uses an undervalued hobbyist medium 'Umbro' enamel paints, to summon the uncanny everyday from the cracked tarmac and red brick, semi-detached estates of his suburban youth. As will be discussed later, through an analysis of similarities and differences in their practice and those applied in this study, there is common ground in our collective interest in using painting processes as a vehicle for examining the quotidian.

### **Layered Place**

Place has a close correspondence to the everyday as an equally contested and often undervalued subject. Its importance for this study relates to the Centre as a local and familiar place, recognising that the site is a social, political and historical urban landscape of layered memory and material agency. It also acknowledges concerns voiced by Edward Casey, Marc Augé and others, that these types of familiar places are rapidly becoming thinned out, featureless corporate ‘glocalities’ (Roland Robertson), which are seen to be undermining the formation of cultural memories and personal identity. In relation to this, Casey highlights “the centrality of place” (Trigg, 2009, p.121), suggesting that “there is no place without self and no self without place” (Casey, 2001, p.684). This situated perspective, which Casey terms ‘geographical self’ (Casey, 2001, p.683), reveals the places we inhabit as a lived experience, intricately bound and fundamental to our being in the world, as will be reviewed further in chapter four in relation to Martin Heidegger’s (1889-1976) writing on Dasein (Being there) and Jeff Malpas writing on ‘Placedness’ (Malpas, 2018, p.194). This reciprocity between self and environment is a key concept within the investigation, as it supports an argument for embodied painting practice which incorporates fieldwork as an effective way of interrogating and understanding the Merrion Centre.

The artist David Walker Barker was fully aware of these issues when documenting his thoughts on painting Blacker Hill, a landscape whose layered history he had known since childhood:

How to begin? How can a landscape be understood, conceptualised and modelled? How can an individual interaction with a particular location be articulated visually? What to focus on, the detail or the generalised? Neither is satisfactory, neither narrates what is known or sensed or yet to be discovered. Appearance alone cannot be taken for granted as identifying a more complex reality, one that is hidden from view or lying beneath the visible surface (Walker Barker, 2007).

Walker Barker highlights various difficulties faced by the painter in visually articulating a familiar site which is enmeshed in both a lifetime of knowledge and a momentary embodied experience. His thoughts on place suggest a complex, layered and unfolding landscape with an elusive nature, perhaps beyond representation. For Walker Barker, fieldwork activates a “physical and mental touching... that bridges the space between location and a reflective redirecting of the experience in the



studio” (Walker Barker, 2007) suggesting a sensory reaching out of the body, eye and mind into the surrounding environment and a containing of that experience to be ‘reterritorialized’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.31) through painting.

The second question also examines how painting, as a research method, contributes towards broader cultural understandings of the places we inhabit. As previously noted, place continues to be an important subject within cultural studies and equally so within contemporary painting. As this study will discuss, the contested character of place, with its inherent lived qualities, makes it difficult to objectively investigate but conversely an ideal subject for an experiential research method such as painting.

### **Photography**

Question three focuses upon the application of photography within the study, interrogating in what ways it enhanced the investigation, examining the mediated nature of a photographic image and reviewing the different types of photographs and their contribution towards an interpretation of the site. As the study shows, photographs played a vital role in addressing the research questions and through this suggested their potential application to other parallel studies. Briefly expanding on this, many photographs were taken during visits to the Centre to capture moments of interest found whilst walking; these photographs acted as an aide memoire and template for constructing paintings back in the studio. By contrast, historical photographs found within the archive also used to inform the paintings, highlighted a fundamental distinction to be made between images captured through direct experience and those found photographs. These differences in the type of photographic images used within the study led to research on the nature of the photograph as ‘standing-in’ for something else as suggested by Casey, an index as claimed by Pierce, a ‘pseudo presence’ as proposed by Sontag and in the case of the found photograph, “the memory of an unknowable and total stranger” (Berger, 1991, p.56) as suggested by John Berger. All of the above will be examined further in chapter four alongside writing by Walter Benjamin on the optical unconscious and Roland Barthes on photography as a new spatiality.

### **Walking**

Question four examines how the psychogeographic approach of walking the site can

offer new understandings of the Centre, through a spatial interconnectivity with our locality. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty, David Seamon defines this as “synergistic relationality” (Seamon, 2018, p.21), in which place is understood experientially through:

the various lived ways, sensorily and motility-wise, that the body in its pre-reflective perceptual presence engages and synchronizes with the world at hand, especially its architectural and environmental aspects (Seamon, 2010, p1).

In relation to this phenomenological perspective, the question engages with the idea of movement as a catalyst for perception, creating a “path of observation” (Gibson, 1979, cited in Ingold, 2004, p.331) in which key spatial information is gathered. This notion of active perception is recognised by Tim Ingold, who argues, “locomotion, not cognition, must be the starting point for the study of perceptual activity” (Ingold, 2004, p.331). Building on this argument for the primacy of movement within the perceptive process, this study analyses the value of walking the Centre as a method towards acquiring new insights relevant to painting.

### **Memory and Remembering**

The final question applies a novel route of enquiry previously unexplored in relation to the Centre, investigating how memory interweaves the processes and outcomes of research. The complexities of what memory is and how we remember as individuals and as societies have been explored extensively by such theorists as: Henri Bergson in ‘Matter and Memory’ (1896), Gaston Bachelard in ‘The Poetics of Space’ (1958), Pierre Nora in ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’ (1981-1992) and Dylan Trigg in ‘The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny’ (2012). Readings of these key texts revealed different kinds of memory at work within the study including the activity of memory in; onsite and studio-based experiences, within the photographs and archive images, personal memories evoked within the Centre and the absent presence within the abandoned hotel. These findings resonate with Bergson’s claim that “There is no perception which is not full of memories” (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010, p.65), which supports personal experiences of involuntary childhood memories triggered by visiting the abandoned Odeon Cinema.

Connected to this, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Pierre Nora identify an

alarming collective and individual forgetting. This memory loss occurs for a variety of reasons including: the selective archiving of history, the acceleration of economic and political change (causing environmental and cultural instability), technological developments in photography (as a proxy for memory) and digitally stored information (in archives). The last two reasons offer a false sense of security, promising that the information can be retrieved as required, which it is argued encourages forgetting.

### **Chapter Summary**

This overview of the research questions draws attention to the central ideas and significant areas of research which have become the keystone to this enquiry. It highlights an interconnectivity between embodied practice, place and the everyday explored within this study. It also foregrounds the significance of photography and walking as active fieldwork practices fundamental to the investigation of the site. In addition, it highlights growing concerns for the future of place, the disruption of the quotidian and a loss of cultural and individual memory. In this respect, at a time in which these elements of daily life appear under threat, a study of this kind is both urgent and timely.

The following chapter will begin the enquiry by examining the value of the Centre as a subject of study, considering its architectural significance as well as its importance as a place of memory. It will also identify the diverse range of research methodologies applied through the investigation, including spatial bricolage, schizocartography, autoethnography, the archive, memory and painting practice, assessing their value and the novelty of their collaboration in a study of this kind.

## **Chapter 2: Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the rationale for choosing the Merrion Centre as the subject for this study, reviewing the significance of the Centre's history, its architectural legacy and its role as an everyday place of memory. Following this, there will be an examination of the selected research methodologies used within the enquiry. This will include an overview of spatial bricolage and schizocartography as complementary methodologies for combining qualitative and performative methods to inform outcomes. It will then consider autoethnography in relation to personal experiences of onsite visits, online community memories and the voices of practitioners with parallel interests such as Peter Doig and Mandy Payne. Following this there will be an overview of the Merrion Centre archive as an important resource for revealing fragmented traces of earlier events, experiences and memories from the Centre's history. Finally, there will be a discussion on painting-based research processes and outcomes as a valuable methodology for generating new understanding, suggesting its unique potential to contribute value and new knowledge.

### **The Significance of Place**

The Merrion Centre became the focus of this investigation through formative practice which had been concerned with painting the urban margins. This earlier research instigated the idea of a sustained practice-led investigation into a familiar place. Initially drawn to the Centre through personal childhood memories, the buildings Brutalist heritage was also important. The site's Modernist legacy resonates with present-day reappraisals of the *béton brut* aesthetic, which applauds Brutalism's "social program and urbanistic vitality" (Meades, 2014). This current resurgence of interest in Brutalism's architectural legacy is exemplified in the work of contemporary artists such as: Mandy Payne, who paints Park Hill, a Grade II\* listed Sheffield council estate; the painter David Hepher, who is drawn to South London social housing estates; printmaker Louise Haywood, who responds to memory and inner city decay; the film makers Jane and Louise Wilson, who explore the hopes and failures of the Brutalist project through the work of Victor Passmore;

and artist Runa Islam, exploring notions of the real and the fictional through film, using a meticulously modelled Trident carpark in Gateshead. This project has much in common with both Payne and Hephher's approaches and concerns however unlike any of these artists, this study will examine the everyday place of a shopping centre.

The revival of interest in Brutalism comes at a time when many examples of this type of architecture are being torn down, including the afore-mentioned Trident carpark in Gateshead and the Tricorn Shopping Centre in Portsmouth, both designed by Rodney Gordon of the Owen Luder Partnership. In Leeds, the photographer Peter Mitchell, in 'Memento Mori' (Mitchell, 2016) recorded the demise of the renowned Quarry Hill Flats during the 1970s, capturing the building and the community that continued to live on the site even as demolition began. These examples of the UK's rapidly disappearing Brutalist architecture, perhaps explains the renewed interest in them and reinforces the timely nature of this study on the Merrion Centre, which is gradually losing its original aesthetic and character through successive phases of redevelopment.

Besides its architectural significance, the Merrion Centre was also important as a "site of memory" (Nora, 1989, p.3), with close ties to my own history and a wider community of remembrance in Leeds. This perception of the Centre as a site in which memory crystallises and accumulates offers a novel research perspective which would become a key aspect of this practice (led) investigation, as will be examined further in chapter four. My own childhood recollections of the Centre included regular visits to the Odeon cinema and hours spent marvelling at the Emett machines (fig 15), I was also aware that my parents first met in the Centre at the New Mecca Ballroom in 1963 and later discovered that distant relations had been a part of a large Jewish community which had settled in the area in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These familial ties reveal additional memory connections, discussed further in chapter four in relation to Trigg and Hirsch, creating a new perception of the land on which the Centre stands as an unexpected ancestral home. These understandings suggest that many kinds of memory operate within the study, a proposition which chapter four and five explore further in relation to paintings of the Centre.



Fig 15. Emmett, R. 2020. The Featherstone Kite Gentleman's Flying Machine (F-K mark II). [Mixed Media]

### **Spatial Bricolage and Schizocartography**

As will be discussed in later chapters, this study identifies the Merrion Centre as a heterogeneous assemblage of everyday place, non-place, heterotopia and palimpsest of lived and uncanny experiences. This interpretation of the site has led the investigation towards an eclectic range of interdisciplinary ideas and approaches which included research in the fields of philosophy, social geography, anthropology, art theory and practice. To combine such a diversity of concepts and practices requires a flexible methodology which can offer a “space in-between disciplinary boundaries” (Biggs, cited in Roberts, 2016, p.4). One such open and versatile methodology is bricolage, which encourages researchers to move “beyond the blinders of particular disciplines... to a new world of research and knowledge production” (Kincheloe et al. 2011, p. 168). This inclusive approach works has proved appropriate for this study, which draws together various threads of research including: fieldwork, historical community research, the Centre’s archive, theoretical perspectives on the everyday, place, shopping and painting practice.

As an extension of this method, spatial bricolage applies this broad approach to the dynamic and unpredictable network of events encountered through fieldwork, with a “ready-to-handedness and ‘making-do’ of approaches that pull tactically and expediently from the ‘taskscape’ (Ingold, 2000) of everyday life” (Roberts, 2018, p.2). This methodology encourages the researcher to become immersed in the field, thereby eliciting a lived, autoethnographic response to onsite experiences. In the generative and shifting environment of the Centre, this approach values personal encounters and the gleaning of fragmented experiences and moments, captured through photography and ‘embodied vision’ (Les Roberts), which Roberts terms, “vision in the flesh” (Roberts, 2018, p.6). In this respect, spatial bricolage is an ideal methodology to investigate the fluid, socially and historically layered narrative of the Merrion Centre.

As a complementary research approach, the cultural theorist Tina Richardson developed Schizocartography (Richardson, 2015), a flexible and adaptable methodology which combines a breadth of spatial theories and strategies. Richardson’s concept recognises the contradictions and uncertainty inherent within Postmodern urban place and the value of subjective experience to generate new meanings. To address these concerns Richardson advocates an interdisciplinary toolbox of methods which:

enables multiple possibilities for interpretation which reflect the actual heterogeneity of place and also mirror the complexities that are integral in challenging the totalizing perspective of space that capitalism encourages (Richardson, 2017, p.1).

Acknowledging the responsive relationship formed between a researcher and the space they inhabit, the Schizocartographer’s toolbox “is not static or constrained, but is ever-changing in its requirement to serve the purpose it is being assembled for” (Richardson, 2017, p.13). Appreciating the “heterogeneity of the local (and even the microlocal)” (Richardson, 2017, p.12), this methodology is sensitive to “social history, creativity and alternative voices” (Richardson, 2017, p.12), an approach which is highly relevant to this study in relation to emergent painting practice, the fluidity of site, historical documents from the archive and local stories.

Referring to Schizocartography, which advocates movement as an analytical tool, this study applied the spatial practices of loitering and walking in and around the

site, at varying times of the day and different times of the year. This allowed the opportunity for a broader experience of the Centre in which to observe and photographically record encounters. Echoing Les Roberts notion of embodied vision, Matos Wunderlich (2008) also recognizes how walking creates a close personal connection between the body and environment, offering a unique sensory insight into place gleaned through a lived experience:

Walking is an embodied practice with specific lived qualities. It is also a mode of experiencing place and the city, and in this context, is an aesthetic and insightful spatial practice. Through everyday walking we develop a sense of (and for) place (Wunderlich, M. 2008, p.1).

These ideas suggest a porous relationship between body and the place which can be activated through walking. The Italian philosopher Tommaso Campanella, took the view that “there can be no sensation without the sensing being’s acquiring a likeness of the sensed” (Campanella, cited in Heller-Roazen, 2009, p.170), suggesting that “that all perception consists in a tactile act, which transmits to one being the nature of another” (Campanella, cited in Heller-Roazen, 2009, p.170). Trigg, as mentioned earlier, also recognises this bond, proposing that “the body through its active but tacit engagement, literally absorbs the contours and textures of an environment” (Trigg, 2012, p.113). This tacit reciprocity between body and environment was key within the study and the development of the paintings, activated through recent onsite fieldwork as well as much earlier childhood impressions of the site.

The unscripted walks in and around the Merrion Centre applied these notions of embodied perception through a receptiveness to the unfolding qualities of place, an attentive gaze and an “openness to new realities and meaning, [with] a refusal to take anything for granted, to treat things as obvious and familiar” (Kociatkiewicz, 1999, p.2). This approach aligns with Latour’s description of “bracketing our familiarity with the object of our studies... to apprehend as strange those aspects [of the studied phenomenon] which are readily taken for granted” (Latour, cited in Kociatkiewicz, 1999, p.38). The following photographs are selected examples of experiences captured during these walks, including objects and details from within the Centre which routine activity might have otherwise overlooked. These include peripheral areas of the site found within the shopping area, hotel, bowling alley, and cinema. They capture fleeting shadows and sunlit reflections, estranged objects,



forgotten corners, the thresholds between places and liminal spaces caught between the past and present. The first photograph of the artificial plant display (fig 16) was captured early in the field work, its imitative qualities symbolic of the hyperreal character of the site in which consumerist fantasy interweaves with the real. During the study, this display moved to other areas of the Centre, resonating with a reading of the site as a place of assemblage, intra-actions and material agency. The apparent liveliness of the display as it moved around the Centre led to the development of a painting of the shrubbery which eventually became the base layer for the piece 'Build' 2016 (fig 143).

The photographs of the photo booth stool (fig 17) and 'caution wet floor' sign (fig 18) found in the retail area of the Centre, and the Disney toys (fig 19), located in the bowling alley, were taken later in the study. These objects are seen as symbolic of an absent human presence, containing the hidden narratives of past activities and events within the site. They also connected with an underlying interest in the agency and apparent liveliness of inanimate objects mentioned in relation to the artificial plant display. Such objects were to become a reoccurring motif in the study as seen in paintings like 'Photome' (fig 66), 'Tables and chairs' (fig 62) 'Caution' (fig 85) and 'The chairs' (fig 151).

The reflection of sunlight on glass surfaces was also significant during these onsite forays, registering surreal distortions of scale, overlaid forms and shifting geometric patterns found around the building (figs 20-21). These spatial ambiguities were interesting due to the seamless collaging of the view in front of the lens with reflections of the space beyond the frame of the photograph. This was a visual effect which would influence a number of paintings in the study including 'The Flâneur' (fig 100), which combined both mannequins and passersby reflected in a shop window. In contrast, the photographs of the derelict Odeon cinema taken during a supervised tour (figs 22-23), present a dark and brooding space which provoked early childhood memories of visits to the cinema. The final photograph, which was taken in the later stage of this project, shows an interior view of a new council office block built upon a redundant pedestrian underpass on the northern edge of the site. This was a highly restricted zone, which meant the architectural ambiguities of the site could only be documented from outside on street level. These images were seen

as significant as they captured the labyrinthine character of the internal structure of the building as a contradiction to the apparent transparency suggested by the glass façade. It also seemed that the building retained some distant echoes of the earlier site's Modernist character, through the clinical, white-walled, minimalist aesthetic.

This selection of images, as part of a larger photographic archive recording personal observations of the Centre, offer an insight into the building's contradictory nature as a social and cultural hub of commerce and leisure, a historical site of past events and shared community experiences, a public and private space of memory and material agency. Some of the images are of the same part of the site taken over time. They chart the development of the Centre in which the present supersedes the past yet leaves faint traces of those earlier places. They document alterations to the structure, décor, fixtures and fittings, highlighting the transitory nature of the site and its potentially destabilising impact upon memory and place building.

In relation to the research question and study, these images of solitary objects, ephemeral events, past and present spaces have informed the process of painting as both a tool for remembering and also as templates for composition, through the use of projection techniques. They also act as a point for reflection on the character of the site, exposing its shifting nature as a backdrop to everyday activity and its position as a commercial structure, driven by monetary exchange and the flow of production from manufacturer to consumer.



Fig 16. Stone, A. 2015. Plastic display. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 17. Stone, A. 2015. Photo-booth. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 18. Stone, A.2015. *Caution, wet floor*. [Photograph]. Merrion centre



Fig 19. Stone, A. 2016. *Disney*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 20. Stone, A. 2016. *Reflection* [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 21. Stone, A. 2016. *Shadow*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 22. Stone, A. 2020. *Cinema: projection room steps*. [Photograph]. Merrion Odeon Cinema



Fig 23. Stone, A. 2020. *Cinema foyer*. [Photograph]. Merrion Odeon Cinema

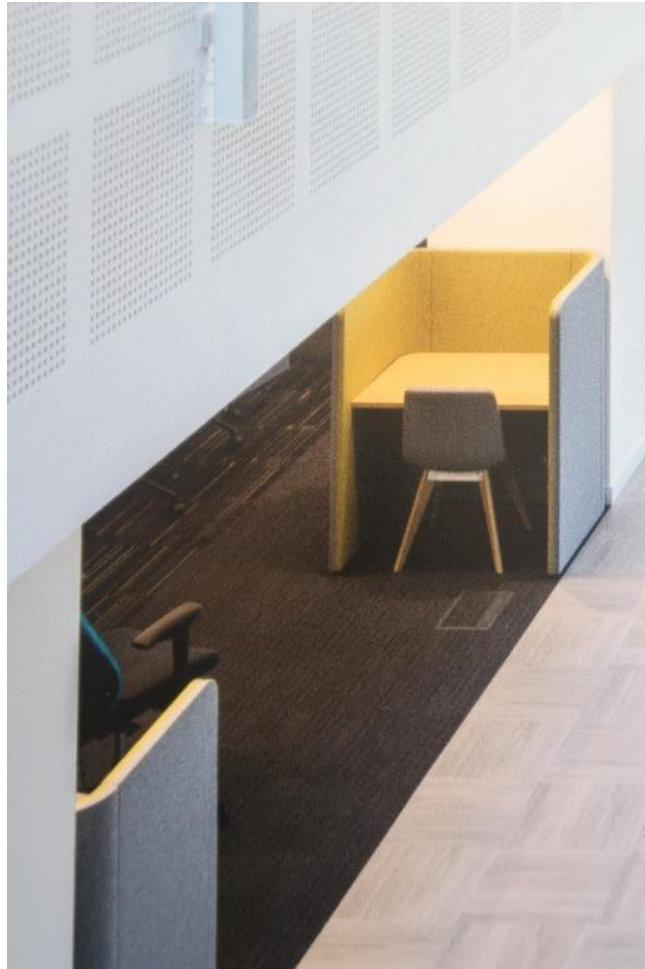


Fig 24. Stone, A.2020. *Department of Social Services*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre

### **Autoethnography: Self and Place**

Autoethnography, as a method for research, recognises “lived experience, subjectivity, and memory .... as agents in knowledge construction” (Sullivan, 2006, p.24), encompassing social and cultural perspectives alongside individual experiences and narratives. Its importance in this study has already been briefly touched upon in relation to onsite experiences through fieldwork, however, it is also relevant to the re-emergence of my own childhood and adolescence memories during site visits. The resurfacing of past experiences in the present is a phenomenon noted by Rupert Griffiths in ‘Re-imagining the margins: the art of the urban fringe’ (2015). Here Griffiths recounts experiences of known places in which he experienced “time as nonlinear, jumping around through memory and personal history between childhood and adulthood” (Griffiths, 2015, p.73). This fractured temporality connects with Trigg’s idea of the familiar unfamiliar in which past and present collide.



Fig 25. Stone, A. 2020. *Cinema steps*. [Photograph]. Merrion Odeon Cinema

It also resonates with personal experiences of temporal disorientation which occurred when ascending the stairs between the lobby and screen room in the derelict Merrion cinema (fig 25). Unexpectedly, the stairs become a threshold between the present and the past, triggering involuntary memories from childhood, through smell and colour. These overwhelming, childhood memories, which briefly surfaced, will be examined further in chapter four.

The study also examines other people's lived experiences, as found within online forums such as Leodis (<http://www.leodis.net/>) and Secret Leeds (<http://www.secretleeds.com/>), in which members reminisce about the Centre in response to historical photographs. As will be discussed in greater depth in chapter two these community memories and misremembering's demonstrate the importance of the Centre as a place in which personal and cultural memories and identity entwine, persisting even when those memories are from the distant past.

### **Parallel Interests**

The investigation also includes insights from artists whose work has parallel interest in examining place, such as the painters Mandy Payne and Robbie Bushe. This was useful to the study as it gives an “understanding of the kinds of questions, concerns, constraints, problems and solutions that the other is dealing with” (Griffiths, 2015, p.73). It provides alternative perspectives to similar subjects, highlighting the varied



ways of approaching such investigations. It also produces new insights on how other artists think about the processes, materials and subjects within their practice, informing new understanding, thinking and practice within the study and through comparison, demonstrating the originality of this investigation.

This approach was applied in the study through a series of questions which were sent to the contemporary urban painter Mandy Payne. Payne's sustained five-year study of the Grade II\* listed Park Hill Council Estate in Sheffield is pertinent to this investigation as it pursues a parallel interest in the aesthetics of Modernist architecture and the activities of memory. The questions, drawing upon personal experiences and challenges which had emerged through this project, sought to recognise common concerns in painting place. Payne's informed responses resonated with my own findings in the Centre and prompted a revaluing of the artist's relationship to place, locating the artist within the frame of the subject rather than as a detached observer. Payne recognises a reciprocity between people and place and the ghostly traces of past activity, identifying sites which "absorb memories and also the traces that people and communities leave when no longer occupying those spaces.... where the memories and layers of past lives are almost tangible" (Stone, 2019). This view articulates my own experiences within the cinema and hotel, each of which transmitted a haunting absence through the detritus of fixtures, building materials and scuff marked surfaces of past activity.

Payne's responses also highlighted mutual aesthetic concerns such as the "myriad of colours embedded in the stained, spalled concrete, the angles of the walkways and pillars creating spaces within spaces, long shadows cast by concrete balconies at noon..." (Stone, 2019). These observations connected with my own interests in the stark and awkward geometry of the Centre's architecture and the contrasting ambience of spaces on the site. Other questions focussed upon the practicalities of field work and studio practices, highlighting similarities and differences in approach. These included the shared use of photography to inform paintings and the contrasting approach in balancing representation and materiality, which will be examined further in chapter five in relation to painting practice.

### **The Archive: History and Memory**

Merewether (2006) suggests that archives can be viewed as the accumulated memories and knowledge of a culture's history, tracing the values and beliefs of the society to which they belong. Created by organisations, corporations, communities and individuals, they exist in a variety of forms and are made for many different reasons. Those who create archives often determine what is recorded and what is omitted, distorting the past. The archive has become a valuable resource within art practice, with contemporary artists challenging its authenticity and questioning its authority. In this study, the reviewed archive materials included written memories of people working in or visiting the site and photographs of the Centre's construction. These were found in the archives of the Merrion Centre and, as previously mentioned, online community forums including Leodis, Old Photographs of Leeds and Leeds Retro. This information proved valuable in understanding more about the land, the communities and history of the site and informed which subjects were painted. An example of this was the decision to paint the sculpture 'Androgyne' (1965) which research suggested had been an important part of the Centre's story, as will be discussed further in chapter three.

The Merrion Centre Archive has been an important element of this project. Predominantly a digital repository, it consists of: news clippings, advertisements, anniversary publications, customer and employee memories, various commissioned artworks and photographs taken throughout the course of the construction phase of the development. I was particularly drawn to these early photographs of the site's construction, taken over fifty years ago, as they provided a bridge to a time beyond my own memory and documented the genesis of the building. Commissioned by the developer, these photographs documented the building construction through panoramic aerial views, capturing both the scale of the project and the physical impact of the development on the land. A closer inspection of the photographs also reveals the construction workers preparing the buildings foundations and moving the materials. The images elevated perspective unintentionally documents the peripheral urban landscape beyond the site's boundaries including the activities of city life during the early 1960s. Using digital software to magnify the photographs revealed more of these marginal spaces, activating what the cultural theorist and philosopher Walter Benjamin termed the optical unconscious (1935). Having

become something of a cinematic trope, through the work of Michelangelo Antonioni in 'Blow up' (1966), and Ridley Scott's film 'Blade Runner' (1982), this process of image manipulation uses magnification to uncover a hidden world beyond normal visual perception. By further enlarging the photographs through projection, it became possible to isolate and open up to closer observation peripheral areas of the image. Enlargement of this type highlighted the digital limitations of these images in which deep zoom would lead to pixilation. Working with these images through painting broke down the striated digital space of the pixel to form the smooth, analogue space resonant with their origin as 'wet process' photographs.

From these experiments with enlargement, a series of small-scale paintings developed which explored the edge lands of the construction photographs, as seen in the paintings 'Peripheral 1' (fig 26) and 'Peripheral 2' (fig 27). Carefully observing these marginal, urban landscapes gives some insight into the type of building which had once stood on the land where the Centre was built. However, it is through painting them that a closer, spatial understanding becomes possible. This occurs through the painted articulation of the forms, attending to the rhythms and spatial relationships between the various structures in the landscape. This process is a metaphysical *dérive* in which the gestures and marks of paint on the painting surface become an equivalent to walking the ground, sensing your way in and around the interstitial spaces, gauging the lay of the land and visualising the dust and noise of nearby construction. Wandering this forgotten urban cityscape through painting practice is to return to the area's industrial past of Victorian slums and derelict factories, emphasising the Centre's radical presence as a vision of the future. In this way, making these paintings becomes a mechanism for understanding the significance of the development to the city but also a way of moving through place. Further analysis of these concepts and their relationship to other paintings in the study will be explored in chapter five.



Fig 26. Stone, A.2019. *Peripheral 1*. [Oil on board]. 17cm x 13cm



Fig 27. Stone, A.2019. *Peripheral 2*. [Oil on board]. 16cm x 12cm

Other archive material previously mentioned included online community forums and social media platforms, where individuals share their experiences, memories and photographs of the Centre. Through the ‘Facebook’ group ‘Old Photographs of Leeds’ I made contact with a forum member whose father had owned a clothes factory on the site prior to the Centre’s development (fig 28). His recollections were

an illuminating glimpse into the area and factory life which included a story about the demolition of buildings adjacent to the factory in which a wrecking ball accidentally broke through the factory wall to an office in which his father was working. In addition to his many memories of the site, he had kept and renovated a wooden cabinet (fig 29) which had been in the building long before the clothing company had taken over the space. This keepsake served as a powerful touchstone and repository of memory, extending back beyond the lifetime of its current owner to earlier inhabitants of the building. It also reflected a discreet material agency at work in which remnants from the earlier communities within the area continue to survive and quietly continue upon their way.



Fig 28. Old Photographs of Leeds, 'No 2 Rockingham Street Clothing Factory', Photograph



Fig 29. De Roxby, D. Cabinet from No 2 Rockingham Street Clothing Factory, Photograph

These traces of community memory contrast with the Merrion Archive photographs as they offer an uncensored, lived experience of the past which captured individual subjective accounts of the site in relation to how their lives, in varied ways, connected with the Centre. In relation to this Lippard suggests:

[P]lace applies to our own “local”- entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke. Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what happened there, what will happen there (Lippard, 1997, p.7).

The entangled and immersive character of place which Lippard describes is evident in these past and present community voices, offering insight into alternative, hidden narratives and describing the lived experience of place which resonate into the future. These personal accounts, when aligned with photographs and the paintings in the study, create a rounded perspective of the Centre as a thickly storied place of layered memories and interconnected events, bringing the past into sharper focus. Reflecting on these notions of the archive, the varied materials collated during this study form their own archive which emerges through the connections, combinations and juxtapositions of fragmented materials, including photographs, paintings, drawings, texts and personal stories.

### **Painting Practice: Meaning and Knowledge Making**

The final significant methodology within this project is, of course, painting practice itself, which in this study encompasses a range of practical studio-based painting activities and their outcomes. This includes: decision made when choosing, editing and scaling up images, projection techniques, preparing painting surfaces, mixing mediums and the activity of painting. This methodology is a dynamic process, responding to the evolving painting and the agency of the varied mediums and material at hand in the studio. It is described by the artist Alison Pilkington (2015, p.4) as a unique, generative process for creating new knowledge, meanings and alternative perspectives. Echoing this understanding of painting practice, theorist and artist Barbara Bolt proposes that, “tacit knowing and the generative potential of process have the potential to reveal new insights” (Barratt and Bolt, 2007, p.31).

Whilst the philosopher, Donald Schön, recognises the creative process as “knowledge in action” (Schön, 1983) establishing a critical and reflective dialogue between maker, object and audience, these ideas suggest an unspoken thinking and a contingent problem-solving generated through the practical activities of working with materials when making a painting. Pilkington suggests that the medium specificity of painting and the iterative processes of reflexivity in painting practice, make the activity:

suited to investigating phenomena that other more rational, ‘scientific’ methods may get ‘stuck’ on. The phenomena I have in mind are the liminal, elusive and often unknown areas that exist between disciplines, between psychological states and between fully formed concepts and disciplinary formations (Pilkington, 2015, p.27).

These points are salient, in relation to the elusive subjects of place, the everyday and memory as experienced within the Centre. The paintings approach these phenomena in a number of ways, including through the handling of material and the development of the image. An example of this, seen in the painting ‘Build’ (Fig 30), is in the multiple layers of paint and images, which combine to convey the passage of time and a build-up of memory, both on the surface as image and within the material as object. Here time refers both to time spent making, encapsulated in the traces of gesture and movement across the painting surfaces and the history of the building from its construction to the present day, which is represented through the layering of different time frames from the Centre’s history.



Fig 30. Stone, A. 2016. *Build*. [Oil on canvas], 120cm x 150cm,

In this way, the painting conjures multiple readings, including the Centre's fluidity as a place of transition and the becoming of place on the picture plane, through a combination of time spent making and memory. These readings are communicated through the specificity of the painting process including: digital cropping, enlarging and editing, projection and tracing, and analogue activities such as the brushing, pouring, wiping, scraping and staining of paint. By working through these processes, compositions are revealed and concealed simultaneously, forming new relationships between mark, line, texture and colour. This process of making is both thought and felt, with an attentiveness to both the wider and particular aspects of the project, visual problem solving and a playful attitude which is open to the accidental. The painter, Peter Doig, describes a similar process in his own work, in which layered mistakes and trial and error provide a "space to allow something to really evolve" (Doig, 2007, p.124). This perspective connects to Bolt's perception of the "performative potential of art" (Barrett & Bolt, 2014, p.30) in which unexpected discoveries and meanings emerge through the handling of materials and



circumspection (Bolt, 2011, p.97). An experimental, time-based piece from the study, which supports this notion of an evolving understanding through making, is the screen print 'Murmurings' (fig 31 & 32). This piece happened accidentally when the screen-printed adhesive failed to hold most of the flock fibre which was being attracted to the statically charged surface of the paper. A weak adhesive solution resulted in the flock continually moving across the surface, under the influence of the static charge, appearing to have its own agency. The liveliness of the flock fibres gave the print a temporal quality, seeming to encapsulate the Centre as a place in transition, of successive unfolding moments, continually superseded.

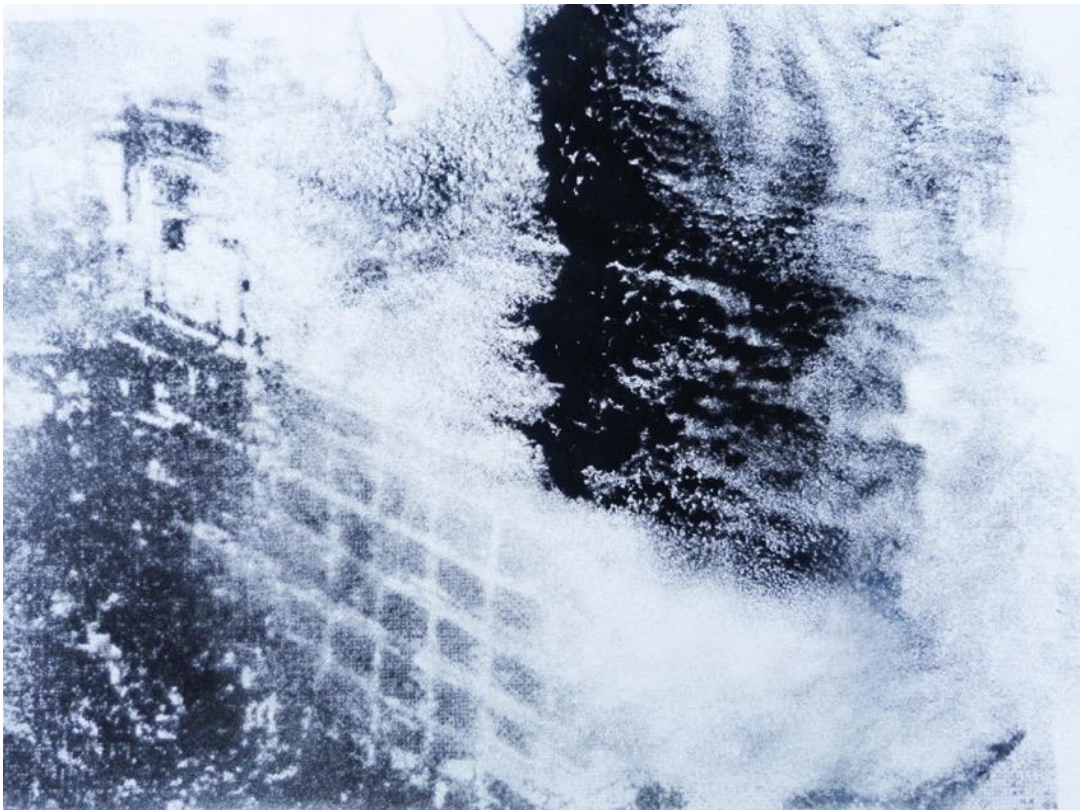


Fig 31. Stone, A. 2018. *Murmurings*. [Flock fibre on paper]. 59cm x 42cm,

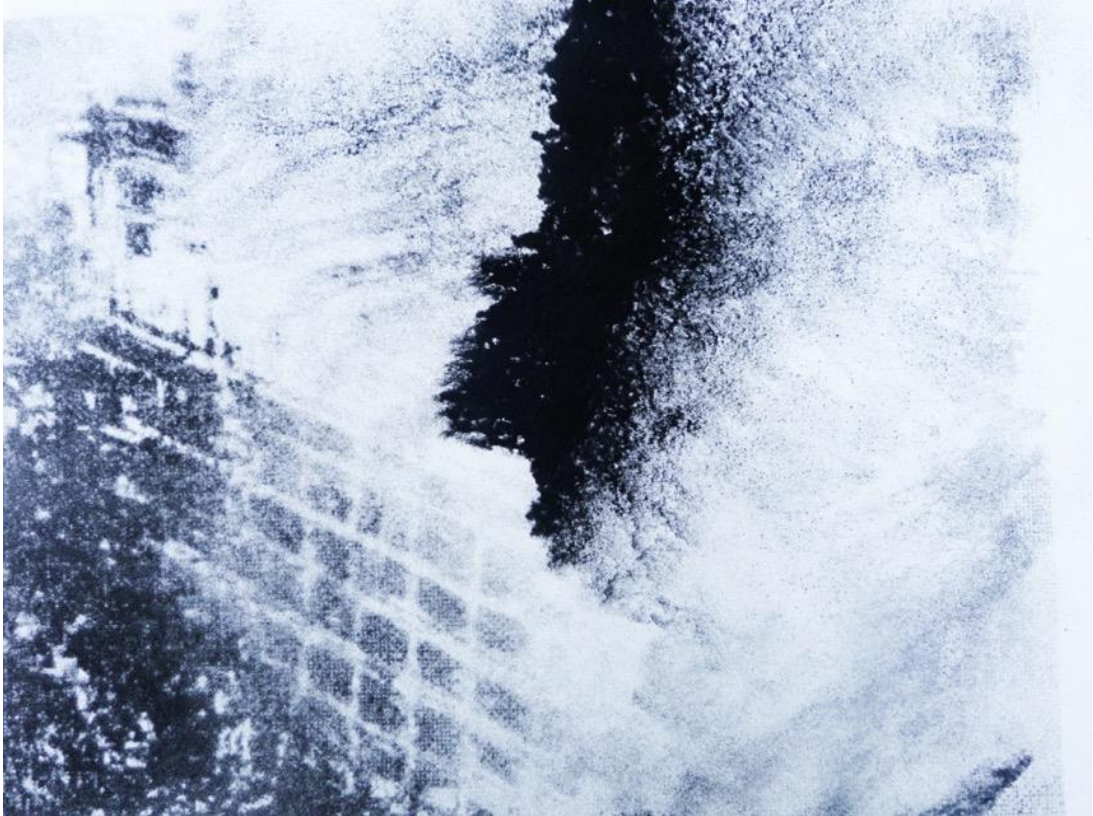


Fig 32. Stone, A. 2018. *Murmurings II*. [Flock fibre on paper]. 59cm x 42cm

This notion of the continuous transition of the Centre resonated with a number of earlier unsuccessful paintings from the study which were later painted over to arrive at new images. This process of working over older paintings of the Centre seemed increasingly appropriate for communicating place as an evolving, relational experience of layered memories. One such example of this process of pentimento was the painting ‘The visionary’ (fig 33) an underpainting of an entirely different image of the Centre, just visible in some areas of the final painting. Like the Centre, the painting has a prior history which has been erased but not entirely lost.

Working on top of an earlier image involved an element of openness to unforeseeable interactions between earlier passages of paint and later additions. It is an anxious and speculative process which tentatively establishes a new order of form and space over an older one. When painting, the artist Gerhard Richter describes “an almost blind, desperate effort, like that of a person abandoned, helpless, in totally incomprehensible surroundings” (Richter, 1995, p.121). The disorientation and embodied terms Richter uses suggest he is situated within the painting, equating the making of a painting to the experience of an unfamiliar place.

This suggests that the process of painting, like the experience of place, is an embodied relational activity and that the paintings, in some way, become place.



Fig 33. Stone, A. 2016. *The visionary*. [Oil on Canvas]. 42cm x 60cm

Returning to the notion of painting as method of understanding, Ingold suggests that, “thinking is inseparable from doing, that thought is “embodied and enacted”, and cognition is “seamlessly distributed across persons, activity and setting” (Ingold, 2000, p.162). In this way, the physical activity of painting becomes a silent articulation of thought. Richter offers what, at first, appears a somewhat contradictory insight when suggesting “Painting has nothing to do with thinking, because in painting thinking is painting” (Richter,1995, p.13). What Richter is proposing is a process of criticality occurring during the activity of making, and within the medium, which is then expressed through the work itself. Such an idea challenges Western traditions which privilege thinking prior to or post the event of making, in which the “actual work of painting is subordinated to the final product” (Ingold, 2000, p.198). The paintings in this study were made with an understanding of Ingold and Richter’s positions, through a mindful attentiveness to the processes of

painting as an active and playful searching towards an unfolding understanding of the Centre.

Perhaps the common ground in these thoughts on painting's generative potential is the implied psychological space which practice arguably offers. The openness to the unexpected found in painting liberates ideas and thoughts from what Heidegger terms "thrownness", a mode of existence or 'being' (Dasein), in which we are preoccupied by everyday life. By stepping outside daily worries and concerns through practical activities (doing), Bolt suggest we might arrive at the "authentic Dasein" (Bolt, 2011, p.28) which leads to practical knowledge. If this is the case, then the painting process would seem ideally suited to engage with the aforementioned difficulties of observing the everyday.

These insights offer a perception of painting as an active, generative and speculative process, harnessing an exploratory playfulness with materials from which new and unexpected understanding can emerge, although it is less clear what mechanisms are at work for this to happen. The paintings in this study investigate the Centre from multiple perspectives, using personal experience and memory, historical photographs and archive materials. It is argued here that these approaches, combined with the aforementioned generative qualities found within practice, can offer understandings of place and shine a new light on the Centre. Jean Fisher suggests "each one of us is a space in which thoughts and images from multiple sources are assembled" (2003, p.220); this tacit knowledge could be transmitted from hand and eye to material through the activity of making, as suggested by Gosetti-Ferencei:

The act of painting is not primarily cognitive but rather embodied. To paint is to engage hand, body and brush, with its movements and suspensions, in active vision (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2007, p.156).

This highlights the importance of the body in painting practice, bringing together contrasting phenomenological and materialist views in relation to embodied knowing, place world and assemblage which will be discussed further in chapter four.

In relation to painting practice as a viable research methodology for addressing the research questions, these perspectives suggest that the process of painting can allow

new interpretations and understandings to occur, where seemingly unconnected ideas, images and materials might coalesce in manifold and contingent ways to reveal new knowledge. As will be discussed in later chapters, the ideas explored, in relation to the experiencing and representing of place, form part of an argument I will continue to develop, which proposes a close-knit relationship between the practice and painting of place and the lived experience of place.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the key reasons for the Merrion Centre becoming the subject of this investigation. This included recognising its cultural significance as a Brutalist-inspired structure and its importance as a place of personal and cultural memory for the city of Leeds. It also examined the methodologies which underpin the investigation, establishing the value of spatial bricolage and schizocartography as flexible, investigative methods appropriate for the study of heterogeneous place. This led to a review of autoethnography as a complimentary methodology which foregrounds the voice of lived experience, fieldwork practices and the voices of artists whose work investigate parallel interests. The chapter then went on to establish archive research as a valued method for sourcing historical information and images, as well as individual and cultural memories of place. Finally, it examined painting practice as an embodied and generative process sensitive to subjective experiences with the potential to generate specific forms of knowledge and reveal new understandings and readings of place. Moving forwards, the following chapter will now turn to examine the Merrion Centre in more detail, seeking to establish the nature of the site and how this understanding might support this investigation.

## Chapter 3: The Merrion Centre as Contested Place



Fig 34. Advert for Merrion Centre [Newspaper cutting]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 35. Broughton, J. 2021. Great throw-back that may be of interest. [facebook]. 2019. [Accessed 17 June 2021]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/>

THE MERRION STREET CENTRE  
MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK

DATE 2.11.62.

NEG. No. D874/19



Fig 36. Merrion land for development as Multi-Storey Carpark. 1962.[Photograph].At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive

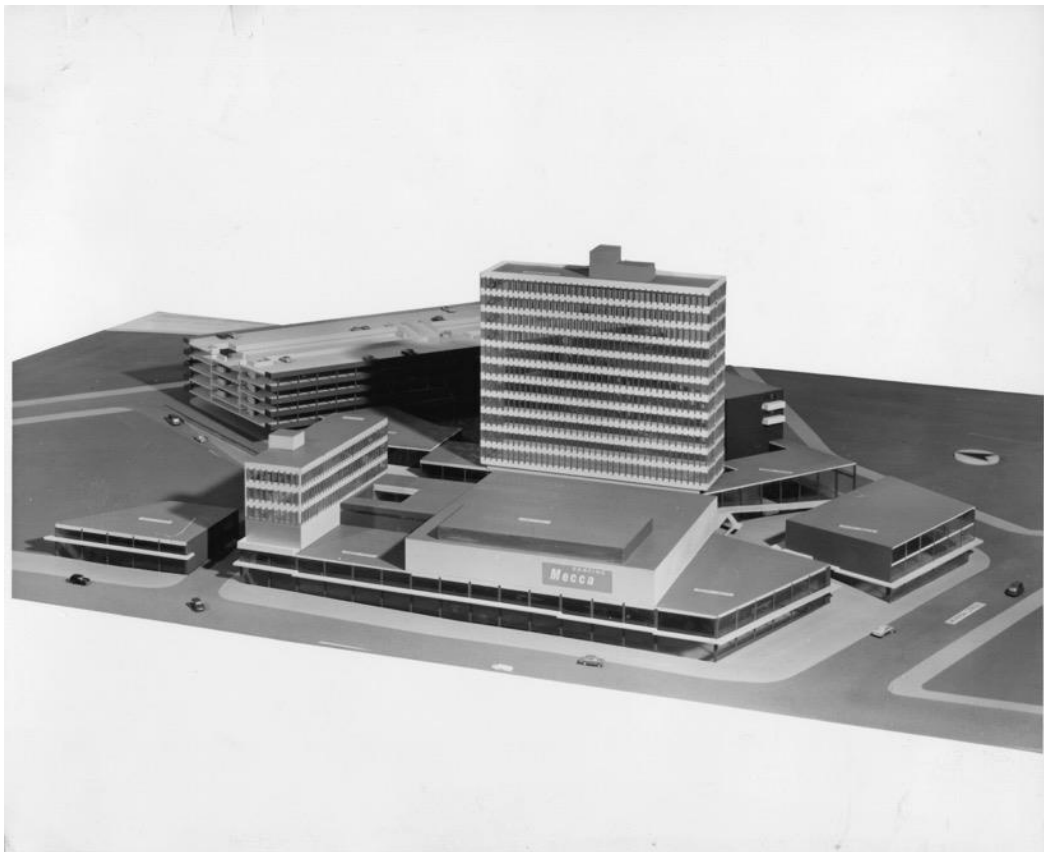


Fig 37. Merrion Model. 1962.[Photograph] At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 38. Drawing of carpark construction. 2018. Ink on paper.



Fig 39. Merrion Centre Construction. 1962.[Photograph]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive





Fig 40. Merrion Centre Topping Out Ceremony. 1963.[Photograph]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 41. News Articles (left) undated, (right) 1963 [Newspaper cutting]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 42. *Radio Leeds in the Merrion Centre*, undated [Photograph]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 43. *Lord mayor of Leeds visiting the Merrion Centre*, undated, [Photograph]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 44. Stone, A. 2020. *Merrion Centre Woodhouse Lane entrance*. [Photograph].



Fig 45. Stone, A. 2019. *Morrisons Carpark, Merrion Centre*. [Photograph].



Fig 46. Stone, A. 2020. *Merrion House*, Merrion Centre. [Photography].



Fig 47. Stone, A. 2020. *Pizza Express*, Merrion Centre [Photography].



Fig 48. Stone, A. 2020. *Pure Gym*, Merrion Centre. [Photography].



Fig 49. Stone, A. 2020. *Citipark*, Merrion Centre. [Photography].



Fig 50. Stone, A. 2020. *Arnold's*, Merrion Centre. [Photography].

## Introduction

[P]lace – anthropological place - is a principle of meaning for the people who live in it, and also a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it (Augé, 2008, p.42).

We are always somewhere, always in a place. But what does ‘place’ actually mean? What does place look like and how does it feel? Addressing some of these concerns, David Seamon identifies a strong relationship between place and experience, proposing that place is “a generative field that shapes and is shaped by parts integrally interconnected in a physical and experiential whole” (Seamon, 2018, p.8). Seamon’s thesis focusses on place as an environment in which life happens, developing a theory which was found to correlate with findings from fieldwork in the Centre. For Seamon, there are six key ingredients of place which include: place interaction (the day-to-day routines and going’s on); place identity (belonging to a place); and place release (serendipity and happenstance). Each of these qualities of place were observed in the Centre, from the daily routines and rituals of cleaners, retail workers and shoppers, the fond memories of the Centre found on social media forums and unexpected encounters and events experienced through field trips. The geographer Robert Sacks, suggests that the consumer dynamics of the shopping centre are a powerful place-making apparatus, “the actions of mass consumerism are the most powerful and pervasive place-building processes in the world” (Sacks, 1988, in Daniels, 1992, p.311). Echoing this notion of place as a vibrant relational experience, the anthropologist and cultural theorist Marc Augé, recognises different textures, variations and qualities of place, suggesting that there is a reciprocity between ourselves and our environment activated through the lived experience of the places we inhabit. This perception of place as a lived locality are supported by earlier social geographers including Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977) and Relph (1976), whose emphasis on the subjective experience of place referenced the phenomenological concerns of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (Cresswell, 2015, p.35).

Recognising these varied perspectives on place, this chapter seeks to establish a clearer understanding of what type of site the Merrion Centre might be. To support this investigation, this chapter will triangulate the Centre’s genealogy, reviewing its character as a mixed-use site of consumption and leisure practices. It will cross-

reference this perception with contemporary understandings of place and paintings of the Centre made during the study. This review will touch upon the Centre's history, encompassing the local and regional context from which this ambitious development sprang. It will also examine how this research into the heritage of the building and the land upon which it is built has allowed a deeper understanding of the emergent and contingent nature of the Centre, which has permeated through into the production of the paintings.

Moving from the specific history of the Merrion Centre, to a wider examination of the theoretical legacy of place within cultural and place studies, this discussion will locate the Centre within broader social, political, and theoretical discourses. This will provide the context for chapter four, which will focus upon selected areas of the site, alongside an examination of psychogeographical and autoethnographical fieldwork practices within 'uncanny places' of the Centre. This section will then analyse how such practices have informed the text and accompanying series of paintings.

Reviewing the site's history, the Merrion Centre's construction in May 1963 and opening in 1964 signalled a new era of mall-style retail in the UK. Other notable examples of that time included the Birmingham Bullring and the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre in South London. Its construction was part of a national redevelopment strategy which sought to replace inner-city, slum housing and longstanding communities with high value commercial spaces. The five-acre plot (fig 51) on which the building was constructed, marked the northern edge of the city centre, at that time. This location was seen as problematic, as it was several hundred yards from the commercial heart of the city and there were concerns that shoppers would not make the effort to visit.



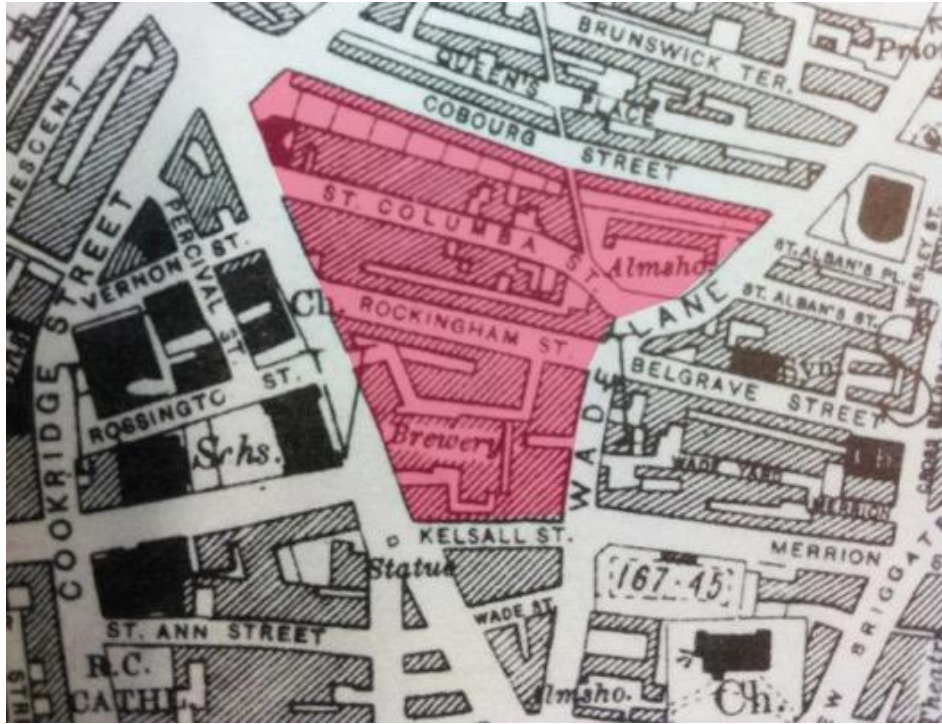


Fig 51. Leeds City Research Library: Map of site prior to Merrion Centre development. Area shaded red: Proposed Merrion Development

The Centre was built upon land which had been earmarked several years earlier for shopping and business use in the first Leeds City development plan of 1955. Prior to the Centre, the site had been corporation car parking and earlier still had been occupied by Victorian slum housing, an alms house, a bus station, the Albion Brewery (demolished in 1933), the city's first synagogue (1846-1860) and a war time emergency water tank. At this time, living in this area had been an immigrant Jewish community originally from Russia, which had been growing steadily from the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. This community, as previously noted, included my own relatives who had made the journey west from Polotsk (Russia now Belarus), circa 1890. It was noted, when cross-referencing old maps of the site with the current layout of the Centre, that these past histories left echoes which resonated through to the present. Examples of this included, the nightclub situated on the grounds of the old brewery and an old kerb stone denoting the entrance to Rockingham Street, now hidden beneath a manhole cover by the west entrance to the Centre.

The concrete and glass construction of the Merrion Centre design reflected a modern Brutalist aesthetic and emulated a new North American retail model, pioneered by the architect Victor Gruen, who envisaged "enclosed shopping centres which would

parallel the ancient agora, the medieval market place and town square” (Lowe, 2000, p.245). A key objective of this new spatial form was to provide a site for shopping in which everything was in one place and conveniently accessible by car. This principle for modern retail was evident in an advert for the opening of the Merrion Centre (fig 52), which boldly proclaimed “It’s open...and everybody’s going!”



Fig 52. Advert for opening of the Merrion Centre.c1964 [Newspaper cutting]. At: Leeds: Town Centre Securities archive

Whilst giving a sense of the celebratory nature of the Centre's development, the advert also gives an insight into its unique selling point as an easily accessible retail experience for all ages, with everything you might need or desire under one roof. This was a new and innovative type of shopping experience, “the first of its type in Europe to include numerous entertainment facilities as well as a traffic free pedestrian shopping precinct” (TCS, 1963). It sought to build on the successes of Gruen's New Jersey, Cherry Hill Mall, built in 1961. Gruen had argued for a new type of shopping experience which could provide:

attractions for shoppers by meeting other needs [i.e. other than simply consumption] which are inherent in the psychological climate peculiar to suburbia. By affording opportunities for social life and creation in a protected pedestrian environment, by incorporating civic and educational facilities, shopping centers can fill an existing void (Kascha Seamon, 2006, p.8).

This new shopping concept was observed first hand by the Merrion Centre's developer and owner, Arnold Ziff, chief executive of Town Centre Securities (TCS),

who had previously visited New Jersey with the Centre's architect Basil Gillinson (Watson, 2005, p.52). Ziff had clearly recognised the potential of this type of retail when describing the Centre's objective as follows:

To allow pedestrians to shop in comfort without the inconvenience of vehicles to hamper their movements, yet their cars can be parked close by to the shops, eliminating today's parking problems (Watson, 2005, p.52).

Emulating Gruen's vision, the Centre boasted one hundred shops, a multi-story carpark, a cinema, a dance hall, two office blocks, a bowling alley and hotel as well as the country's first outdoor traveller and purpose-built bus terminal directly beside what was then a flagship Morrisons supermarket.

The construction site stretched from Merrion Street on the south side to Cobourg Street on the north with Wade Lane to the east and Woodhouse Lane to the west. Straddling the site east to west were the two roads, St Columba Street and Rockingham Street. Initially, the excessive scale of the build made securing the £2 million (Watson, 2005, p.52) investment difficult. At the time, critics of the scheme questioned the concept of a shopping precinct when smaller supermarkets were seen as a novelty. They raised concerns regarding its excessive scale, high cost and exceptionally large, 1100 space, multi storey car park, in an era where many households did not have a car. Fortunately for the developer, the site swiftly became a commercial and cultural success within the city, becoming a social hub due to the Northern Soul scene at the New Mecca Locarno Ballroom.

### **Representing the Merrion Centre**

The original model of the Centre (fig 53) shows the open-plan, geometric design of the site which innovatively incorporated office space with multi-storey car parking, to accommodate envisaged future demand. A later model (fig 54) shows the substantial changes made to the building since the initial design, including a roof to cover the main pedestrian area and the removal of a road which separated the Morrison's store (bottom of the image) from the main site. This more recent model highlighted the Centre as a structure of change and transition rather than a stagnant, fixed site. The persistent redevelopment of the Centre throughout its history resonates with Seamon's notion of 'place intensification' (Seamon, 2018, p.9) in

which the considered remodelling of a spatial environment has the potential to strengthen place. As previously mentioned, Seamon's research identified six process which worked together to either invigorate or weaken place, noting that place intensification happens through well considered architectural, planning and policy decisions which improve how communities interact with place. The later model also became an important subject within the study, resulting in a series of paintings which explored the indexical link between subject and representation, as will be discussed in chapter five.



Fig 53. Town Centre Securities (TCS). c1962. *Architect's Model of Merrion Centre*. [Photograph]. At TCS archive: Leeds



Fig 54. Stone, A. 2019. *Photograph of Merrion Centre Model in TCS archive.* [Photograph].



Fig 55. Town Centre Securities. *Gillinson Barnett and Partners: The Merrion Centre.* At TCS archive: Leeds

Presenting the Merrion Centre as a futuristic structure, the architect's illustration (fig 55), found in the Centre's archive, visualises the northern edge of the site. With sweeping pedestrian walkways, which seem to float above the traffic, and sleek,

horizontal lines of concrete and glass, the design echoes many elements of Le Corbusier's Brutalist ideals for which the Centre is known. Using a ground level perspective, the buildings soar above the skyline, whilst the uncongested, litter-free streets and landscaped gardens create a clinical cityscape within which citizens leisurely stroll. The image presents a space in which work and leisure seamlessly combine and all traces of the past have been erased. The handling and application of materials in the making of the image are purposeful, using a translucent, layered and muted palette to convey sleek glass and concrete surfaces, with a sheer perspective to emphasise the scale of the building. By representing the Centre in this way, the illustration conveys an aspirational future-scape which aimed to catch the imagination of the developers, town planners and the public.

The photographs below, (fig 56- 57), also from the Centre's archive, were taken during the construction phase of the building and give a further sense of the scale and ambition of this development. The clean, horizontal forms of concrete slabs in the new buildings create a stark contrast to the surrounding Victorian dwellings and factories blackened by the city's industrial past. This photograph gives a sense of how radical this development was at the time, signalling the beginning of a much wider inner-city regeneration project in Leeds and acting as a barometer to the city's growing affluence as a commercial centre in the North.



Fig 56. Town Centre Securities (TCS). c1963. Photograph of construction work at the Merrion Centre. [Photograph]. At TCS archive



Fig 57. Town Centre Securities (TCS). c1963. Photograph of construction work at the Merrion Centre. [Photograph]. At TCS archive

The development also reflected a broader, nationwide, post-war, redevelopment strategy and coincided with a fifteen-year development boom fuelled by the ending of wartime building controls in 1954. This national program of inner-city regeneration resulted in the gradual rehousing of predominantly working class, inner-city communities to estates on the periphery of the city centre.

This understanding of the Centre's history and the cultural landscape in which the site emerged has been significant in the development of the paintings of the Centre. It has led to an understanding of the Centre as a symbol of the city's hopes and aspirations as a northern powerhouse and also, to the disclosure of previously unknown family connections with the displaced Jewish community of this area. This new information about the site highlights the palimpsest nature of place, which filtered through into many of the paintings to be discussed later in this chapter.

### **The Dialectics of Place**

The following section will interrogate the Merrion Centre in relation to contemporary discourses within the field of place studies, with the aim of providing a foundation for analysis on how new understandings of place informed the paintings within this study.

Edward Casey, in 'The Fate of Place' (1998), suggests that place as a concept is taken for granted, due in part to its nearness and hidden nature. He argues that more scientific and temporocentric terminologies, such as space, site, position and point, have superseded place leading to a less humanistic perspective on the subject. Casey charts the decline in the value of place from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards in relation to a number of 'theoretical, cultural and historical tendencies' (Casey.1998, p. xiii) which focused upon universal themes. Casey also recognises the impact of Temporocentrism as found in the work of Hagel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Darwin and later Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger. With the ascendance of time as a universal condition to which all things are tied, place became merely the location upon which material bodies move. More recently, there has been a renewed interest and analysis in the near and close by, as seen through the work of: Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), Shields (1991), Augé (1995), Lippard (1988), Malpas (1999), Massey (2005), Trigg (2012) Cresswell (2015) and Seamon (2018) registering a return to notions of locality and the politics of place-making, in relation to identity, community and individual memory.

Although well known locally as a retail centre, the site is more accurately described as a mix of public and corporate spaces. As previously touched upon, the Centre has varied textual qualities of place, ranging from the bowling alley, numerous nightclubs, hotel, retail outlets, health clinic, supermarkets, a Mini Market (redeveloped 2017) and until 1977, an Odeon cinema. For the individuals and communities who visit and use these facilities, these places continue to retain their personal narratives and memories, even when these areas are redeveloped. This is evident in the entries found through online forums such as Leodis (<http://www.leodis.net/>) and Secret Leeds (<http://www.secretleeds.com/>). On these community forums members share memories and discuss their own experiences of visiting or working at the Centre, their recollections evoking not just the memory of a place, but also a sense of the time.





Fig 58. Town Centre Securities Archive, *Stylo/Androgyne*. [Photograph]

Often comments are provoked by posts of old photographs of the Centre such as the image ‘Stylo/Androgyne’ (fig 58) circa 1967, found on the forum ‘Leodis’. As exemplified in the comments thread below, common reoccurring topics include the various nightclubs, the Odeon cinema, the moving pavement and the wind tunnel effect which led to the Centre eventually acquiring a roof. They also often include insider knowledge from those that worked at the Centre, giving technical details of the projectors used in the cinema, the names of managers from the various shops at different times of the Centre’s history or historical information about the land use prior to the building’s construction.

Date:21-Jan-2009 Comment:

Androgyne is now vanished to the well near the old (closed off) pedestrian underpass of Claypit Lane and Woodhouse Lane.

Date:17-Jan-2013 Comment:

In around 1963, I took my girlfriend to the Locarno Mecca here. But I wasn't wearing a tie, so they wouldn't let me in. I don't remember where I got a tie from, but we did eventually get in. What I do remember, was dancing myself silly to a Rolling Stones song, and almost passing-out. I remember the song as 'Mona', a Bo Diddley style number perfect for the

kind of dancing back then, but I've never heard it since. Does anyone recall the Stones doing this song?

Date:28-Jan-2013 Comment:

This song "Mona (I Need You Baby) is on the Stone's 1st album and is actually a song written by Bo Diddley.

Date:08-Oct-2016 Comment:

We too went to the Mecca when it opened, also the Odeon cinema inside the Centre. Does anyone remember the escalator which ran up to the Centre from Merrion Street at the top of which was Mothercare, and how the inside of the Centre was like a wind tunnel.

My own posts on the Facebook group 'Old photographs of Leeds' led with an archive image of the Centre just before it opened. The post received many interesting responses and revealed a common perception of the building's ugliness and also surprise by many on the forum, that the Centre's originally design had been open to the elements.



Fig 59. Town Centre Securities Archive. 1964. *The Merrion Street Centre*. [Photograph]

Responses to posting of the above image (fig 59) on the Facebook forum Old Photographs of Leeds.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/leedsnostalgia/permalink/3282216048490491>

“The wind used to whistle through it like blowing a gale!”

“My mum told me they had to add a roof as it was a wind tunnel when it first opened.”

“One word..... Depressing! Two words.....Bloody Depressing!”

“I believe the Merrion Centre had one of the first "travellators", i.e. a moving walkway into the Centre from Merrion Street. It did not last long and was removed for health and safety reasons (in the 1960s!).”

“The architect must have been inspired when he designed this beauty.”

“I think it was Gillinson and Barnett.”

“Are they still in hiding?”

When correlated, these recollections and misremembering track the changes within the site over time, explaining where a sculpture went or the change in name of a night club. They also help to illustrate the evolving nature of the Centre and people’s emotional attachment to those distant places as demonstrated in the following thread from ‘Secret Leeds’:

Zip55 wrote (Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2007, 2:12am):

In 1970, the Mecca was upstairs with the Bali Hai next door. Cinderella’s & Rockerfellas were out the back across the road from the bowling alley. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Trojan wrote (Monday 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2008, 9:33pm):

No, you're not wrong. We used to go to the bowl in the sixties, we used to alternate between the Merrion Centre one and the one on Kirkstall Road across from where Yorkshire TV is. There was a restaurant on Merrion Street in the Merrion Centre on the first floor called the "Skand a Grill" we used to eat there quite a lot in the late sixties early seventies.

Bramle4woods wrote (Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2008, 1:29am):

For us it was our "Once a year day" with a new baby to bring up and the mortgage rate more / less doubling in 6 months during the middle of 1972 with 20% inflation. However, 9 or so years earlier going to Central High, we regarded the Skanda Grill as the coffee bar underneath. Otherwise known as "That place wi't rugs on t'walls." Not that we had the money for more than 2 or 3 coffees per year anyway.

(zip55 et al. 2007-8. Merrion Centre.[Secret Leeds]. [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019]. Available from: <https://www.secretleeds.com/>

The unmoderated memories found online convey a personal, lived experience which is affectionate, openly critical and often humorous. There is also a liveliness in the dialogue between the online contributors resulting in a richer sense of the time. Often these conversations seem to spark others' memories, revealing a shared community experience. In contrast with these less formal online comments, the following archive memories from Centre customers and staff which were published in the Centre's commemorative book 'The Merrion Centre: The First Fifty Years', seem to offer a rose-tinted perspective somewhat detached from the lived experiences expressed through the online commentary.

The Centre has the familiarity of a market and its very friendly. When I first came to Yorkshire there was a fantastic Emmett automaton here, and on the hour all sorts of things happened. It was worth sticking around for. Naomi, Morrisons customer (Town Centre Securities. 2014, p.50).

I remember when it first opened. I still do my shopping at Morrisons, go to the sandwich shop, have a pint and it's on the way home. Leonard Baldwinson (Town Centre Securities. 2014, p.52).

Highlighting the temporal limitations of the Centre archive, the forum memories often extend back to a time before the Centre was constructed, recalling the texture of an earlier place:

Brixxie1 wrote (Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008, 4:56pm):

The Merrion Centre was largely built over the old Rowland Winn's garage (main Vauxhall agents) which was pulled down around 1963/64. I used to work at Rowland Winn's and we were all made redundant when the Merrion Centre was planned. The Rockingham Street bus station was opposite Rowland Winn's car park and was the terminus for the No. 65 bus (Pudsey & Bramley) As I lived in Armley (Wyther Estate) I used to catch the bus to work. Many good memories of the old Rowland Winn garage - absolutely freezing in winter and roasting in summer! Only source of heat in winter was a single 6" hot water pipe which ran down the edge of the workshop at sitting height (Brixxie1, 2008 cited in Secretleeds.com).

These narratives of the Centre, and their vivid descriptions provided a valuable context for understanding the lived experiences of the Centre. Together these voices powerfully illustrate the wider socio-economic climate of the country, touching on the spiralling costs of living in the 1970s, the excitement of going out to a restaurant and the cultural significance of the Centre to a post war generation that had greater

leisure time than ever before. They also describe a sensory history of working environments and extreme weather conditions, as well as illustrating how passing time may affect memory. As noted in chapter one, they also demonstrated an important reciprocity between place and identity, a view substantiated by Casey and Augé who argue that places acquire meaning through the people who occupy them. This understanding of place having a porous relationship with its inhabitants, was highly significant to the making of the paintings as it highlighted a potential bridge between my own experiential site visits, earlier childhood memories of the Centre and studio painting of the site.

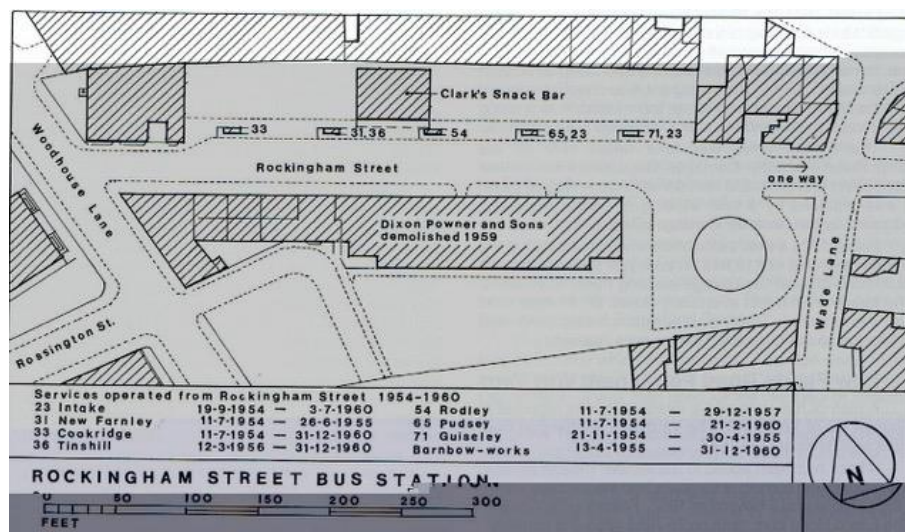


Fig 60. Rockingham Street Bus Station (Roundhegian, 2007)



Fig 61. Rockingham Street Bus Station (Roundhegian, 2007)

Verifying the earlier land use as described by forum members, the street plan (fig 60) and photograph (fig 61) show Rockingham Street bus station situated in what was to become the main retail area of the Centre. This photograph verifies that historically the site had been an important transport hub for the city, a status which continued through the Centre's proximity to a number of major transport links, including the Leeds Inner Ring Road. The plan of the bus station on Rockingham Street gives an aerial view of the area, clearly stating the bus stops, routes and businesses on the site. However, its schematic character offers no qualitative sense of place, unlike the photograph which is rich in period information. Cross-referencing the photograph with the map confirms this as a view looking north towards Coburg Street, with semi derelict Victorian factories and slum housing.

The painting 'Tables and Chairs' (fig 62), referencing notions of layered place, presents a small cafe located in the vicinity of where the Rockingham Street bus station (fig 61) once stood. It uses unbleached titanium oxide, an off-white yellowish paint, to convey the unnatural artificial lighting within this area of the Centre. The muted colour gives the painting a melancholic, dreamlike quality, which is emphasised through the gentle blurring of the image. The blur is achieved through the repeated light dragging of an adapted window cleaning tool across the wet surface of the canvas. This process leaves a series of faint, vertical lines which interrupt the smooth surface of the painting, suggesting a minor visual glitch or misalignment, reminding the viewer of its mediated nature. With no lively brushwork to energise the peripheral areas and engage the eye and its banal subject matter, the painting offers a disinterested gaze. The image has an atemporal quality as though in stasis, presenting an estranged and distanced world in which the inhabitants have mysteriously disappeared. The painting foreshadows the dramatic social dislocations that were to follow only a few weeks after its completion with the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic.



Fig 62. Stone, A.2020. *Tables and Chairs* [Oil on canvas]. 45cm x 65cm.

The area's previous life as a transport hub suggests the Centre's land as 'anthropological place', which is described by Augé as a social, historical and relational network of routes, axes and paths, connecting centres of commerce and places of assembly. Such sites are seen to have a complex and layered history, with a unique identity created through social contingency. This reading of the Centre resonates with Edward Casey's notion of 'thick place', which describes a diverse, community-based locality which gives its inhabitants intensive and enriching, lived experiences. Contradicting this perspective of the Centre is the notion of 'thin space', a uniform, indifferent glocality often associated with generic, retail outlets. Echoing this, Augé labels such homogeneous sites 'Non-Place', whilst Robert Macfarlane applies the term 'Blandscape' to "a landscape or place that has been left devoid of diversity, stripped of local distinctiveness, genericised" (Macfarlane, 2018). These different perspectives of place offer contradictory readings of the Centre, with research suggesting that the site contains both thick and thin qualities

of place. The ambiguities and contradictions suggest further investigation is needed, that the study and the paintings should be open to understanding the site as a multi-textured and layered locality.

Reviewing the area's history, through the collective memories of those that have known it, reveals the site as an evolving place. The legacy of community memory suggests the Centre as 'anthropological place' yet, as a commercial retail site it is also associated with non-place. The paradoxical nature of the Centre was explored in many of the paintings within the study, including the pieces 'Snackbar' (fig 63-64) and 'Photome' (fig 65-66). The painting 'Snack bar' depicts a 'down at heel' coffee shop which was located in the now redeveloped, Merrion Mini Market. Prior to the Merrion Centre's construction, this had been the location of an alms house. The outdated décor of the cafe was the antithesis of a contemporary high street coffee house, with propped-up tables and mismatched furnishings. The site had a lived-in homeliness, evidenced by the traces of those that had passed through with scuff marks, scratches and well-thumbed menus. It was a place of transit and memory, a mixture of both anthropological and non-place.

The painting of the snack bar had been through two significant phases in its development: in 'Snack bar, state 1' (fig 63), the aim had been to evoke a liminal place, half-remembered but no longer there. The composition had been developed by splitting up and applying a blur tool to the CMYK layers of the photograph. These were then projected onto the canvas and then painted using a muted palette. The blurring of the image during the painting process was done with a large painting tool dragged across the surface whilst the paint was still wet, leading to the loss of many finer details and a flattening of space. This combination of limited palette and editing of detail through process, gave the painting a fleeting, ephemeral and dreamlike quality, aiming to produce in the mind of the viewer, an unease bordering on the uncanny.





Fig 63. Stone, A. 2020. *Snack bar, state 1*. [Oil on canvas].97cm x 148cm.



Fig 64. Stone, A. 2020. *Snack bar, state 1*. [Oil on canvas].97cm x 148cm.(unfinished).

The second phase of this painting (fig 64) contrasting with the first impression, introduced more details alongside a much broader and warmer palette, with a strong light emanating from within the space. These changes sought to enhance the realism of the image, moving from memory back to the original encounter with the aim of drawing the viewer closer to the experience by creating a warm and welcoming environment. In this way, the colour palette produces a sensation of being there

rather than the sense of nostalgia or loss suggested by the earlier state. Relating this directly to the research questions, the development of this image supports the notion of paintings' ability to evoke an alternating sense of place relative to the visual language employed in their representation.

In 'Photome, state 1' (fig 65) a different kind of space is examined, this time creating unease through the mirroring of the photo booths and the hyperreal quality of the oversized cartoon characters and reflective chrome and glass surroundings. Tucked away in the shadows under the stairs in the main shopping area, the two photo booths suggest the sacred space of the confessional. This area has qualities of non-place with its mirrored surfaces deflecting casual glances. It also acts as a junction or point of departure offering escape towards the sunlit atrium. Seated within the booths, the closed curtains create a temporal dislocation, cutting off the inhabitant from the flow of the bustling arcade. Once inside, these spaces act as a mirror which relocates the sitter into a 'placeless place' or utopia, described by Foucault in these terms:

I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent (Foucault, 1986, p.24).

The photo booths also have a museum-like quality, as heterotopian cubicles in which tranches of time accumulate (Foucault, 1986), storing earlier versions of ourselves within their systems. Over the time frame of this study, dramatic changes to cultural life unfolded in unanticipated ways, through the impact of a global pandemic. Its influence had extended into all areas of everyday life including the day-to-day running of the Merrion Centre. 'Photome' is one of a number of paintings in this study, which was retrospectively affected by this situation, with changes made to the composition in light of new information.



Fig 65. Stone, A. 2020. *Photome state 1*. [Oil on canvas]. 39cm x 54cm.

Returning to site during the easing of the countrywide lockdown, the photo booths now had their curtains closed and had been hastily sealed with warning tape to prohibit further entry, (fig 66). This addition to the scene had a dramatic effect on the interpretation of the subject- were we now a culture fearful of its own image? The interior space of the booths, once so welcoming, are now due to social distancing rules a danger zone within which harmful things might be transmitted. On a compositional level, the alterations are minor yet the interpretation is significantly altered. The tape breaks the uncanny symmetry of the booths, whilst the stark yellow and black of the tape creates a dramatic colour contrast to the reflective chrome and mirror surroundings. The photo booths have now been switched off, becoming lifeless chambers echoing the emptiness of the Centre. No longer mirrors into a Foucauldian other space, they return the viewer back into the dystopian reality of the vacated precinct. In this sense, the tape signals to the viewer a return to the cultural trauma of the restrictions imposed through prolonged periods of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Here as previously noted in relation to the painting 'Snack Bar', relatively minor shifts in the composition of the image create a new interpretation of the subject.



Fig 66. Stone, A. 2020. *Photome state 2*. [Oil on canvas]. 39cm x 54cm.

A further reading of the Centre would be that ‘supermodernity’ (Augé, 2008, p.36) had overwritten anthropological place, eradicating, without trace, any sense of the land’s earlier history. The site’s construction supplanted an area, known for clothing manufacturing, erasing the workshops of skilled communities of tailors which had emerged through the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialisation of Leeds. This history was replaced with a modern retail centre, arguably creating a place “surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporal and the ephemeral” (Augé, M. 2008, p.63). In many respects, this development foreshadowed a deeper cultural shift which took place in the UK from the 1970s onwards, with a move away from manufacturing towards goods and services.

The Centre continues to evolve from its original design with the concrete façade now almost entirely encased in more modern materials, and its interior décor and structure under continuous cycles of refurbishment. This continued reinvention of the site reflects the Centre as a complexity of interacting elements, an assemblage of

“components working to stabilise its identity as well as components forcing it to change or even transforming it into a different assemblage” (DeLana, cited in Cresswell, 2015, p.54). These components include the cultural and material elements from which the Centre is constituted: the land, memories and materials which continue to push and pull on its identity.

The site’s apparent contradictions as both place and non-place leaves its identity open to interpretation. What can be gleaned from this discourse is that these definitions of the Centre remain contingent and might be applied to different parts of the site at different times in its history. These perspectives on place have a common understanding for the close connection between people and the places they inhabit. This is developed further by Dylan Trigg, who applies a phenomenological lens to the traditional hegemonies of place, proposing an intricate relational bond between place, presence and memory. Through this discourse, Trigg seeks to bridge the Kantian position of place as an objective reality and place as a “socially constructed realm of materiality and intersubjectivity” (Trigg, 2012, p. xviii). Trigg sees the concept of non-place as both an arbitrary and subjective term which ignores the heterogeneous qualities of place. The concern here is that a place/ placelessness binary is misleading as qualitative differences emerge when thinking holistically about placeness. This either /or scenario becomes a blunt tool for meaningful analysis of the nuances involved. It leads to the portrayal of place as a unique, characterful, memorable and qualitative experience, whilst non-place is then perceived as a desolate, detached, and replaceable space. Trigg’s analysis foregrounds a reciprocal relationship to place, recognising the textural, temporal and liminal nature of any given site. In this way, place is never entirely fixed due to the contingent and relational factors of those that inhabit it. This reciprocity between people and place will be revisited later in chapter four in relation to onsite research. Such contrasting perspectives make it difficult to define the Merrion Centre, suggesting that it is best viewed as being a fluid, intermediate and transitory environment. The following section expands upon these broader theoretical notions of place, to consider the site in terms of its everydayness as a modern, regional shopping centre.

### **Mall Dreams**

In the last thirty years a great deal has been written regarding the cultural role of shopping and the phenomenon of the shopping mall, in part due to cross-disciplinary interest in postmodern consumerist culture, encompassing notions of identity, consumption, materialism and market forces. This growth of literature can be found across a range of disciplines including sociology, (Faulk and Campbell, 1997), anthropology (Appadurai, 1986 and Miller, 1995), human geography, (Goss 1993; Jackson and Thrift, 1995; Sack, 1992, Zukin,1991), psychology (Csikszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton ,1987; Dittmar 1992) and cultural studies (Morris, 1988; Shields, 1991, 1992). The scale of the subject, and the specificity of this study, leave much of this research outside the scope of this thesis. However, as the Merrion Centre is predominantly perceived as a retail site and this study is mostly focussed towards the retail areas of the Centre, it is relevant to review a selection of contemporary and historical perspectives underpinning this field, to better understand the site's hidden social and cultural narratives which underlie the paintings.

The modern concept of the retail centre can be traced back to late 18<sup>th</sup> century London with the development of the department store. This initial blossoming of modern retail involved a simple yet innovative separation of a large shop into zones, with each area selling specialist items. Later iterations of the department store were built with the intention of overwhelming the visitor with their immense scale and diversity of commodities. They also sought to bring the consumer closer to the merchandise by encouraging browsing with no obligation to buy (Ferguson,1992, p.29). To a degree such stores induced sensory overload, where customers were swept along in a phantasmagoria, an almost dream-like state, by an over-abundance of desirable commodities they might own.

By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Parisian arcades had surpassed these early innovations in both scale and grandeur, described at the time as “interior boulevards ...glass covered, marble-walled walkways through entire blocks of buildings... a city, a world in miniature” (Buck-Morss, 1990, p.3). In 1927 the philosopher and cultural critic, Walter Benjamin, began the Arcades Project. For Benjamin, the arcades were “ur-phenomena”, a kaleidoscope of images and forms representative of a modern

cultural shift towards mass consumerism which fetishised the commodity and provided a spectacle of modernity from which deeper social, cultural and political agendas might be exposed. Benjamin describes the arcades as a collective dream world in which consumers are immersed in a phantasmagoria of commodities. The arcade becomes a netherworld in which fantasy and reality are interchangeable. This was, perhaps, the origins of what was to be recognised as the aestheticisation of everyday life, describing a culture which has commodified everything including the consumer. Such spaces are now regarded as the precursor to the post-war malls and regional shopping centres prevalent today.

### **The Everyday Pleasures of Consumption**

To understand the Merrion Centre is to recognise its central role as a site of consumption. Operating as a hub to a global network of production, it is also a stage upon which a multitude of social and commodity exchanges may occur. Such sites are privately owned yet appear as public spaces in which people might socialise, mimicking older sites of exchange such as market-places. The shopping centre acts as a place for coming together, for meeting and communicating, creating what Lefebvre terms a 'social centrality' (1975). This perception of the retail centre as a social and community space is recognised as important to commercial success and site authorities are unsurprisingly keen to foster this reading through the development of seasonal community events and anniversary celebrations.

A key aspect of the postmodern hyper-reality of the shopping experience is the spectacle of mass consumption, establishing what Scrivener describes as a liminal site in which the "lines between leisure, fantasy and the commodity become blurred" (Scrivener, 2003, p.155). Lauren Langman, in 'Neon Cages, Shopping for Subjectivity', (Shields, 1992) explores some of the psychological mechanisms at the heart of shopping activities, describing an inherent deficiency or want on the part of the consumer, which she argues originates from Freudian notions of sublimated erotic drives appropriated through a consumption-based society seeking affirmation of selfhood. Langman claims that such sites of consumption act purposefully to "deny any genuine individuality or any kind of critical consciousness" (Langman cited in Shields, 1992, p. 44), a point challenged by Scrivener (Elephant, 1995), who doubts that shoppers lose criticality and unwittingly become entirely absorbed within a fantasy.

### **The Spectacle of the Everyday**

Being an earlier generation of shopping centre design, the Merrion Centre is not quite one of Langham's cathedrals of consumer culture, it is however a prototype for what would follow. In comparison to other larger modern centres, it lacks some of the more nuanced, immersive strategies employed in sites such as Sheffield's Meadowhall or Gateshead Metrocentre, where areas are zoned and themed with carefully controlled temperature and lighting. These spaces are often enclosed, inward facing, indoor worlds, ignoring what lies beyond their boundaries. In contrast, the Merrion Centre, as an older site of consumption, was designed primarily for functionality and retail efficiency. Its layout with a main avenue and central square appears more high-street than theme park in design, with multiple entrances and retail units which face outwards onto adjacent streets, integrating with surrounding city shops. This connection with its surroundings is perhaps partly a legacy from the centre's earlier construction when it appeared to be more like a town centre high street, as seen in the photograph below (fig. 67). This openness to the elements proved problematic with the angular buildings surrounding the pedestrian precinct creating a wind tunnel effect which eventually led to a roof being installed and, through later renovations, a Victorian-style glass atrium. The archive image below shows the Centre prior to the roof and includes the infamous, outdoor escalator, which was one of the first of its type in the country. When visitors were reported falling off, this new innovation was slowed down and eventually removed, although a Centre employee suggested that a part of it still remains under the new paving.





Fig 67. Town Centre Securities (TCS). c1964. *Escalator at the Merrion Centre.*[Photograph]. At TCS archive

Through decades of restructuring, the retail area of the Centre now more closely evokes Benjamin's Parisian arcades rather than a high street with an enclosed glass atrium which engulfs consumers as they enter. The central pedestrian walkway which traverses the site has shop units on either side, each with floor to ceiling windows which allows the consumer, standing on the central thoroughfare, to survey the commodities on display, reminiscent of Bentham's panoptic prison design which required open plan spaces with a central observation post.

Besides the shopping precinct, the Merrion Centre contains many other sites of activity within its boundaries. One of its main innovations as a development was to combine previously segregated, social activities such as leisure, work and consumption. This Post-Modern synthesis of different, spatial practices within the mall environment created new spatial and cultural forms (Shields, 1992; Chaney, 1991; Simmel, 1950) which foreground consumption as a spectacle or "theatre of everyday life" (Shields, 1992, p.7). The mix of differentiated, spatial activities causes a tension between the controlled rationality of economic activity and the more arbitrary and contingent nature of leisure spaces which Shield, referencing the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, compares to the carnival. In the case of the Merrion Centre, the blurring of the boundaries between these different uses of space occurs daily, for example, when office workers cut through the site mixing with consumers and those heading into the Centre's leisure spaces.

The sense of the carnival or the theatrical is most notable at Easter and Christmas when the Centre transforms into themed grottos. The painting 'Sweet' (fig 68) presents a subtle example of the carnivalesque by crossing the boundary between the real and fantasy, leisure and consumption, presenting a miniature sweet truck designed to entice children to draw closer.



Fig 68. Stone. A. 2016. *Sweet*. [Oil on canvas].120cm x 150cm.

In the painting 'Sweet', the stark lighting of the Centre, creates a reflective water-like shimmer on the floor and creates an intricate series of shadows by the seating in the foreground. The surface of the painting is a mixture of thickly and thinly applied layers of paint, with some earlier passages of colour still visible. The floor lacks solidity and in areas becomes almost liquid, as though flowing, only given substance through the shadows cast by the seating and the van. To the side of the van are a range of undefined colourful shapes, shop merchandise which glisten like jewels in the darkened store. The painting draws the viewer's attention to these inanimate things, making them the focus of the narrative. The scene has a theatrical quality, as though we are entering at a momentary pause in the play, before the cast returns to the stage.

In a similarly theatrical way, the interactive light sculpture ‘Dazzling Dodecahedron’ by Amber lights (fig 69 & 70) which was located in the Centre during Leeds Light Night, 2018, offered an immersive, kaleidoscopic experience to consumers through a visual restructuring of the everyday environment of the Centre. It magnified an existing tension between audience, participant and commodity in which all are simultaneously both seen and seer. Stepping up into the structure thrusts the visitor on to a stage. Caught within this multi-coloured glass structure and surrounded by psychedelic colours, the participant experiences an altered perception reminiscent of a dream state, whilst from the outside they appear above the crowd as an attraction, becoming commodified as an object to be seen.

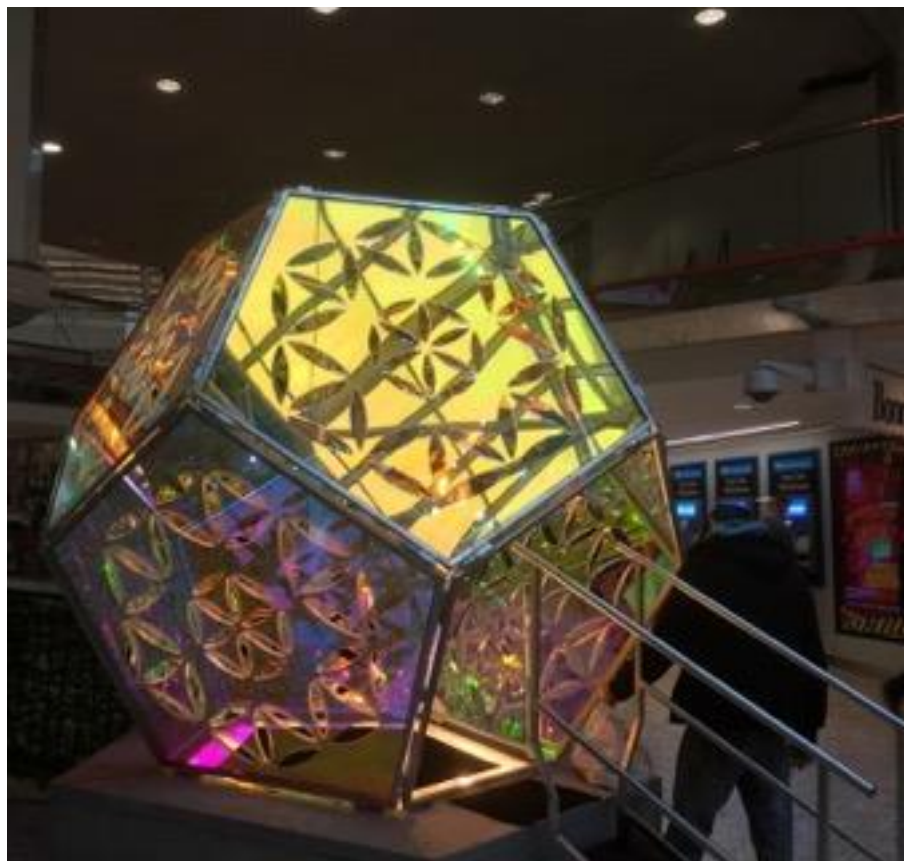


Fig 69. Stone, A. 2018. *Dazzling Dodecahedron* by Amberlights. [Photograph]



Fig 70. Stone, A. 2018. *Dazzling Dodecahedron by Amberlights*. [Photograph]

This review of the Centre's ideological heritage suggests that the site should be understood as much more than a place to shop, that it contains complex cultural, ideological and political narratives that are so subtly embedded into our everyday experiences that we become oblivious to them. These narrative roots reveal a rich and complex network of ideas and understandings of such places which continues to change as society's patterns of consumption and cultural exchange evolve.

This developing understanding of the site as a contested ground which defies a singular definition as either anthropological place or non-place, has helped inform the making of the paintings by providing new perspectives on the Centre. These ideas regarding the meaning and making of place and its varied social, political, economic and historic qualities sparked a deeper curiosity about how such an ambiguous site might be re/presented through painting. Chapter five will think through this relationship between these concepts of place and the Centre as a real place, examining how painting practices used in this study might represent the quotidian experience of the Centre. Prior to that, chapter four will further explore the Merrion Centre's more unique articulations of place, reviewing examples of uncanny places which became the subject for a number of the paintings in this study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This Chapter has reviewed the history of the Centre, highlighting how at the time of its construction, it was seen as both a new and innovative type of shopping experience and a commercial folly. It was discovered that the Centre's design followed a template pioneered by the American architect Victor Gruen, which blended consumption, work and leisure to create what Lefebvre termed a 'social centrality', by bringing communities together. Recognising this, it then pressed the case for the Centre as much more than a site of consumption, acknowledging its social and cultural significance through the earlier communities which it superseded and the remembering's of those that have visited the Centre. These traces of layered history suggest the Centre as 'anthropological place' (Augé) in which community memories still dwell. Building this argument for the Centre as a thick and textured place, it looked at the varied qualities of the site with reference to paintings from the study, triangulating this research with contemporary theories on place. Key observations coming from this research include the Centre's varied qualities of place in which the hyperreal blends with the anthropological, the uncanny and the heterotopian. The paintings, examined in this chapter interrogated their subjects in correspondence with these ideas, using the medium, the processes of application, colour palette and composition to investigate these places further.

## Chapter 4: Onsite



Fig 71. *Merrion Hotel entrance*, Merrion Centre, 2018. [Photography].



Fig 72. *Merrion Hotel Reception*, Merrion Centre, 2018. [Photography].



Fig 73. *Merrion Hotel Lobby*, Merrion Centre, 2018. [Photography].



Fig 74. *Merrion Hotel Kitchens*, Merrion Centre, 2018. [Photography].



Figure 75. *Merrion Hotel Kitchens study*, Merrion Centre, 2018. [Charcoal on paper].



Fig 76. *Merrion Hotel Kitchens*, Merrion Centre, 2018. [Photography].





Figure 77. *Odeon Cinema, Merrion Centre.* [Photograph]



Fig 78. *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire.* [Film Still]



Fig 79. *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. [Film Still]



Fig 80. *Odeon Cinema, Merrion Centre*. [Photograph]



Fig 81. Odeon Cinema, Merrion Centre. [Photograph]



Fig 82. *Get Carter* [film still]



Fig 83. *Lighting*, Merrion Centre, 2016. [Photograph].



Fig 84. *'Looking up study'*, 2016 [Charcoal on paper]

## **Introduction**

Fieldworks is a richly resonant term. It recalls traditions and techniques of open-air research and teaching, field studies, field trips, field trials, field walking and field notes, which some contributors reference in practices of observation and mapping, and develop in imaginative ways, for example to record sound and movement (Daniels et al, 2010, p.2).

Having reviewed some of the key discourses within place studies which identify the Merrion Centre as an ambiguous and multi-textured site, this chapter will now examine the study's fieldwork activities of walking and photography, which were used in collaboration with studio practices, to create the paintings. In addition to reviewing these activities, it will also consider how film memory and personal memories of the Centre have interacted to inform the research. Finally, in relation to these subjective understandings of the Centre, there will be an examination of specific areas experienced within the site which contained unusual spatial qualities and identified as "architecturally uncanny" (Vidler, 1992, p3), a term which Vidler uses to describe architectural structures which produce a sense of "estrangement, alienation, exile and homelessness" (Vidler, 1992, p.ix).

### **Walking and Loitering**

As the cultural geographer Stephen Daniels suggests, fieldwork approaches can offer rich and varied experiences. The onsite research activities for this study began by taking walks around the complex at different times of the day and night, to reacquaint myself with its topography and visually experience how the Centre had changed in terms of the layout, décor and retailers. Through these forays I noted that the original plan of the Centre had remained very much the same, however the décor and retailers had changed considerably. The walks also offered a kinaesthetic encounter with place providing an intimate and felt experience, which captured the textures, sensations and sounds (Lippard, 1997), that would be unattainable through surveying a plan or photograph of the Centre. To know a place requires a degree of familiarity (Yi-Fu Tuan, 2007), subjects can be identified through a gradual process of time spent 'in place', discovering hidden or obscured narratives and experiencing differing textural qualities of space. For these reasons, it felt important to re-familiarise myself with the Centre, to acknowledge that this was no longer the place

of my childhood memories due to the many alterations which had been carried out over the years. Whilst visits prior to this study were driven by necessity, with movement across the site motivated by need, these research visits were less determined and were guided by a curiosity to reveal a different perspective, recording events spontaneously with a camera. This approach meant becoming both an insider and outsider, stepping outside of the role of consumer, whilst remaining sensitive and close to events on the ground through personal experience, conducting a reflective examination of the culture from within, as a ‘participant observer’. Participant observation is an ethnographic method in which the researcher closely participates in the culture under investigation for a limited time after which the observer returns home to analyse the data in accordance with current ethnographic theory. The artist and anthropologist Susan Hiller expressed her unease with such an approach which she suggested distanced the observer from the subject by prioritising the objective over the subjective. In this approach, Hiller identified an:

ideological split, that creates a hierarchy which locates embodied knowledge and the contradictions of lived experience “below” the abstractions of overarching theory (Hiller cited in Bell, 2019).

Being mindful of this issue, my activities in the Centre responded more to the subjective and phenomenological encounter of place, using the experience and collected images to aid the production of paintings in terms of form and colour relationships. These approaches involved continuous perceptual adjustments in which my engagement with place moved between the architectural and material, to the sensory, and the observation of varied social exchanges and interactions of people, things and place found within the Centre. This shift in perception has parallels with Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein or being in the world, a term Heidegger uses to ground the body in a place, emphasising an entwined relationship between ourselves and our environment. Heidegger distinguished two states of Dasein: one, attentive to the everyday concerns of living, the other offering new possibilities of revealing through a detachment from the everyday and an openness to ‘what is’. To achieve such openness requires the suspension of socially and culturally structured activities, escaping what Barbara Bolt describes as the “matrix of possibilities and limitations that set standards for how we move in the world” (2011, p29), allowing an authentic experience situated outside of the everyday.



Fig 85. Stone, A. 2020. *Caution*. [Oil on canvas].88cm x 107cm.



Fig 86. Stone, A.2017. *Threshold*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



Fig 87. Stone, A.2017. *Reflection*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre



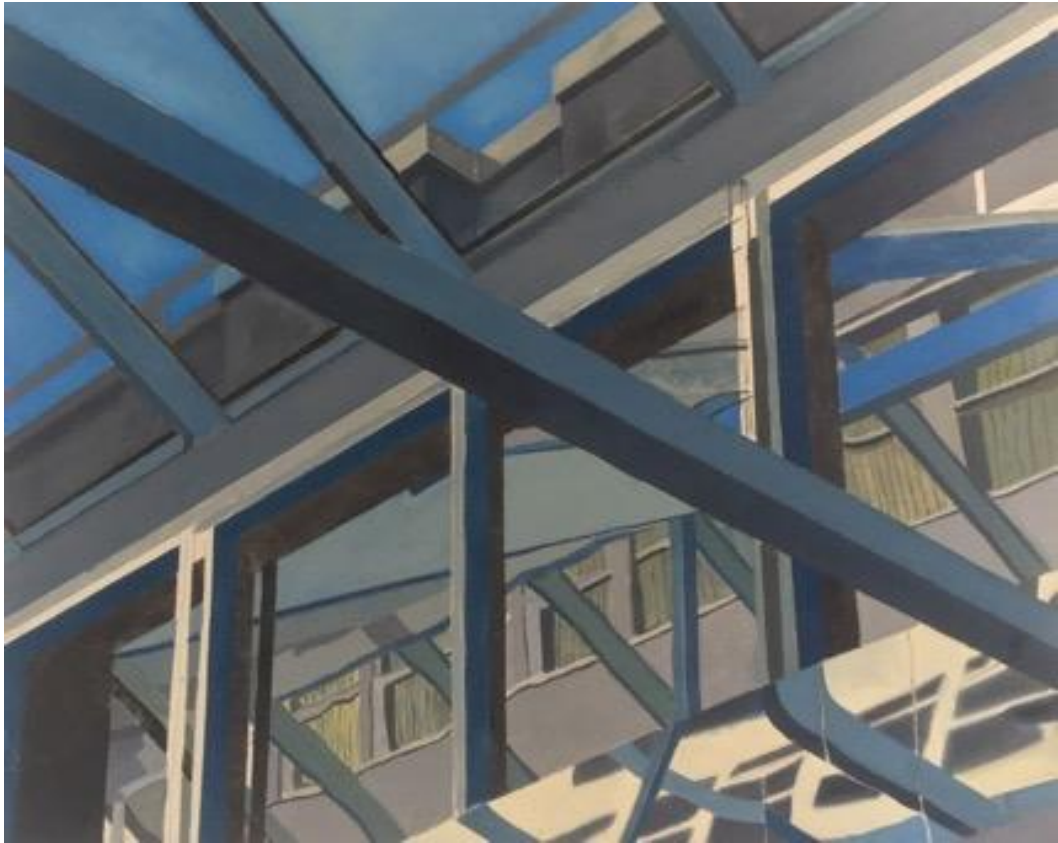


Fig 88. Stone, A. 2020. *Looking up*. [Oil on canvas]. 88cm x 107cm

To enable such new perspectives of place through these walks around the Centre, I chose to employ Psychogeographic tactics of the *derive*, a playful walking strategy in which, “chance encounters and uncanny resonances could disrupt dominant ways of seeing and potentially reveal the marvellous buried within the everyday” (Richardson cited in Pinder, D. 2005, p.4). These were unplanned drifts through the site which provoked unexpected encounters, photographing subjects which unintentionally captured an absent human presence, building up an archive of images which will be discussed further in the following chapter in relation to paintings developed in the studio. The paintings and photographs above (figs 85-88) are examples of some of these chance encounters which, at the time, felt intuitively important moments of the experience. In the painting ‘Caution’ (fig 85), the yellow slip hazard cone seemed particularly significant as a sign designating a position at which something had happened, perhaps an accidental collision causing a spill. Whatever the reason, the consequence was the appearance of this bright yellow warning cone placed by someone as a sign of potential risk but also readable as an index of this past incident. In this sense, the cone also evokes an absent presence, analogous to the artist’s gesture found within a painting. Such represented moments

invited questions which will be addressed further in chapter five, regarding photography and painting as an index of real-world events.

### **Other Spaces**

The exit door in the photograph 'Threshold' (fig 86) was also a signifier of human presence, as well as a place of transit and a threshold to an entirely other space. However, it was primarily the tension which certain images can create between the painted surface and the illusory space of representation which suggested it as a subject. The door presented a flat geometric structure just beyond the picture plane but then reveals a deeper perspective through the semi-transparent glass panels, creating a spatial contradiction which both stops and encourages a spatial reading. The reflections caught in the window, in the photograph 'Reflection' (fig 87), present a similarly ambiguous space but this time there is an interior depth through the glimpsed space behind the window blind and an exterior space reflected from outside of the picture frame, which is suggested by the reflection of two shadowy figures leaning over a balcony. These figures are barely discernible amongst the other background tones yet perception allows us to correctly interpret these vague forms as human. The painting 'Looking up' (fig 88) builds upon this idea of reflection and looking through by focusing on the complex architecture of the Centre's atrium. Unlike 'Reflection', where the eye is held on the surface of the glass, in 'Looking up' there is a line of sight to an infinite horizon beyond the structure. The view is then interrupted by both the actual and reflected diagonals of the atrium's framework, which behave as barriers or hurdles to visually navigate. This compositional awkwardness is furthered by the reflective surfaces which clad the structure and stop the gaze moving forwards, instead presenting a space exterior to the framing of the image. This pictorial device acts to immerse the viewer by projecting the image back into the real space of the spectator, suggesting a space beyond the frame which enfolds the viewer. By encouraging this closer relationship with the viewer, the painting seeks to disorientate and confuse, as was felt through the original onsite experience.

During these fieldtrips, snapshot digital photographs responded directly to personal experience. This spontaneous and open approach led to the documentation of materials and textures found in and around the building and observations on the

varied qualities of reflection found in the glass, metal and ceramic surfaces of the Centre. This photographic documentation varied between the macro and the micro, capturing panoramic views across the city, while also being alert to the traces of human activity found in scuff marks on walls and floors. In combination with the researching of maps of the site prior to the development, these journeys revealed a trace of what was once Rockingham Street which originally cut through the land from east to west across what is now the main concourse of the Centre. At one time, as discussed earlier, there was a small bus depot located on this street, all that remains of this road now is an entrance walkway between Morrisons and Costa Coffee and a previously mentioned hidden kerbstone. Further investigations uncovered other examples of a submerged past with online research through the website 'Secret Leeds', unearthing archived photographs of the old entrance to the cinema, veiled by a bank of cash machines beside Home Bargains. Another example of this overlaying of place is the previously mentioned moving walkway which, is now allegedly covered over with a ramp. These observations concur with De Certeau's view that places are like palimpsests, layered with past presence and accumulated stories. As will be discussed in Chapter five in relation to archive photographs, these traces reveal a temporal perspective which shows how our present environment is mediated through the ghosts of past place.

### **Subversive Behaviour**

Despite having permission to photograph within the building by Town Centre Securities, the act of drifting across the site, taking photographs, still felt uncomfortable and somehow subversive. The concern was two-fold: firstly, although the Merrion Centre is a private space, such spaces are often perceived by those that use them as public arenas and so it was important to be both mindful of people's right to privacy and seek permission to photograph from the site's owner. The second concern regarding these movements across the site was a personal discomfort for what might be termed 'subversive behaviour'. Although only a minor and harmless intervention into place, there was a sense of being there under a false pretence. I was no longer using the site for its intended purpose or following the usual paths of movement around the space. Instead, by playfully and aimless wandering around the site, I was working against the Centre's spatial conventions,

trying to sidestep customary routine with the aim of catching off guard the everyday within the Centre. Such strategies of *dérive* and *detournement* can be viewed as a tactical subversion from within the urban system, achieved through transgressive movements across space (De Certeau, 1984). Through this practice, new paths and spatial connections can be created, subtly disrupting the structures of control created by urban planners. The unrelenting stare of the many surveillance cameras were a cause for further anxiety, creating a heightened feeling of being continuously under scrutiny. Morag Rose of the Loiterers Resistance Movement (LRM) argues such technologies produce the modern equivalent of Bentham's panoptic surveillance system. In response to this pervasive observation, Rose proposed a tactic of *Sousveillance* in which the watched watches the watcher, subverting the gaze by turning the lens in on itself and photographically documenting these subtle forms of social control. Such subversive behaviour echoes my own forays onto site which transgress expected behaviours to gain alternative perspectives on the rhythms, flows and movements which unfold within the Centre, towards new interpretations of locality.

### **Body and Place**

As well as being a strategy for subversion, the activity of walking is also a direct form of sensory engagement with the world. By walking around the Centre, a complex and multi-layered understanding of the environment through all the senses is actively gathered, rapidly assembling a coherent view of the world with each step. Such activity initiates a knowing familiarity, helping to locate oneself within the world "through the porous retention of our bodies" (Trigg, 2012, p.11). This embodied knowledge of our environment suggests a bond between body and place which contradicts the Cartesian mind-body dualism. In contrast, contemporary understandings of our place in the world envisage a much more entangled and intra-active relationship with our environment, world view in which humans are one of many actors within a complex and fluid network of things, enmeshed in a continually emergent environment (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Ingold, 2000). This connectivity to the places we inhabit is also noted by Casey who proposes an 'outgoing' and 'incoming' relationship with the places we pass through, whereby the body reaches out and connects spatially with the world in terms of its up/down, front/back, right/leftness, whilst the body and identity are in turn, shaped by the

environment. For the artist in the field, and within the studio, these concepts seem significant, suggesting that our connection to the environment is more than optical and cognitive, that place is to some degree defined through our engagement with it. This notion of embodied reciprocity with the world is famously examined through the paintings and practice of the artist Cezanne by the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who suggests that:

The painter's vision is not a view from the outside, a merely physical-optical relation with the world. The world no longer stands before him through representation; rather it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible (Merleau-Ponty cited in Crowther, 2013, p.90).

Merleau-Ponty points to an inseparable bond between the painter and the world in which each defines the other. This reversible interaction between artist and place is more than a visual connection, it would seem to be a deep-rooted, embodied relationship achieved through 'being in' and responding directly to place through lived experience. Pursuing this idea further, it is arguable that my own field work strategies, employing observational, documentary and experiential practices, such as photography and walking, can glean understanding from the experience and reterritorialize this through onto the canvas.

An example of this type of experiential understanding is evident in the work of the contemporary painter Simon Ling who highlights embodiment as an intrinsic aspect of his painting practice. Switching between the studio and en plein air, Ling combines sensory data gathered by being in place, with memory and photography, a process which activates his work, creating what he describes as "this alive, but slightly shifted, version of the world that has me both in it and looking at it" (Grant and Wroe, 2013). The subjects Ling observes are everyday urban landscapes of ordinary places, painted as though seen for the first time, (fig 89). There is an awkwardness in Ling's paintings, something feels awry with these compressed architectural forms with their skewed perspectives and tilted surfaces. The buildings appear to be bulging and straining to hold together, barely able to stand. A bright orange underpainting bleeds through the gaps between the architectural surfaces creating "a tear or rupture in the screen of the image" (Clarke, cited in, Wilson, 2013, p.46). Here Clarke is referencing Lacan's lecture 'Of the gaze as object petit

a', which describes the real beneath the surface of the world in which Lacan uses the term image-screen to explain the surface upon which the real is projected and becomes masked. The work reflects back on the viewer, questioning our faith in perception. Ling notes how "Perception is an act of creativity in which thought and action combine" (Grant, 2013, p.58). Echoing Merleau-Ponty, he is expressing the emergence of the visible, suggesting "We are not merely sensing light and its interactions with matter – our eyes are in a creative relationship with reality" (Ling, 2013, p.43).



Fig 89. Ling, S. 2012. *Untitled*. [Oil on canvas].

In contrast to Ling's practice, paintings made during this investigation were not worked on directly from the subject. Instead, the paintings were informed by photographs taken whilst walking around the Merrion Centre and images found in the Centre's archive. Painting from the fieldwork photographs captured details that would have been missed in the direct experience. This way of working allowed for close observation of small areas of these photographs, each highlighting an area of incident which would have otherwise been overlooked. In 'Reflect' (fig 90) a small section of a large mirrored wall located high above the entrance to Morrisons is examined. In this image, the glass-roofed atrium of the Centre is reflected on its mirrored surface, creating spatial ambiguity in relation to the diagonal structures

which hold the mirrors in place. In common with Ling, this piece seeks to prompt questions regarding perception by presenting a perspective which appears difficult and awkward to understand. The painting 'Reception' (fig 91) uses a similar approach, however the perspective is less severe with a more straightforward orientation. Here the reflection is more obvious, with a shop sign that clearly designates the window surface. However, the interpretation is left open regarding which parts of the image are reflection and which objects are seen directly through the glass. In 'Walk' (fig 92), there is a more severe dislocation of the picture plane which occurs through the overlapping of two moments in time. The shifting light which overlays the figures becomes a barrier to understanding the scene. This playfulness with surface, ground and spatial relationships was to become a recurring motif within many of the paintings in the study, alluding to the fluid nature of the Centre and the challenges of directly observing the everyday.



Fig 90. Stone, A. 2016. *Reflect.* [Oil on board]. 21cm x 30cm,



Fig 91. Stone, A. 2016. *Reception*. [Oil on board]. 21cm x 25cm



Fig 92. Stone, A. 2015. *Walk*. [Oil on canvas]. 120cm x 150cm



### **Familiar Unfamiliar**

In relation to notions of reciprocity between ourselves and our environment, the following section will examine how personal recollections of the Centre interwove with film and memory to affect the paintings. As noted earlier, I had many fragmented memories of visiting the site through my childhood and as a teenager, passing through the Centre to shop at Woolworths, eat at the Scanda Grill and watch the latest release at the Odeon Merrion Cinema. Walking the site releases some of these old memories, prompting a strange sense of being caught between the past and the present. This feeling of being in both the past and the present can be disorientating creating an uncanny sense of temporal dislocation. Trigg suggests, that when we revisit familiar places, we become “partly dispersed in time, and yet partly absorbed in place, but never actually here” (Trigg, 2012, p. xiii). This sensation is explored in paintings like ‘Late shift’ (fig 93) which shows the steps, located in the main area of the shopping precinct, leading up to the second floor where in the 1980s, there was an entrance to a night club. Walking up these steps reawakened memories of visiting the club, which the painting sought to blend with more recent experiences.

In the painting, the brightness of the club lights reflects off the chrome and glass balustrade, contrasting with the quiet darkness of the surrounding shops to draw the viewers eye up towards the light. The surface of the painting is congealed and pitted around the stair well, which creates a hazy, atmospheric quality that appears to originate from the floor above. The thickly textured surface also serves to rupture the image surface, stopping the eye from moving further into the space. The painting attempts to capture something of the temporally disorientating sensation which occurred in revisiting the site, fusing different eras in the Centre’s history to create a hybrid image which presents the site as an evolving, personal experience of shifting identity.



Fig 93. Stone, A. 2016. Late Shift. [Oil on canvas]. 30cm x 46cm.

Trigg's concept describes a common experience for anyone who has left a familiar neighbourhood or a family home, to return several years later and discover it has radically changed, yet to some degree, still retains the traces of that past we remember. If as proposed in chapter two, our identity is partially formed through our experiences of the places we inhabit, then this sudden revision of our memories places the returning visitor in a strange, atemporal and uncanny landscape between the past and present. This disconcerting, partial recognition of place is evident in sites like the Merrion Centre which retain their original layout but alter over time as retailers change and the internal cladding is modernised. The following photographs (figs 94-96) sourced from the Facebook group 'Old photographs of Leeds' show the same area of the Centre, as depicted in the painting 'Late Shift'. They highlight the contrasting qualities of the site as both a place of transition yet also structurally relatively stable.



Fig 94. Facebook Group: Old Photographs of Leeds, Merrion Shopping Centre



Fig 95. Facebook Group: Old Photographs of Leeds, Merrion Shopping Centre



Fig 96. Facebook Group: Old Photographs of Leeds, Merrion Shopping Centre

These photographs visually track the Centre's alterations through the decades, showing how lighting and transparency become significant characteristics of the site, qualities enhanced by the extensive use of mirrors and glass. They also mark the transition of the Centre from its original austere concrete aesthetic to a sleek, open plan, marbled boulevard. The area seems transformed with a vaulted atrium allowing natural light to flood into the space and cast intricate shadows on the floor. The elevated, glazed gallery evokes a "sacred-liturgical or secular civic function" (McDowell, 1997, p.270) which has now become a common feature in many suburban retail sites. The trailing shrubbery and natural daylight combine to suggest a soft natural environment, perhaps alluding to "the model garden city, the courts of Babylon and most especially the tropical vacation setting" (McDowell, 1997, p.270). Such 'landscapes of the temporary' (Jackson, cited in Farrar, 2011, p.725) are viewed as transitional and unstable places, often found within the urban sprawl; their transient nature makes it difficult for personal and community memory to adhere. Contrary to this, it is interesting to note how iconic and much loved the Merrion Centre has become. Discussions with Centre employees often revealed the public and staff's great affection for the place, with many stories of customers using the Centre habitually since its opening. Changes to the Centre often provoke feedback from the community and, on occasion, petitions arise to try and stop planned

development. If, as Casey argues, it is “the stabilising persistence of place ... that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability” (Farrar, 2011, p.724) then perhaps these protests are the outcome of a community striving to hold onto their memories. Certainly, it seems that many people are passionate about the Merrion Centre’s history and want to be involved in its future, something which is understood by the Centre management who recognise the delicate balance to be maintained between future development and community memory.

Although the Centre has altered radically, my childhood memories remain resilient to these changes, and it is still possible to visualise many parts of the site from those earlier trips in the 1970s, especially those to the cinema with its distinctive lobby and Modernist lighting. As a child, impatiently waiting in the cinema queue on those innumerable visits to what was a fantasy world, the sights and sounds of the cinema became imprinted into my memory. If, as Jackson contends, temporary landscapes are too fluid to hold memories then perhaps it was these repeated returns to the cinema at an impressionable age which helped make those memories stick. Visiting the cinema, which had closed in 1977, I found the interior lobby area barely recognisable (fig 97) with just a few elements of the original fittings and signs still visible. However, the wide stairway up to the screen (fig 98) was largely intact, including the original wall paint.

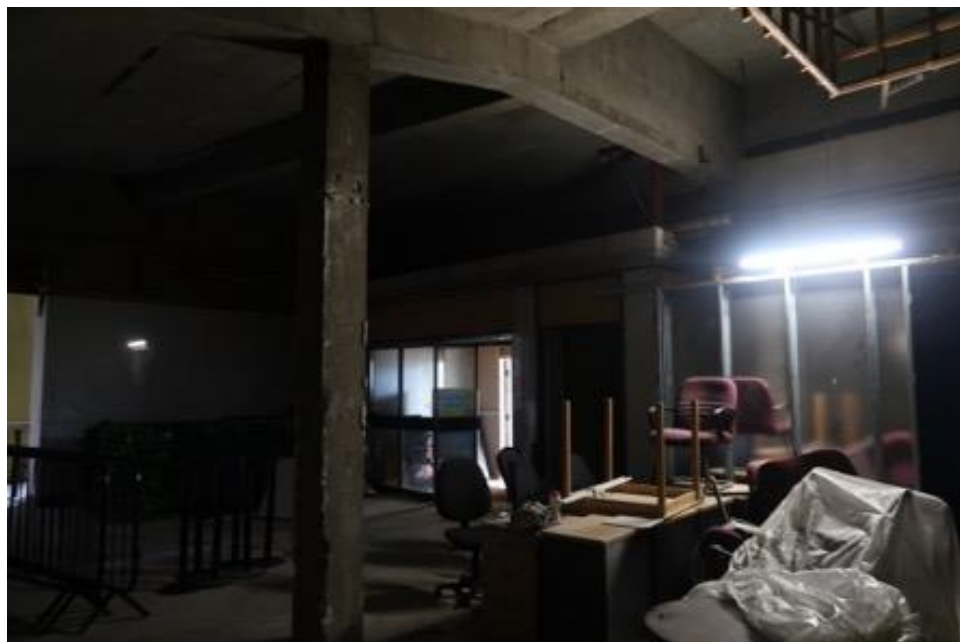


Fig 97. Stone, A. 2019. *Merrion Odeon Cinema foyer*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre, Leeds



Fig 98. Stone, A. 2019. *Merrion Odeon Cinema Auditorium Steps*. [Photograph]. Merrion Centre, Leeds.

Walking up the stairway I was immediately struck by a familiar smell which took me back to those earlier childhood visits. This seemed an involuntary memory of a type written about by Benjamin and described by Trigg as an “unexpected confrontations with sounds, ‘atmospheres’, and particularly smell” (Trigg, 2004, p.837). Such memory is largely a nonvisual, sensory experience and powerful sensory encounters have the power to reawaken the past in the present, producing a moment in which two timeframes overlap with neither dominating. This latent memory triggered, I continued up the stairway fully expecting to see the cinema in its earlier glory; sadly, the auditorium had been dismantled, revealing the underlying skeletal structure of the space. Despite its deconstruction, the room retained traces of its history, such as the porthole windows from the projection booth and the large stage at the front of the room, which were still in place. I had been asked not to take photographs of the auditorium, the reason being that there were preservation groups so passionate about the cinema that seeing it in its current state might lead to petitions. It was surprising to hear that such strong, intergenerational memories and feelings could persist for a place that had closed down over forty-five years ago, but

it was clear from researching posts on various Leeds forums that there were, indeed, still many who remembered.



Fig 99. Stone, A. 2020. *Stairwell, Merrion Odeon Cinema*. [Oil on canvas].88cm x 107cm. unfinished

The painting ‘Stairwell’ (fig 99) represents the most preserved part of the cinema which was a narrow stairway leading up to the projection room. Despite some areas of decay, it still retained the original paintwork and the odd piece of now redundant signage. The area abounds with memories, including traces of those that worked here, visible on the fixtures through scuff marks and foot prints, whilst decaying paintwork reveals layers of earlier histories. The painting attempts to convey the haunting atmosphere of this neglected fringe of the Centre which stubbornly clings on to the vestiges of its previous life.

Despite its many refurbishments, the Centre has maintained its original footprint, however there are currently planning applications in progress to radically alter some areas of the site, including the cinema. The news of this development is in the public domain and there is already a sense of gathering protest from the wider community for the imminent loss of the hidden cinema. This apparently binding connection with

individual and community memory and place is an important area for investigation in this study and will be examined further in chapter six through an investigation into lieux de mémoire.

### The Cinematic Uncanny



Fig 100. Stone, A. 2016. *The Flâneur*, [Oil on canvas]. 45cm x 60cm.

The painting ‘The Flâneur’, 2016 (fig 100) references the Baudelairian loiterer, wandering aimlessly through the Centre. It has the snapshot quality of a photograph taken without great care or attention for composition. The image could be read as a view through the Flâneur’s eyes, presenting a careless glance, surveying the surroundings. In the image, there are four figures whose identities are purposefully ambiguous, possibly mannequins in a shop window. The paint is loosely applied with a strong light/ dark colour contrast used to illustrate the harsh light of the Centre. The light bleaches out facial details, the faces appear almost mask like and one of them stares directly out of the painting confronting the viewer. The figures inhabit a liminal space appearing simultaneously inside and outside the shop, with a translucent quality suggestive of a reflection or a projection. Their surroundings are



a loose matrix of verticals and horizontal structures suggesting shop interiors with a sign, partially visible, glowing above their heads. The structures are both behind and in front them, giving the figures a spectral quality which suggest they are not entirely present.

In an alternative reading, the image could be the view through a mannequin's eyes, the figures then become the window shoppers, staring at the mannequin/viewer, who becomes the commodity. The shoppers have stiff and unnatural postures with colourless skin tone and mask like features, which make them look vaguely doll-like. The German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch's writing on the uncanny in 1906 noted the confusing and fearful experience which could be achieved through mistaking an animated automaton for a real person, a fear exploited in George A. Romero's classic horror film, 'Dawn of the Dead' (1978). This film viscerally connected to my younger self through sites like the Merrion Centre, due to its setting in an American shopping mall. The film is widely read as a dystopian parody of rampant consumerism and societal breakdown, deliberately activating feelings of discomfort and fear as described by Jentsch by provoking psychological disturbance through the trope of the undead. In the film, the viewer is confronted by reanimated matter. It creates a feeling of the uncanny in the audience by playing upon a common fear of the familiar unfamiliar, achieved through the everydayness of the shopping mall, and the unexpected liveliness of inert matter. The uncanniness is amplified as the dead wander the mall in a dreamlike state, echoing the scenes of an everyday shopping experience. This similarity to ourselves causes anxiety, as described by the theorist Masahiro Mori whose research into the phenomena of the 'Uncanny Valley' in the paper, 'The Uncanny Valley' (1970), demonstrated that the more human-like the automaton, the greater the psychological impact.

A further association between film and the site was developed in the painting 'The Demon Kings Castle' (fig 101), which explores the shared architectural aesthetic between the Merrion Centre carpark and the Trident multi-story carpark in Gateshead, which provided a stark backdrop to Mike Hodges film, 'Get Carter' (1971). Besides recognising a similarity between each building's Brutalist origins, there was also a connection made between the fleeting glimpses of Gateshead's industrial past, seen through the concrete structure of the carpark and archive

construction photographs of the Merrion Centre, in which Victorian industrial buildings surround the levelled site. Through this it is suggested that the boundaries between the constructed reality of film, the memory of film and lived memory can become blurred. In ‘Towards a History of Empty Spaces’, (Koeck and Roberts, 2010), Charlotte Brunson explores this spatial turn, mapping the relationship between film and historical place, to analyse peripheral landscapes in films about London. In these landscapes, which Brunson describes as a “hesitation in the cinematic image” (Koeck and Roberts, 2010, p.9), alternative cultural narratives can be constructed, such as the shared industrial history found in the lost landscapes presented in both the archive photographs and Hodge’s film.



Fig 101. Stone, A. 2019. *The Demon Kings Castle*. [Oil on canvas]. 120cm x 150cm

These connections between film, memory and place were a result of subjective associations made between specific elements found within film and personal memories and perceptions of the Merrion Centre. The instances in the films, which return me to childhood recollections of the Centre, were mostly architectural, transformed from the film fantasy of an American Mall and the Modernist Trident carpark, to the everyday location of the Centre and its Brutalist architecture. This mixing of personal memories with film fiction resonates with observations made by

the artist and writer Victor Burgin, who suggests that our own memories have been invaded by cinematic imagery fed to us by a film industry which seeks to enter our collective unconscious, selling our memories (Burgin, 2006). This interweaving of personal and cultural history can create new hybridised memories, caught between a real experience and a fictional, cinematic experience, enmeshing the real and the imagined to reveal new ways of looking and interpreting the places we inhabit and our experiences within them.



Fig 102. Stone, A. 2019. *The Demon King*. [Oil on canvas]. 88cm x 107cm

These associations between film led to the painting, ‘The Demon King’ (fig 102), which montaged different moments in the film ‘Get Carter’, to explore disruptions in the narrative. This approach echoed experimental filmmakers such as Eisenstein, Vertov and Brakhage, whose work often juxtaposed visually conflicting imagery to disrupt continuity and experience. In this piece, the uppermost layer of the painting is an earlier sequence from the film than the layer beneath. This restructuring of the original sequential narrative operates much like the flash-back or flash-forward technique used in cinema. In film, the flash-back seeks to mimic memory whilst the flash-forward draws a parallel with the imagination. By over-laying temporally

disjointed scenes repeatedly, each layer seems to visually and temporally neutralise the other, creating a stutter caught between the past and the future. Visually, the image loses its coherence, privileging the gesture and medium alongside the relationships between form, colour and composition. The concept of reordering and collaging fragmented stills from film is examined by Burgin who recognises how technological developments have allowed for “dismantling and reconfiguring the once inviolable objects offered by narrative cinema” (Burgin, 2006, p.8), proposing that such filmic restructuring is the armchair equivalent of the *dérive*. The painter Cathy Lomax in her ongoing series ‘Film Diary’ (fig 103), explores this potential for reconfiguring film by transposing into paint personally significant still images from her own film experiences. Lomax also incorporates text below each image which in various ways reference the source films and juxtaposes images from different films to add a further layer of interpretation. In this way, Lomax merges the autobiographical with cinematic fictions and mythologies to open up new narratives and meanings.

Lomax’s approach is quite different to that used in the ‘Demon King’ in which only one film is referenced. There is also a noticeable contrast in scale and format, with Lomax’s work being smaller and closer to the format of analogue film stills. Although there is a shared simplicity in their execution, perhaps the most significant difference is the layering which occurs in ‘The Demon King’ This analogue montaging of film stills within the painting echoes ideas noted earlier in the study regarding place as palimpsest, in which the past is overlaid but not entirely erased. Unlike the sequential temporality of a film, the painting becomes a succession of overlaid moments, echoing the making of place.

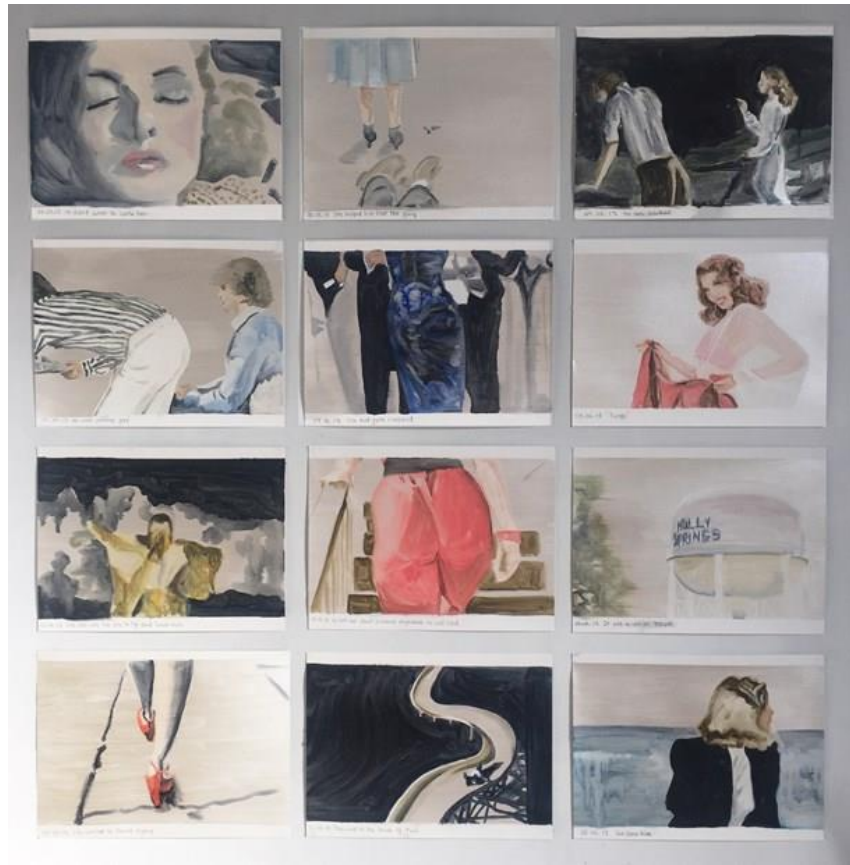


Fig 103. Lomax, C. 2013. *Film Diary #49* (28.05.13 – 22.06.13). [Oil and acrylic on paper]. 12 x 23cm x 30cm



Fig 104. Stone, A. 2017. *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. [Oil on canvas]. 55cm x 64cm

Combining cinematic interests in the Centre with experiences documented through fieldwork photographs, the painting 'The Fall of the Roman Empire' (fig 104), takes its title from the 1964 film by Anthony Mann. As the first film to be shown at the Merrion Cinema it was a pertinent title for a painting which depicts the steps beside the boarded-up exit to the cinema. The steps are shallow and broad, a type often found in secular environments, made to slow down movement and create a solemn and measured gait (Thiis-Evenson, 2000. p.97). The painting explores the abstract geometry of the steps, whilst contrasting my own childhood memories of leaving the cinema with the mundane view which they present today. It also feigns the trope of surveillance footage by presenting an elevated, oblique perspective of a banal subject, a pictorial device also found in the work of Wayne Toepp, who similarly explores notions of "power and control" (Toepp, 2014 cited in Valli & Dessanay, p.97), through the panoptic vision.

In Toepp's work (fig 105), there is an emphasis on the mediated nature of the image, suggested through a light emanating from within the painting, simulating a screen. There is also attention to vertical and horizontal optical glitches described by Toepp as "scan lines [the alternating coloured and black rows] on the analogue screen or pixels in digital interfaces" (Toepp, 2014 cited in Valli & Dessanay, p.97), which disrupt the image and suggest a low-resolution video still. These pictorial devices produce a twofold distancing of the viewer from the scene, firstly through the lens of the camera and secondly through the surface of the painting. This contrasts with the painting of the steps, which has a less overt emphasis on the mediated nature of the image and a clearer view of the subject. Whilst Toepp seeks to create distance and estrangement through medium, atmospheric conditions and human presence, the painting of the steps is more ambiguous. Its stark lighting illuminates the whole area, with a cropped composition and skewed perspective suggestive of an optical view, as though a cursory glance made whilst passing through the area. The snapshot viewpoint through the eye of another, draws the viewer to closer to the lived experience of the space, as though they are there.



Fig 105. Toepp, W. 2011. *Cell Still#5*. [Oil on Canvas]. 91cm x 122cm

The covert photographic approaches which were so important to many of the paintings in this study responded to ideas discussed previously in chapter two regarding the difficulties of stepping outside of normal habits and behaviours, to directly observe the ordinary and everyday. Working with similar concerns, the contemporary filmmaker Emily Richardson's film '*Transit*' (2006) utilises the uncompromising eye of the camera lens to capture the submerged rhythms of urban spaces, evoking the aesthetic technique of *Photogénie*, which Paul Newland suggests can reveal the strangeness of the familiar and uncover quotidian narratives obscured within layered urban spaces (Newland, 2012). Like Richardson's work, many of the paintings in this study have a shared intention of examining the mundane and the seemingly irrelevant. However, unlike filmed or photographic images the paintings appear further dislocated from the original experience through the secondary mediation of paint, becoming as much about the formal arrangements and uncontrolled activities of materials and the applied visual language.



Fig 106. Stone, A. 2016. *Wade study*. [Oil on board]. 21cm x 25cm.

In ‘Wade study’ (fig 106), the image has become inseparable from its materials and method of making, built up incrementally with thin layers of predominantly non-naturalistic monochrome colour which uncouples the painting from its photographic source. The handling is loose and gestural with all areas of the image handled in an equally imprecise manner. The painting is knowingly mundane and featureless, prompting the viewer's eye to repeatedly scan the scene looking for a point of interest. Its lack of detail makes it awkward to discern what is seen, whilst the bold brushwork makes it difficult to see through the medium to the subject. Coupled with this, the overall blurring of the image mimics the ‘visual smear’ (Solso, 1994, p26) which Solso suggests is a naturally occurring reduction in details which happens when scanning an environment. In this way, the painting seeks to test perception, questioning how optical information from our surroundings are processed and how meaning is made. Although ambiguous, the space in the painting is just perceptible, despite forms remaining uncertain, presenting something familiar but as yet unresolved. This uncertainty echoes the grounded experience of walking the Centre, with things shifting in and out of focus, constant movement and changes in perspective, with most of what is encountered absorbed as unresolved extraneous information.



## **Uncanny Places**

In addressing notions of the strangely familiar, this investigation used site visits, photographs and painting to examine several spaces which in different ways contained what could be characterised as uncanny qualities. Through successive modernisations of the Centre, some of these areas had passed into the community memory of online forums like Leodis and Secret Leeds. Fortunately, during this study there were still a few of these unusual spaces left to be discovered, although by end of the investigation they too had been redeveloped. What follows is a review of paintings made in response to these unusual places such as the Merrion Hotel, the Mini Market and the pedestrian underpass.

### **The Merrion Hotel**

The Merrion hotel, situated on eastern edge of the Centre, was opened in 1966 and closed in 2012 after the operator went into administration. The hotel was then left abandoned for several years before being acquired by the ‘Ibis’ chain. During this time, I was fortunate to be given access to the site, to go behind the scenes and get “a glimpse of something authentic, not designed for public consumption” (Chapman, 2005, p.3). Wandering through the hallways, reception rooms and bedrooms of the building felt transgressive, as though infringing on something private and personal. Without a function, it seemed that the hotel has lost its identity, becoming a disorderly and temporally detached presence. It had become what Trigg describes as a modern ruin:

The ruin is not the same as its previous (active) incarnation. Now, an altered place emerges, which retains the shadow of its old self, but simultaneously radically destabilizes that presence. ... a place of desolation marked by ambiguity and indeterminacy (Trigg, 2009, p.131).

The hotel had an uneasy familiarity, it still resembled an older version of itself, yet somehow seemed disjointed from its origins, producing an ‘uncanny temporality’ (Trigg, 2009, p.131). The temporal disruption was tangible through the dust, mildew and mould multiplying on the fixtures and fittings which littered the rooms. These objects, many familiar to our own lives, contained the haunting presence of past activity, which the profound silence of the building seemed to amplify.

The painting ‘Lobby’ (fig 107) presents a view of a seating area beside a small conference room in the hotel. Light streamed through the window illuminating the

layers of dust which had settled on all the furnishings, giving a strangely muted tone to the room and dulling its acoustics. The rooms disconcerting emptiness was being filled by the chairs which were acting as a proxy for their earlier occupants, giving the space an intense presence. Tim Edensor argues that the routine and habitual activities of everyday places don't just disappear when place is vacated:

These embodied actions and sensations are, however, not merely recollected by ex-workers but also communicated by the 'ordinary' environments which they have left behind, and in the traces which conjure up their bodies-in the specificities of remnant spaces, fixtures, and clothes (Edensor, 2004, p.840).

Echoing Edensor's observations of the lingering presence found in abandoned spaces, the painting 'Lobby' sought to express the absent presence and "dynamic silence that encircles the cessation of activity" (Trigg, 2009. p.136), which had been sensed within the room. As an approach to convey this, the painting combined different visual devices, including a low eye level, which emphasised the ceiling and made the chairs appear larger. This viewpoint distorts the perspective of the space, directing the viewers gaze towards the ominous darkness of the room ahead. The painting also catches sunlight radiating through the window, silhouetting the furnishings and casting long shadows across the heavily pattern carpet. The light spreads across the room illuminating every feature, including the vents and fire alarm located on the ceiling, throwing them into stark relief. Combining with this, the colour palette is a controlled neutral tone reflecting the muted atmosphere of the space whilst the paint is applied in a mixture of thin glazes and thick daubs which obscure detail to suggest the rooms indeterminate physicality. In this way, the painting seeks to translate an experience which John Jervis suggests is unrepresentable:

Presence, one might say, can only be experienced, not represented, which in turn means that even its status as experience is problematic (Jervis, 2008.p.11).

The haunting atmosphere of presence found within this room was of a troubling nature, seemingly without any identifiable source. The feelings of apprehension which the room provoked dissipated rapidly as reason took hold. To identify this experience further it is worth noting Jervis who, writing on the uncanny describes:

A feeling, a shudder of apprehension or fear. It disturbs deeply held, taken-for-granted assumptions about what is real and unreal, or imaginary about the world, and the entities within it; whether these entities are dead or alive, animate or inanimate, natural or artificial, self or other (Jervis, 2008.p.11).

It seems from this understanding, that the sensations encountered within the room and throughout the hotel, were located within the realm of the uncanny. In this instance, triggered by the unexpected coexistence of the past and present in the same place, a disruption in the familiar undermines previously held assumptions about the immediate environment and everything within it.

### **Doppelgänger**

Moving deeper into the hotel, the affecting presence of a large artificial flower arrangement emerges from the darkness of the restaurant. With the torch light creating dramatic shadows and the surrounding mirrors increasing its presence, stumbling across this strangely mutated form was unsettling. In writing on sites of the uncanny, Vidler notes the psychological effect of doubling through the reflection of mirrored surfaces, suggesting there is horror in repetition, where something familiar is transformed. The painting *Doppelgänger* (fig 108), investigates the transformed presence of this object, seeking to communicate its apparent liveliness. To achieve this, the painting process includes successive layers of white flock fibre, creating a velveteen surface which settles in thick and thin striated layers, suggestive of a topographical landscape. The flock process statically charges the canvas surface, to make the fibres stand upright, acting to breathe life into this inanimate object.



Fig 107. Stone, A. 2020. *Lobby*. [Oil on canvas]. 88cm x 107cm



Fig 108. Stone, A. 2020. *Doppelgänger*. [Oil on canvas]. 88cm x 107cm

This approach contrasts starkly with Graham Crowley's painting on a similar theme, 'Flower Arranging 6' (fig 109). Here, Crowley applies a grisaille technique in which pigment is wiped away to reveal the canvas surface, creating an illuminated inner light. Unlike Crowley's painting which appears to emerge from within the canvas, 'Doppelgänger' protrudes from the surface, growing outwards toward the viewer. Despite these differences, both pieces share a common interest in their exploration of "painting [which] oscillates between the thing itself, the material, and being a sign or image" (Tucker, 2020, p.11). This fluctuation between object, image and idea adds a further layer of ambiguity to a subject which already appears in transition or mutation.



Fig 109. Crowley, G. 1998. *Flower Arranging 6*. [Oil on canvas]

## **Absence**

Transgressing the customary boundaries of a hotel guest, I linger briefly in what had once been the administration and management offices before moving towards the cellar. The basement was a labyrinth of corridors and rooms stacked high with indistinguishable objects and materials creating strange forms in the light from my phone. In an uncanny mirroring of Yung's tale of the 'prudent man' evoked by Bachelard in the *Poetics of Space* (1994, p.19) to describe the unconscious fears which lurk within the cellar, the accompanying security guard would not enter the hotels basement, apparently spooked by reports of strange noises. Bachelard describes the cellar as the territory of the unconscious, a "*dark entity ... of subterranean forces,*" (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 18–19), an uncivilised place of psychological horror. The paintings 'Vent' (fig 110) and 'Coil' (fig 111), focus on details of the detritus which litters the rooms. They seek to convey the oppressive anxiety of the space, through a sombre palette and loose, gestural brushwork. In 'Vent', a thin layer of dark oily paint is laid over a lighter underpainting, then gently rubbed back with a cloth to loosely describe the air vent, echoing previously noted methods applied in Crowley's painting. This approach enlivens and illuminates the warp and weft of the canvas whilst simultaneously creating a diffused, atmospheric quality to the painting, reminiscent of the dimly lit room in which the vent was located. In 'Coil', objects gather in piles on the cellar floor, merging into a mass of unidentified matter in the low lighting. Their entangled forms bring to mind Jane Bennett's argument for 'thing power', which contends that everyday objects are imbued with a vitality and agency beyond their original function. In the hotel cellar these inert things appeared to have independently assembled, forming new and unanticipated allegiances and relationships.



Fig 110. Stone, A. 2015. *Vent.* [Oil on canvas].10cm x 16cm

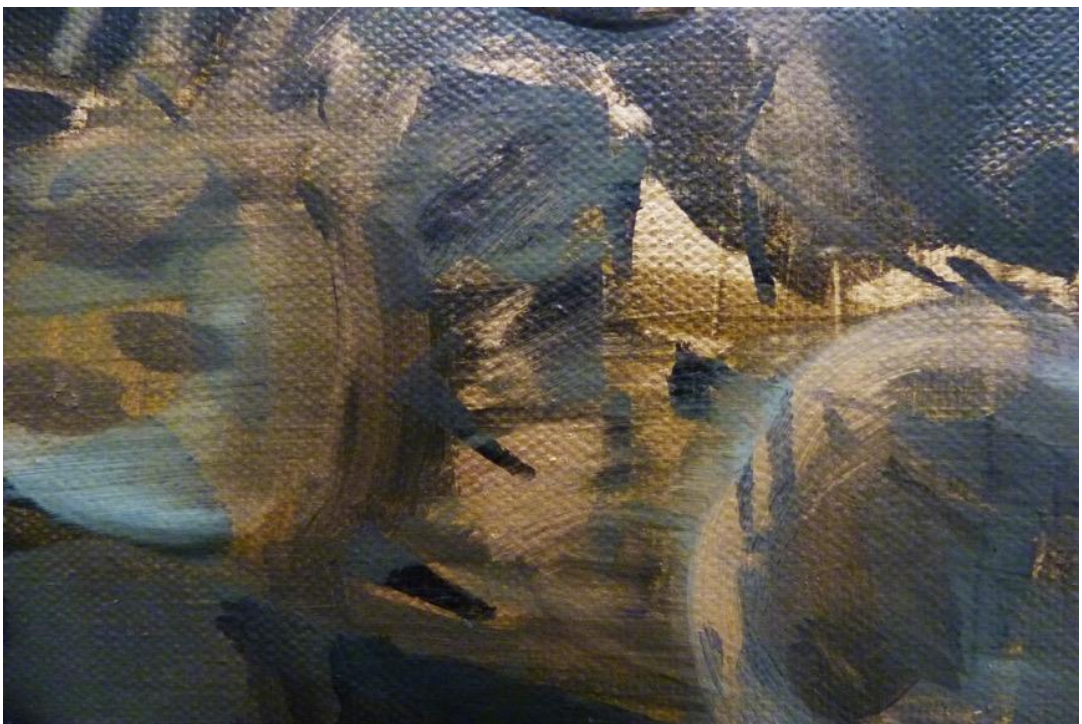


Fig 111. Stone, A. 2015. *Coil.* [Oil on canvas].10cm x 16cm

In contrast with the cellar, the bedrooms on the floors above were bathed in bright daylight, which flattened the space like an overexposed photograph. If the basement had been the realm of the unconscious imagination and agential materials, these

bare, bleached out rooms were the place of faded memory, with the mattresses and chairs still moulded to the bodies of the last occupant. The absent presence within these spaces made entering them feel intrusive and voyeuristic. In the painting 'Absence' (fig 112), the composition places the viewer at the threshold to one of these unwelcoming spaces. The painting attempts to convey the rooms sparse and strangely disturbing character, which had provoked an unhomely or 'unheimlich' sensation which Trigg suggests is due to the "unfamiliarity of that which hitherto was regarded as familiar" (Trigg, 2009, p.201). In this sense, the hotel room which is meant to be a reminder of home, becomes doubly unhomely as both a simulacrum and also as a husk of its previous identity.



Fig 112. Stone, A. 2020. *Absence*. [Oil on canvas]. 88cm x 107cm



### **The Mini Market**

Another example of a space which felt familiar yet unusual, was the Merrion Mini Market, which was hidden away at the back of the Centre beneath the carpark, situated on land that had previously been the location of an alms house. The market's makeshift, down-at-heel aesthetic was a striking antithesis to the rest of the Centre, producing in visitors what could be described as an uncanny experience. This area was particularly striking as it presented as a familiar yet distorted inversion of the main shopping area. This unusual domain appeared temporally detached like an apparition, creating an unease which was something felt, as much as seen. Such an uncanny experience recalls Arthur Machen's 'The Cosy Room' (1936) a chimerical tale of unexpectedly encountered dreamscape in which improbable views are momentarily glimpsed in unexpected places. Such unexplainable, temporal hauntings have a precedent on the site. In one account (Moss, 1977, p.153), during the post war slum housing clearances of 1945, a young child playing in one of the derelict buildings heard a noise outside; when peeking through the window, he reported seeing an old man tending to a well maintained rose garden instead of seeing the actual rubble landscape. Such spectral sightings illustrate the layered history of the site, suggesting it is a liminal or porous place in which past and present cohabit.

To access the mini market from inside the Merrion Centre involved walking down a narrowing passageway off the main thoroughfare. The hidden entrance to this part of the building appeared unresolved, the flooring seeming to give way slightly under foot. Beyond was a wooden floored vestibule area with prefab shop units, including a specialist tobacconist, shoe repairer and a philatelist. Glass doors at the end of the lobby led to steps down in to the main hall of the market. This was a highly distinctive space most notable for its peculiar mix of prefab shop units, which seemed labyrinthine in layout. The market was distinctively anachronistic with its eclectic range of shops, many of which were closed at any given time. The space was essentially filled with rows of units with hand painted signs and worn paintwork which appeared to be the antithesis of the commercial and corporate outlets found in other parts of the Centre. The shops included a snack bar (fig 114), discussed in chapter two, an internet café, an Ethiopian and Caribbean café, a boutique clothes and costume hire shop, a hair salon 'Hair we go' (fig 113), a beauty salon 'Stay

Young’ and a clairvoyant ‘Eastern Palmist’. One of the longest serving tenants was Neville’s DIY store, established in 1975, which as their sign suggested was, ‘an Aladdin’s cave for all your DIY needs’. The archive images of the mini market shown below capture something of the eccentric nature of the site. The lack of passing trade and unrelenting fluorescent strip lighting added to the sense of temporal stasis which permeated the space. The bright, contrasting colours of the painted units appeared ad hoc and uncomfortable on the eye, suggesting there was no planned, corporate colour scheme for this space.



Fig 113. Bell, J. 2018. *Hair We Go*. [Photograph]. Merrion Mini Market



Fig 114. Stone, A. 2020. *Snack Bar state 2*. [Oil on canvas].97cm x 148cm

The mini market had a presence which physically affected its visitors, encroaching into the body through a smell which attached itself to clothing and skin. Walking down the aisles gave a sense of being in a familiar, yet strangely subverted place, reminiscent of an out of season seaside town. Trigg describes something similar when writing of the augmented familiar or uncanny noted earlier in the chapter:

Above all, we are drawn to the fact that the uncanny is to be understood fundamentally as an effect, a felt experience that disturbs the body, resulting in the departure from the everyday. Yet no less a displacement from the everyday, the uncanny simultaneously places us in the midst of the familiar (Trigg, 2012, p.27).

This disturbance in the everyday can activate anxiety, doubt or fear. Trigg suggests that the uncanny experience eludes a precise definition or origin, but is as a physically affecting experience which can occur during the daily routines of everyday life. Perhaps it was a combination of effects on the senses which caused the imbalance found in the market. The smell of the space, coupled with the bright florescent lighting, the bright garish colours of the prefab shops and the awkward layout of the space, each contributing to an overwhelming sense of dislocation. Or perhaps it was the sense of the familiar unfamiliar, combined with a perception of time stood still and the vacated stalls, which imbued this place with a sense of otherness.

Vidler argues that Modernist architects wished to erase any sense of history from their buildings, a tabula rasa by which could eradicate the ghosts and traumas of the past. In many ways, the Merrion Centre was a late blossoming of such ideals yet the mini market appeared its antithesis, a locus suspectus (haunted site), an awkward, nonconforming twin confined to a quiet corner of the site. The mini market has now vanished, having recently been stripped out and reinvented as a Puregym, it now seems aesthetically more connected to other areas of the site. Yet it seems uncanniness may persist in place, although, perhaps a different type, as bodies are strained, exerted and sculpted, each seemingly oblivious to their surroundings or each other.

### **The Underpass**

Another marginalised and equally uncanny space, which has now been redeveloped, could be found at the northern edge of the Centre, beside a pub once called the Pig

and Whistle and opposite what had for many years been another well-known public house called the Coburg. As seen in the painting 'Underpass' (fig 115), the space was an open air, concrete courtyard which had functioned as an entrance to a disused pedestrian underpass linking Cookridge Street to Clay Pit Lane. Steps led down from a back entrance to the Centre, to a concrete amphitheatre. At one time, there had been an escalator, which ran down the left stairwell, before eventually being decommissioned. Once the underpass had been closed, this space seemed to have no practical use, becoming something of an inter-place.



Fig 115. Stone, A. 2019. *Underpass*. [Oil on canvas].76cm x 87cm.



Fig 116. Stone, A. 2018. *Androgyne*. [Oil on canvas].39cm x 45cm

It was perhaps one of the few places left on the site where elements of the Centre's original Brutalist design could still be seen, guarded for many years by the sculpture 'Androgyne' (1965), a cast aluminium art work by Glen Hellman. The sculpture appeared as a memorial to the Centre's earlier aesthetic, its form in some sense absorbing its surroundings architectural legacy as the space surrounding it altered. Revisiting the research questions, the sculpture reveals different types of memory through its making and its material history but also seen through its relationship to the building in its weathered and marked surfaces and also deep within its structure, as embodied memory accrued through its orbital movements around the Centre. There was a powerful bond between this mute form and the building, which gave the work a dynamic presence and agency, as though caught in movement. The painting, *Androgyne*, 2018 (fig 116), seeks to capture this connection, enveloping the figure within its surroundings through the use of a predominantly muted palette, which reflects the area's austere, concrete aesthetic and sharp, vertical and horizontal edges. Varying textures of paint, combined with gestural marks and passages of

detail, aim to evoke the subject's liveliness, whilst also acting to remind the viewer of the painting as object. As will be discussed in the following chapter, such painterly devices can bring the viewer closer to the original experience of place, imitating how we encounter the world as a fluid, active and fractured environment. By emphasising the material nature and authorship of the image through gesture and material application, a connection is also made between the maker, the viewer and place, with the viewer experiencing place through the painter's subjective articulation of the original experience.

Reflecting on the site in terms of the modalities of place, this space, at first, seems a grey area. It was a route between places with no sense of an early history prior to the construction of the site, excepting some subtle traces of human traffic and weathering, etched into the concrete substrata. In some areas, weeds and mosses had taken purchase in the various cracks and crevices, establishing micro zones of organic materials. The painting 'Social' (fig 117) captures the area as it was being redeveloped in 2018. The new building left no discernible trace of early place with only archive photographs, living memory and the painting 'Androgyne' to confirm its existence. The painting shows the new structure under construction as a liminal, unrealised place. The composition is of a small section of the building, focussing on the concrete and steel structure and the glazed façade. It highlights the complex relationship between the many verticals and horizontals which form a skewed grid across the picture plane. At first glance, this new structure might be viewed as an example of thinned out place in which the past has been erased. However, projecting forward to the future of the new office spaces, which will house council social care departments, it is argued further iterations of place continues, built upon the narratives and lived histories of the employees and visitors that will soon be accessing the building.



Fig 117. Stone, A.2020. *Social*. [Oil on board].23cm x 29cm

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined some of the onsite approaches used during the study, describing how embodied experience and memory (personal, cultural and cinematic) can be viewed, through the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Casey and Burgin, as valuable approaches to understanding place. In addressing the research questions, this chapter reviewed the value of psychogeographic practices to support and contribute towards painting place. It highlighted, through the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, Daniels, De Certeau, Lippard, Casey, Hiller and others the importance of getting to know a locality, recognising that walking can offer a level of familiarity with place that cannot be matched by the abstractions of theory. For Wunderlich, walking is a way of unconsciously connecting with our environment:

enabling us to sense our bodies and the features of the environment. With one foot-after-the other, we flow continuously and rhythmically while traversing urban place (Wunderlich, 2008, p.125).

It was noted that walking allows for a sensory immersion within the “temporal continuums of social everyday life” (Wunderlich, 2008, p. 126), with the potential to become a critical spatial practice (Cariei,2002; Rendell, 2006; Wunderlich, 2008) through which new understandings of place might emerge. Further research suggested a reciprocity between body and environment, a mode of being in place

which Tim Ingold terms enmeshment. Dramatically, Karen Barad and Jane Bennett go as far as to suggest a level of body/place entanglement and intra-action, in which traditional boundaries between our body and the world don't exist.

The onsite fieldwork led to observations which might otherwise have been overlooked, such as chance encounters with objects which indexed earlier activities or traces of earlier place partially obscured by redevelopment. The paintings which emerged in response to these journeys convey a sense of the fluid nature of the site, presenting peripheral views and fragments of experiences as well as interweaving personal past memories with current encounters. In combination, these pieces draw together research and lived experiences towards new readings of the Centre, portraying the site as an area of surveillance, a palimpsest of the past and present, an uncanny ruin and a place of real and imagined memories. In relation to this, the cinematic memories explored in the painting 'The Demon King' (fig 102) were regarded as significant and original in its use of montage to disrupt narrative but also in suggesting a porous relationship between personal and film memory which can affect how place is experienced. In addition, there were three specific areas from within the site which were recognised, with reference to Trigg and Vidler, to contain uncanny spatial qualities. These sites were examined, through a series of paintings, in relation to notions of the familiar unfamiliar, the absent presence of past activity, the layering of past and present place and the agency and imbued memory of objects situated within these spaces.



## Chapter 5: Thinking through Painting



Fig 118. Studio, 2018. [Photograph]



Fig 119. Studio, 2017. [Photograph].



Fig 120. *Studio*, 2021. [Photograph].



Fig 121. *Thixotropic painting medium (matt)*, 2021. [Photograph].



Fig 122. *Glass painting palette*, 2020. [Photograph].



Fig 123. *Oil painting mediums*, 2020. [Photograph].



Fig 124. *Painting tools*, 2021. [Photograph].



Fig 125. *Merrion Centre Model*, 2017. [Photograph]. At: Town Centre Securities.



Fig 126. *Merrion Model*, 2019. [Photograph]. At: Town Centre Securities.



Fig 127. Projection, *View from Merrion Carpark to the Merrion Hotel*. 2017.[Photograph].



Fig 128. Projection, *Over-lay projection onto painting 'Get Carter'*. 2017.[Photograph].

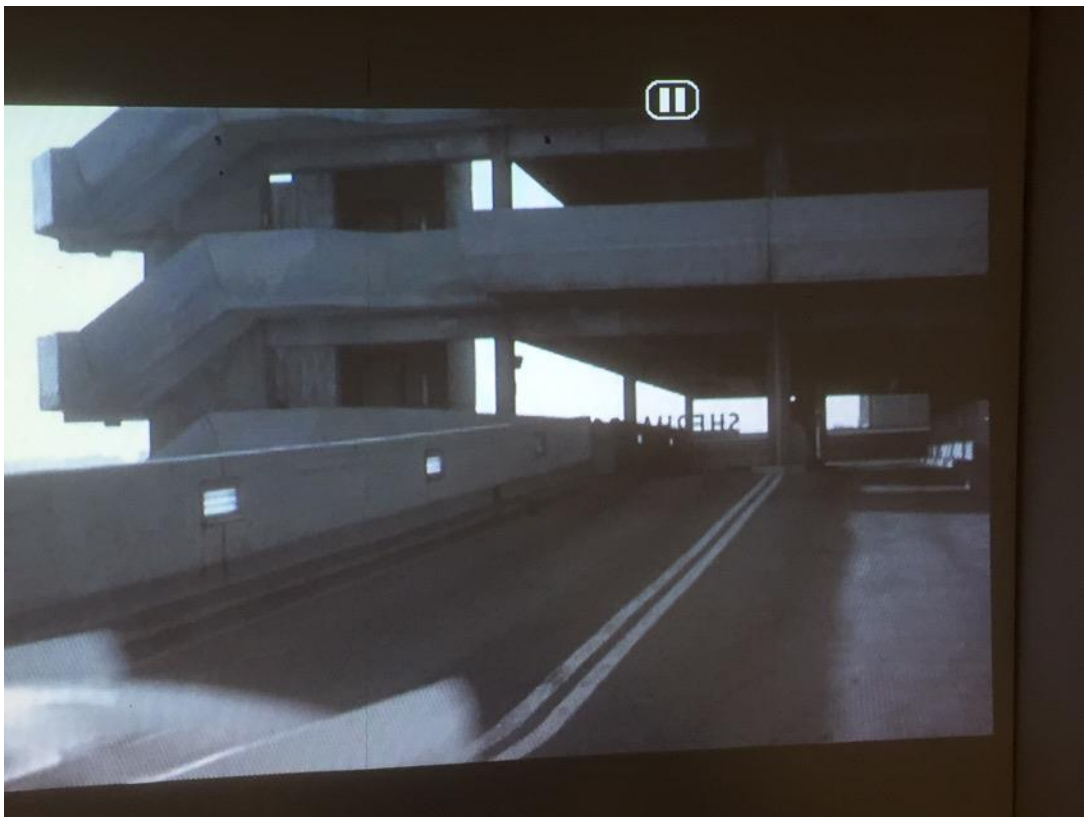


Fig 129. Projection, *Over-lay projection onto painting 'Get Carter'*. 2017.[Photograph].



Fig 130. *Merrion Model*, 2019. [Photograph]. At: Town Centre Securities.

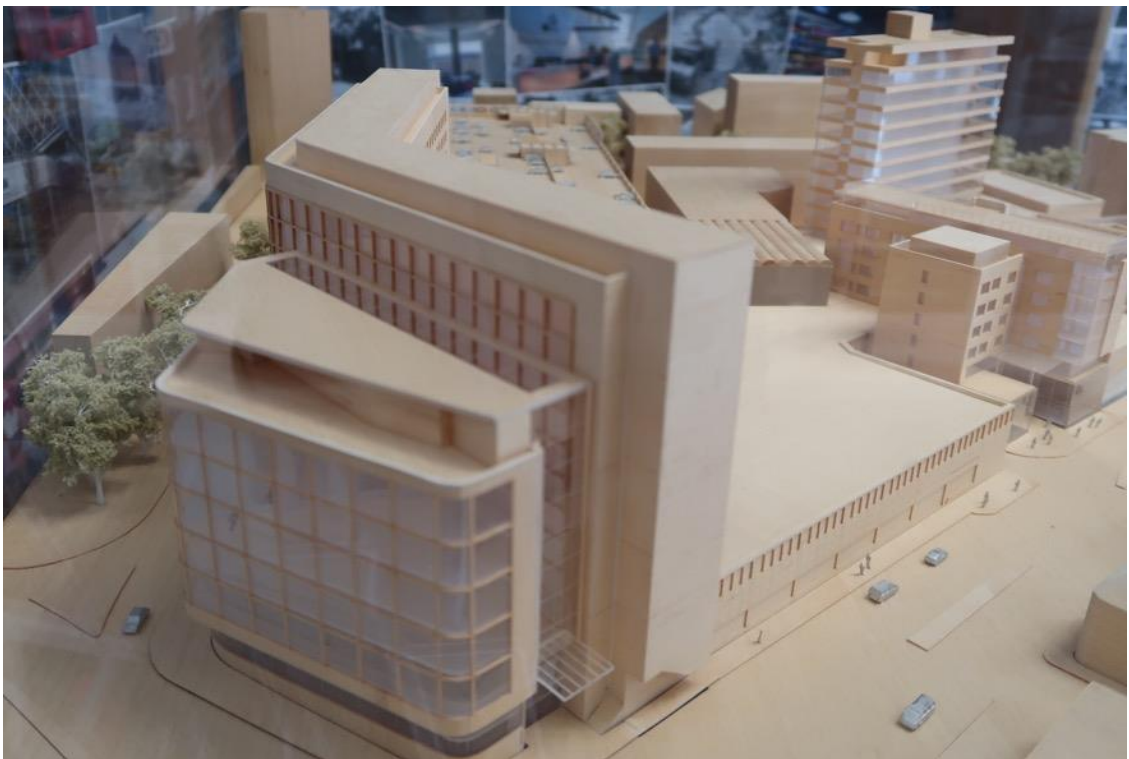


Fig 131. *Merrion Model*, 2019. [Photograph]. At: Town Centre Securities.

## **Introduction**

This chapter examines a series of the paintings of the Merrion Centre which were developed in collaboration with the other research activities discussed earlier. The paintings and the processes involved in their making are viewed as a central methodology within the investigation. In this study, the activities of painting open up a critical and reflective dialogue between myself, the Centre and the paintings. As such, the paintings can be understood as a point of intersection in which the Merrion Centre's polyvocal character as a quotidian place of social history combines with lived experience and individual and cultural memory. Expanding on this point, the entire 'Merrion Centre Series' provide a space for new understandings of the Centre to emerge by becoming a nexus for 'thinking through' the many discourses which have been shown to connect to the site such as: place, the everyday, memory and uncanny. The paintings, through the generative process of practice, then act collectively as a field of enquiry through which to addresses the research questions.

## **The Merrion Centre Series**

The paintings in the study were often started in series, with groups of work focussing on different areas of the Centre. Often there would be an overlap in the series with some paintings taking many years to complete, due to later rethinking of visual elements, such as the composition or colour palette. The paintings examine different areas within the Centre, with a large group referencing elements of the main shopping precinct, whilst others focus upon marginal and hidden places such as the abandoned cinema and derelict Merrion Hotel. In some cases, the paintings refer to areas of the site which no longer exist except in memory. These paintings were mostly informed by historical images found in the Centre's archive or through online forums. There is also a small group of paintings which draw connections between memory, film and place, exploring how the memory of film, through painting, can offer alternative readings of place. These paintings were made in direct response to watching the films to which they refer, in some cases tracing directly from still frames of the projected film. This group of paintings were perhaps the most speculative of the study in terms of indirectly looking at the Centre, through either my own associations or what was playing at the Merrion Cinema when it was open. They are also perhaps the most experimental in relation to how they were



made and the least resolved, in that there seems much more that could be developed in this area.

### **Retail Zombie**

The paintings made in the retail area connect to the walks and photographs made during fieldwork. Considering that the Centre is a busy retail site, it is notable that in almost all of the paintings the human figure is absent and in the few paintings where figures are present, they tend to be either mannequins or zombies. There were a number of reasons for the decision to substitute or erase direct reference to human presence. Firstly, the shop model as part of the ‘the silent salesman’ display used “to manipulate the consuming habits of the shoppers” (Seamon, 2006, p.9) was a viable human proxy with which to convey the Centre’s agency. Employed primarily to influence and direct, it forms part of a wider architectural strategy in which “the mall itself tells one what one ought to buy” (Seamon, 2006, p.9). Additionally, in relation to earlier discussions on the uncanny in Jentsch, this sales tactic purposefully breathes an uncanny agency into the otherwise mute forms of the mannequins. With this in mind, the paintings suggest that in this new mode of retail space, the mantle of flâneur has been reassigned to the shop window mannequin, which passively survey the crowds. This perspective appears increasingly apt as the unfolding pandemic has stopped human activity within the building, leaving only the silent presence of the mannequin to bear witnesses. From another perspective, the loitering window shoppers emulate the nonchalant tempo of the flâneur and as previously noted in chapter three, through their ungainly ambulation’s, also resemble the reanimated bodies of 1970s horror movies.

A further reason for omitting the figure was the ephemeral flow of human traffic which continuously streamed through the Centre. This brought to mind Louis Daguerre’s photograph of the bustling ‘Boulevard du Temple’ (1838), in which a long exposure process had led to a hauntingly empty street scene. Daguerre’s image powerfully represented place with just the barest trace of human presence. This photograph suggested that to paint the shoppers would result in a momentary, superficial image which would soon become outdated. For these reasons, it felt more relevant to focus upon the traces of interaction between people and place, through the architecture and the objects left behind, such as slip cones, chairs and reflections.

In relation to these ideas, in the painting 'Inert' (fig 132), a mob moves awkwardly towards the entrance of a store where two men are frantically trying to shut the door before the crowd arrive. This is a scene from 'Dawn of the Dead' (1978) and the crowd are a hoard of zombies, slowly lumbering towards their prey. The painting captures a still from the film which resembles an everyday scene from the Centre. In the painting, the stores merchandise is brightly illuminated to lure passing trade, but it is unclear in this scene what type of consumption is attracting these shoppers. The painting was made by projecting the film and freezing the frame at the chosen moment, with only the half-light of the projector in which to mix and apply the paint, which resulted in a much less controlled palette. The paused film still vibrates slightly and the forms become pixelated with a noticeable colour shift on the canvas. The image continuously stutters, making it appear impatient to move on to the next frame. Foucault claims that working from a photographic source in this way creates "not a painting based on a photograph, nor a photograph made up to look like a painting, but an image caught in its trajectory from photograph to painting" (Foucault, 1999, p.91). This sense of the interstitial resonates through the painting process with the image simultaneously located above and below the medium, making it impossible to accurately trace.



Fig 132. Stone, A. 2020. *Inert*. [ Oil on canvas],48cm x 54cm.

### **The Process of Practice**

In the following sections the research examines how photography, memory and psychogeographic approaches intersected with painting practice towards an understanding and interpretation of place in the paintings. Photography was a particularly important approach to sourcing information during the study. With limited access to significant areas of the site such as the cinema and the hotel, photography rather than onsite observational drawing became the principal aide memoire. The time limitations in these hidden spaces emphasised the importance of fully experiencing place and capturing as much information about the buildings as possible. In the visit to the Merrion hotel, there was so much potential source material that a strategy for selecting relevant subjects had to be made quickly during the visit. This led to a series of photographs which focussed on space, form and pattern as a means to capturing the unique character of each of the areas within the building.

By contrast, the fieldwork practices within the main shopping area of the Centre were less formulated, involving an open mind to what might be found through

wandering the space without a set agenda or destination. During these visits, covert photographs were taken by placing the phone camera to the side of the body, a technique which created chance compositions, with a ‘hip level’ snap-shot aesthetic. This approach gave the photographs a sense of being situated at a specific time and place, connecting to the movement of the body rather than the eye. This arguably produced what Barthes terms a “having been there-ness” (Gibbons, 2011, p.30), an immediacy which permeated through to the paintings ‘Sale’ (fig 133), ‘Closing Down’ (fig 134), ‘Top Brands’ (fig 135) and ‘Steps’ (fig 136), through their awkwardly cropped compositions. By mimicking saccadic eye movements, capturing banal subjects, cropped forms and truncated text, the paintings appear as fragments of larger scene, suggesting a world beyond the picture frame. The dirty palette reinforces the triviality of the content, desaturated and faded they appear to be poor-quality print reproduction, emphasising the scenes as drab and unremarkable.



Fig 133. Stone, A. 2015. *Sale*. [Oil on board]. 28cm x 25cm.



Fig 134. Stone, A. 2015. *Closing down*. [Oil on board].25cm x 21cm.



Fig 135. Stone, A. 2015. *Top Brands*. [Oil on canvas].79cm x 60cm.



Fig 136. Stone, A. 2015. *Steps*. [Oil on board]. 25cm x 21cm.



Fig 137. Price, N. 2012. *Untitled Kerbstone Painting (MJK)*. [Acrylic on canvas]. 91cm x 122cm.

### **Snapshot**

The paintings mimic the ‘snapshot’ through their composition, presenting mundane, everyday views, but also through the spontaneity of their execution, made with one hour time constraints. This approach limited unnecessary detail and liberated the painting process from habitual gestures. These constraints resulted in images with missing information, evoking the immediacy of a cursory glance. The painter Narbi Price also seeks to celebrate the neglected beauty of the ordinary and unremarkable found in the urban environment, documenting amongst other things, architectural textures and features, street furnishings and road markings, as seen in ‘Untitled Kerbstone Painting (MJK)’ (Fig 137). With a similar interest in the hidden histories and intersecting narratives of place, Price encourages the viewer to question the meaning of the banal scene by meticulously rendering it in paint, contradicting paintings historical convention for representing elevated subjects. The painting points to something important but hides its narrative behind the veil of the everyday. Contradicting the paintings photorealist qualities, the drips, splashes, marks and gestures of production hide in plain sight, slowly seeping into the viewers consciousness through closer inspection. These signs of activity point towards the painting as a lived experience of a real place. Through these marks the painting projects a quasi-agency, a trope which Isabelle Graw ascribes to the ‘vitalistic fantasy’ of liveliness (Graw, 2018). This liveliness is transferred through a close correspondence between the artist and painting, through playful experimentation with materials. The agency within the painting suggests that the artist’s experiences, thoughts and memories are evoked or possibly transmuted into the painting through the labour of making, resonating with those ideas discussed earlier by Bolt, Fisher, Gosetti-Ferencei and Ingold regarding embodied knowing and the transmission of tacit knowledge through practice.

### **The Optical Unconscious**

The photographs used in the study offered a way of examining aspects of the site which otherwise would have gone unnoticed. This understanding of photography’s ability to enhance perception is well known through the work of Walter Benjamin, on ‘the optical unconscious’. Benjamin recognised that photographs had the

potential to reveal new information and understanding of events and experiences which unfolded quicker than the eye and mind could absorb:

We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods. This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object (Benjamin in Jennings, 2008.p37).

This concept of optically hidden or obscured information led to the use of editing software to examine and manipulate source photographs, experimenting with image contrast, alteration of colour layers and values, magnification and cropping. These processes revealed new elements of the subjects overlooked at the time the photographs were taken, missed due to time constraints or poor lighting conditions. These processes also gave access to previously obscured information from the archive photographs, including peripheral areas of the construction site which had not been the intended subject of the original photographs. These experiments with source imagery were to inform many of the paintings in the study including *Excavate* (fig 138), *Taskscape* (fig 139) *Edgeland* (fig 140) and *Wade'* (fig 141). In these paintings, digital manipulation of the original photograph included magnifying small areas from a larger field of vision. When expanded on screen and then further enlarged onto large canvases, these scenes reach out to encompass the viewer and the digital image becomes pixelated, with individual forms and landmarks becoming lost in a patchwork of patterns. This translation from the pixel to brush mark represents a shift from the striated geometry of the digital to the smooth space of the analogue. The stain, daub and gesture used in the process of painting spill over the pixel boundaries- these tactile marks producing a haptic sensation of the place they represent.

In the paintings '*Taskscape*' and '*Edgeland*', this tension between the smooth and striated is emphasised by the loose brushwork overlaying the grid structure, which represents the pixelated screen. By doing this, the paintings seek to return the image from the digital to the original moment, expressing the liveliness of the lived experience. Thus, it is argued that photographs can extend perception and support memory and that painting's indexicality, seen through mark and gesture, can work with photography towards a more experiential presentation of place.





Fig 138. Stone, A. 2016. *Excavate*. [Oil on canvas].120cm x 150cm



Fig 139. Stone, A. 2020. *Taskscape*. [Oil on canvas].120cm x 150cm



Fig 140. Stone, A. 2019. *Edgeland*. [Oil on canvas]. 70cm x 100cm



Figure 141. Stone, A. 2020. *Wade*. [Oil on canvas]. 120cm x 150cm

### **Monochrome**

Perhaps the most striking deviation in the paintings from the original monochrome image is the introduction of a limited colour palette. This shift from greyscale to polychrome acts to reanimate the landscapes, a device used to bring the images back into the present. The painting 'excavate' uses thin veils of blue/grey over repeatedly miss-registered black linear tracings from sections of the photographs, to give a ghostly image of the buildings foundation work. These stains are so thin in some areas of the painting that the light reflects off the canvas below, creating a back lit screen effect. The processes used in its production seek to convey the smoggy weather conditions of 1960s Leeds described in the photograph, whilst also alluding to the fragile, transitory nature of the site before its completion as the Centre. In other paintings from this series, such as 'Taskscape' and 'Edgeland', the colour palette also remains limited but is noticeably more colourful, with thin and thickly painted passages of vibrant colour contrasting with neutral greys to visually enliven the image. In some areas of these paintings the land is carefully modelled to describe the textures of the exposed earth, whilst in other areas the painting style loosens to allow the underlying grid matrix to emerge. This combination of fluidity and detail seeks to create the illusion of space whilst also contradicting it.

### **Aerial Assault**

From another perspective, this series of paintings are all views from elevated positions. This has a historical precedent in landscape paintings which applied aerial perspective to mark out the territory and control of powerful landowners. More recently, photographs like those found in the archive have become a tool of ownership and control for municipal and institutional urban planners. Michel de Certeau recognises that such privileged perspectives command a hierarchical, almost celestial, position, an 'atopia-utopia of optical knowledge' (De Certeau, 1984, p.93) which estranges the viewer from those down below, "whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write" (De Certeau, 1984, p.92) but are unable to read. This sense of detachment from the ground makes those below seem like a small part of a larger abstract tapestry of forms. Losing their humanity, they become ethically easier targets for aerial bombardment.

In the panoramic paintings ‘Taskscape’ and ‘Wade’ the landscape spreads out like a topographical map, their katasopic perspectives reminiscent of reconnaissance or surveillance footage of enemy territory. The views produce a detached, depersonalised landscape, beyond normal human vision, the opposite of the snapshot style paintings from within the Centre. In common with all the paintings in the study, these pieces are mediated through the lens of the camera and then through translation into paint. Working from the archive images distances the images further from the original subject and tests the viability of the paintings to convey the experience of the place they represent. However, as previously mentioned, there is something at work in the transmutation between photographic image and painted representation, which breathes life into the image through the activities, processes and materials of production.

The exhibition ‘The Painting of Modern Life’ (2007) at The Hayward, Gallery London highlighted a number of contemporary artists whose work explored this issue, including Gerhard Richter and Vija Celmins. Ralph Rugoff, a contributing author to the exhibition catalogue, recognised how translation from photograph to paint slows down the viewers reading of the image. He proposed that, “the variegated surface invites the eye to linger, to scrutinise the hundreds of contacts between brush and canvas” leading to the viewer “reinvesting feeling into images whose affect has been drained through repetition” (Rugoff, 2007, p.16). The re-introduction of the subjective through the painterly touch as described by Rugoff seems an important element in this relationship, imbuing the painting with presence and inviting the viewer to inhabit the surface. This claim points to a potential within the medium and activity of painting, to communicate something of a moment which is lost or left behind in a photograph, an issue which will be addressed further in Chapter six in relation to painting and memory.

### **A Token of Absence**

Reviewing the various types of photographs used within the study highlighted differences between my own fieldwork images and the found footage of the archive. The archive photographs were taken by anonymous observers, evoking what John Berger describes as “the memory of an unknowable and total stranger” (Berger, 1991, p.56). Disconnected from the original encounter, they had what Sontag

describes as a “pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (Sontag, 1979, p.16). Their temporal displacement gives the photographs a liminal quality, oscillating between the past and the present, allowing for a less subjective interpretation, unaffected by personal memory. In the essay ‘The Rhetoric of the Image’ (1964) Roland Barthes describes this unnatural temporality within photographs as:

A new spatial category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then. (Barthes 1977, p.44).

For Barthes, the re-emergence of the past in the present found in photographs “is never metaphoric ... the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing.” (Fisher, 2008, p.24). In this sense, the archive images, as reanimated presence, have an uncanny quality similar to the shop mannequins and the zombies referenced earlier in the study. In relation to the research questions, this difference between the archive footage and the photographs taken on site affected the way in which the paintings were processed, with the distant archive images prompting a direct, objective and less precious handling through painting. In contrast, the paintings which referenced photographs of personal experiences from some areas of the site proved more difficult to resolve due to their subjective nature and the memories which they provoked. These paintings took longer to complete with difficulties settling on colour palette and approach to production, suggesting that memory might also interfere with as well as aid the painting process.

### **Temporal Collapse**

These ideas of fractured time and the re-emergence of the past, as found in the archive images, are explored in the paintings ‘Build’ (fig 143) and ‘Making Place’ (fig 144) through the layering of past and present images of the Centre. Visually these pieces suggest decay or erosion through what appear to be architectural ruins. Reinforcing this reading of the ruin, the image and surface are both fragmented, allowing earlier layers of painting to become visible. This sense of things breaking down is further echoed through the making processes, which collapses time by overlaying temporally distanced photographs. As the artist and writer Christian Mieves notes, in relation to a similar temporal flattening found in the work of the artist Idris Kahn:

The amalgamations of layers of photographs and the interwoven texture of images seem to result in a collapse of the categories past and present, or abstraction and figuration (Mieves, C. p.4).

Mieves also suggests that in Kahn's work, bringing together different temporal moments creates images which are at the same time both transparent and obscured, a reading which resonates with the painting 'Build' in which two images of the Centre are fused. In this painting, there is an image from an archive photograph of site construction painted over a flower arrangement, found more recently within the Centre. By marrying these two distant moments in the Centre's history, the painting draws attention to the Centre as a palimpsest in which new iterations of place reoccur. Visually, the flowers are partially obscured but not quite illegible, their faux organic foliage breaking through the rigid architectural structures of scaffolding to corrupt the coherence of the image. In contrast, the passages of paint to the right of the building combine more fluidly, with the underlying foliage used to describe the ambiguous forms of billboards, streets and cars which edge the site.

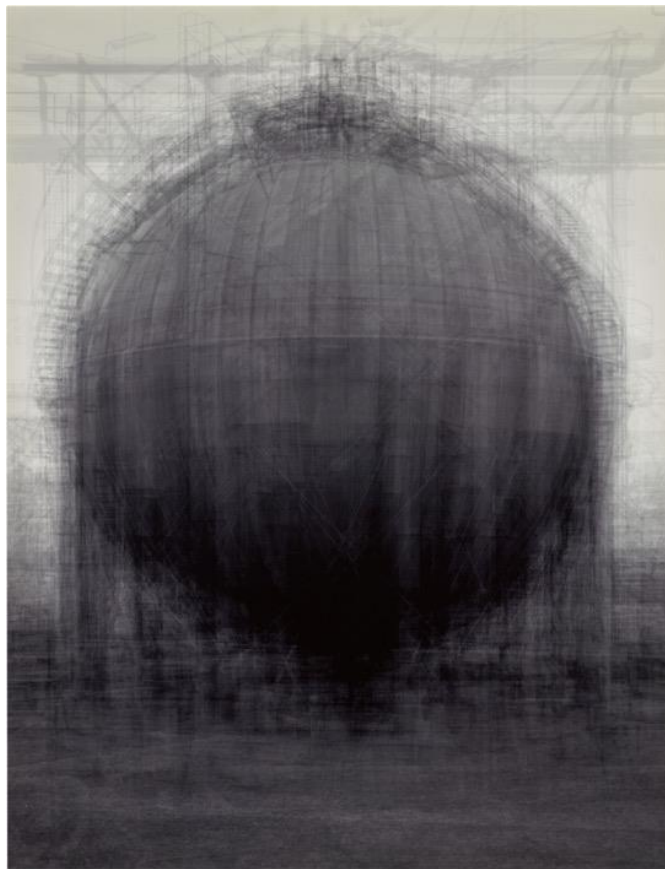


Fig 142. Khan, I. 2004. *Every ... Bernd & Hilla Becher spherical type gas holders*. [Pigment print, flush-mounted to aluminium]. 132cm x 102 cm

There is a shared sense of image overload found in Khan's work and the layered paintings in this study, although they operate in quite different ways. In Khan's piece, 'every Bernd & Hilla Becher spherical type gas holders' (fig 142), similar images are layered directly upon each other, generating an intense energy which seems to be emanating from deep within the form. The whole image vibrates through the misaligned trace shadows of extraneous details, which surround and infiltrate the essential form of the spherical tanks. This overloading has quite a different effect in the paintings 'Build' in which conflicting images struggle for dominance and the surface appears under attack from within and different again in 'Making place' where the images appear more reconciled, combining to create an apocalyptic vision.



Fig 143. Stone, A. 2016. *Build*. [Oil on canvas].120cm x 150cm.

In 'Making Place', the timeframe of the images which inform the work stretch back before the building's development, combining scrub land prior to the Centre's construction with an archive construction image superimposed on top. In this painting, the land seems to be growing back through the overlaying structures. This notion of layered place resonates with what the literary critic

Jean Starobinski (1920-2019) terms a ‘Bass Line’, the submerged history of a place which has been overwritten through time, although traces of its past still remain visible. These paintings build on the memory contained within the photographs, echoing Starobinski’s temporal layering of place through the stratification of paint. Within these pieces there is a contradictory sense of loss and celebration, a melancholy for the demise of an earlier place and recognition for the emergence of something new. We might draw a connection between the place of the painted surface and the shopping Centre as ‘anthropological space’, described by Augé as a place which has “the presence of the past in a present that supersedes it but still lays claim to it” (Augé, 2008, p.61). From these ideas, we might argue for a closer indexical relationship between the paintings and their subject.



Fig 144. Stone, A. 2016. *Making Place*. [Oil on canvas].120cm x 150cm

### **Memory of Place**

In previous practice, observational drawing had been a way of closely observing and internalising a subject and activating memory; without this process, during site visits, there was an increased emphasis on remembering the encounter. The



paintings developed back in the studio became more reliant upon the embodied experience and remembering, transmuting memories from the site visits through the act of painting. In relation to this, the painter Mandy Payne recognises the personal experience of being onsite as integral to her own practice, creating a closer connection to place:

I think it's essential (if you can) to spend time in a location to really get to know (and feel) a place. I would go back repeatedly, amassing 1000s of photos on my phone which I used as a visual diary... Memory plays an important part in my work, and I hope to imbue a sense of it in my practice (Payne, cited in Stone, 2019).

Payne also deepens her connection to place through direct contact with the surfaces of the sites she visits, using frottage techniques to create indexical rubbings as aide memoire. Although Payne's memory of 'being there' is integral to the painting process, she states that the photograph is the primary tool for creating an accurate representation, which suggests a fallibility within memory as a reliable record of experience. This cultural distrust of memory's ability to accurately inform dates back to the enlightenment, reflecting doubts on the veracity of memory as a valuable mode of knowledge. This suspicion regarding memory's truthfulness coupled with the invention of photography has led to what Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer consider to be a loss of cultural memory, an issue which is explored further in the following chapter.

For the painter Judith Tucker, an understanding of place draws upon inherited memory (Gibbons, 2011) which provides a powerful personal connection to her own experiences. Tucker references Postmemory within her work, described by Marianne Hirsch as the memory of traumatic experiences and events which are then inherited by successive generations. This concept of generational memory resonated with previously noted ancestral ties to the land the Centre was built upon. Had I been drawn to the Merrion Centre through a deeper unconscious relationship with the land? Perhaps this was intergenerational transmission, a connection not borne out of cultural trauma as theorised by Hirsch, but some similar type of inherited memory, mediated through "narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness" (Hirsch, 2012). This site's appeal might also be a mode of what

Trigg describes as ‘place-cathexes’, with myself being unknowingly drawn to lament a lost ancestral home.

Tucker’s interweaving of the embodied experience of being in a place with the “second generation position” (Tucker, cited in Durrant, 2007, p.76) of Postmemory and the referencing of mediated imagery through found photographs sought to bridge the distance of time and space to create paintings which become:

a site of encounter for any viewer; they become other-or more-than a substitute for the experience in the location. The paint/ing becomes a metaphor for place and a place in itself (Tucker, cited in Durrant, 2007, p.64).

This approach of working with a range of sources, both personal and cultural, alongside an interest in challenging the limitations of representation and speculation on paintings as place, were concerns mirrored within this investigation. Building on this conversation to answer the research questions, this study argues that through combining a range of specific research methods and practices, the indexical qualities of painting can communicate a deep connection to and understanding of place. Arguing against this, the philosopher, Edward Casey, challenges the potential for painting, or indeed any medium, to effectively present itself as a substitute for first-hand experience, describing such encounters as “something that is at once elusive and omnipresent, a whole and yet not a totalisation, perceived by no single sense” (Casey, 2002. p6). Recognising this problem, the writer Lucy Lippard argues that:

a painting, no matter how wonderful, is an object in itself, separate from the place it depicts. It frames and distances through the eyes of the artist, which is what it’s supposed to do (Lippard, L.1997, p.19-20).

Yet this study suggests that the practice of painting has something unique within its process, a relational connection between the painting and the place, achieved through the sensory experience of observing the subject and the activity of painting, a claim which will be examined further in relation to paintings of the Merrion Centre model, the index and sensorimotor perception.

### **Model / Painting / Index**

It seems that however closely a painted image resembles its referent, its material nature will return the viewer to the painted surface and the image as representation.

This is seen in the painting ‘Model (State2)’ (fig 149) and the smaller studies ‘Model study’ (figs 145) and ‘Roof Top Study’ (fig 146) which explore the idea of a representation pointing to something else, in this case referencing a photograph of a model of the Centre. Casey suggests that all representations are essentially standing in for something else, qualifying the argument through the semiotics of signs found in the work of the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Peirce recognised three categories of representation characterised through the relationship they had with their subject: the icon associated with resemblance, the symbol relating to cultural conventions and the index, which had a direct relationship with its subject. In relation to this study, the concept of the index has particular relevance in so much as the marks and traces within the painting signify the presence of the artist, giving “a vivid physical sense of the painter’s movements” (Graw, 2018, p.113). This is the case in the painting ‘Model (State 2)’ (fig 90) in which the gestures of activity on the picture surface trace my own engagement with the work, signalling that this is a trace of an image and indicating my attendance in its production.



Fig 145. Stone, A. 2019. *Model study*. [Oil on board]. 26cm x 18cm



Fig 146. Stone, A. 2019. *Roof top study*. [Oil on board]. 26cm x 20cm

In relation to this, it is suggested by Isabelle Graw that the artist's visible gestures made through the act of painting evidence a lifetime of labour. As previously mentioned, Graw argues that the value (labour in its congealed state) is stored within paintings, giving an impression that they are alive (Graw and Lajer-Burcharth, 2016). Developing these ideas of the indexicality and quasi-agency found within painting alongside the notion of the transmission of knowledge and experiences through painting, this study proposes an experiential correspondence from painter to painting of lived experience and embodied memory. This observation builds on the anthropologist Tim Ingold's, notion of the participant observer who acquires tacit knowledge through correspondence. Ingold describes the idea of correspondence as a dialogue or co-participatory 'coming together' between an observer and a subject or maker and material, which occurs within the experience as it happens. This happens, by attending to the world on a sensory level, not as a separated, individual entity but from within and part of the experience. For Ingold, this lived knowledge can be re-implaced through the materials and processes of making. As an example of this, in the painting 'Model (state II)' (fig 149) there are areas of the work which relate directly to fieldwork in the place they represent. Time was spent in these

areas, becoming familiar with the terrain and the conditions on the ground, building a complex understanding of the locality through sensorimotor perception.

This active approach of familiarisation with place is described by Alva Noé as having a touch-like quality, which imparts the paintings with something arguably greater than Graw's "semblance of hum of lived reality" (Graw, 2018, p.115). It is argued that throughout the painting of 'Model' there was a strong sense of being there, walking in the space and actively perceiving the environment. This experiential correspondence is signalled within the work via the impasto passages of light and shadow which translate a haptic engagement and embodied experience of place. With this in mind, it is suggested that brush marks and gestures of medium express much more than their material presence, becoming what Derrida (1979) terms a 'floating signifier', describing "what cannot be said in ways that cannot be described" (Nadaner, 1988, p.173). These types of marks are often overlooked, seen as what Mieke Bal terms 'subsemiotic', in that they support understanding of the image but are often not considered to give meaning in their own right.



Fig 147. Payne, M. 2014. *Brutal*. [Aerosol spray paint and oil on concrete]. At: Private Collection

In Mandy Payne's 'Park Hill' series the concrete substrate of the paintings becomes a referent for the Brutalist buildings in the paintings, worked upon through sanding and abrasion to emulate the textured surfaces found in place "creating a physical connection to the subject" (Payne, 2019). In these paintings, the concrete is often left bare so that the audience "will react and engage with the materiality" (Payne, cited in Stone, 2019) of the work. In this way, the materials simulate a truth about the site's construction, giving the work a presence as both an object and a real place. This play between surface and design creates an oscillating effect of both nearness and distance. Despite their sharp photorealist traits, the paintings still retain signs of the authors hand, a haptic quality and facture which stands over their photographic reference and comes from Payne's time spent prospecting many sites'. The painting 'Model' explores themes close to those found in 'Brutal' (fig 147) with both seeking to draw the viewer into the work, by conveying a sense of being situated in place. They do this in part, by exploring notions of the real and the fictional. In 'Brutal' the concrete substrate acts as a tactile proxy for the architecture, provoking memories of such places, whilst in 'Model' the subject is a simulacrum of the Centre, placing the viewer in a room situated in the Centre.

'Model' (S I) (fig 148) and 'Model' (SII) (fig 149) demonstrate how modifications to a painting can radically alter the reading and understanding of the subject and effect the position of the participant viewer. 'Model' (SI) appears to be an aerial perspective of the Centre, as though the viewer were situated high above the buildings. There are only minor suggestions that this scene might be something other than it initially appears, specifically the subtle echoing of buildings and trees in the top right-hand corner of the painting. 'Model' (S2) radically alters the reading by introducing a light source which casts shadows and reflections onto the model, illuminating the glass vitrine which surrounds it. The new identity of the subject as model dramatically changes the perceived scale of the scene and relocates the viewer into an interior space within the Centre. In this version, the introduction of a horizontal white line crossing the front of the image signifies the boundary edge of the vitrine, where the sides of the cabinet meet. The reflections from the lights above reinforce the interpretation of receding transparent surfaces whilst the strong contrast between the yellow ochre and Prussian blue create deep shadows on the surface of the model which help to suggest the depth and volume of the glass case.



Fig 148. Stone, A. 2019. *Model' (state I)*. [Oil on canvas].120 x 150cm



Fig 149. Stone, A. 2019. *Model' (state II)*. [Oil on canvas].120 x 150cm

As previously mentioned, this new reading of the painting aims to create a disorientating *mise en abyme*, as the viewer participant is transported into a room in the Centre looking at the model, which also has the same room with a model in it, infinitely reoccurring. The repetition of the building within the building combines with a fluctuation in scale, to produce a *katascopic* and *anasopic* perspective, provoking disorientation which Jencks suggests is an attribute of the uncanny, a “fundamental insecurity brought about by a lack of orientation” (Vidler, 1992, p.23). The painting transports the viewer into the Centre, calling into question their location. This push and pull of scale, orientation and perception continues with the materiality of the thickly applied paint, which interrupts the viewer’s gaze from ‘seeing through’ the medium to the image. This notion of ‘seeing through’, which has its roots in Renaissance perspective systems as examined by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise on painting ‘*De pictura*’ (1435), engenders what Rosalind Krauss describes as an “it’s, response: it’s a portrait, it’s a landscape...” (Elkins, 2011, p.19). The paintings in this study often use gesture and mark to break that pictorial deception, encouraging the observer towards a dual perception of the painting as both object and image. By doing this, the work aims to encourage new ways of seeing and thinking about the relationship between the painting and the subject, presenting within the painting a deeper encounter with the Merrion Centre as experienced and remembered by the artist.

### **Re-implacement**

These ideas build on the close connection between a painting and the place it represents, suggesting a porosity between fieldwork, memory, experience and studio practice, with the artist as a conduit. For this study, which seeks to examine what kinds of understanding painting might offer of place, these notions of correspondence, agency and transference suggest paintings of place can become more than just a representation, that they can offer a thicker understanding of a location by becoming a locus for the artist’s lived experiences of place through processes of re-implacement. The notion of re-implacement forms an integral part of this study’s response to the research questions as it suggests that paintings of place have the potential to “bring forth into the open clearing of its presentation the display of its own presence ... something beyond itself” (Casey, 2002, p.251). This is something Casey suggests can be observed “only in drawings or etchings or



paintings” (Casey, 2002, p.170). He goes on to propose that it is through playful exploration without any sense of an end goal, that artists re-create the presence of place, transforming the work beyond representation to become a self-presented place in its own right. The emphasis here is on the notion of ‘for itself’ playfulness and experimentation found within the process of painting. This playfulness becoming a method for paintings to transcend the world as representation and become “a place of presentation for this world” (Casey, 2002, p.254). In this concept, the viewer is not a passive observer looking in but an active participant looking out from within, in a correspondence (joining with): the artist, the painting and place.



Fig 150. Top, P. *Threepenny Bit*. <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/621426448578603857/>

In relation to this, the painting ‘The Chairs’ (fig 151) developed from the experience of visiting a conference room in the Merrion Hotel. The building which housed the conference room was an octagonal shaped Brutalist structure, with striking modular windows which give it a space age aesthetic (fig 150). Known locally as the ‘Threepenny Bit’ due to its form, the building had opened in 1965 as a pub called the ‘General Wade’, eventually becoming the ‘Nautical wheel’ in 1979, with its upper floor later used by the Merrion Hotel as a conference room.

The buildings architectural peculiarities had always been of interest, so it was something of a pleasant surprise, whilst exploring the hotel, to gain access to this

strange space. The painting 'Chairs' attempts to give a sensation of being in this uncanny structure. The viewpoint places the participant at the threshold to the room, with the perspective of the chairs creating a convincing depth to the space, which combined with the low-level lighting of a torch light, draws the eye further into the room. The chairs were carefully laid out in rows, with some left askew as though recently used, suggesting the activity of a past event. The white mould stains on the chairs add to the sense of neglect and abandonment found in this space. Signalling the slow passage of decay, the mould also points to hidden non-human activity which proliferates within the hotel. The painting seeks to visceral connect the participant viewer to the space, evoking the musky odour of mould and the intense, silent presence which can only be found in vacated places which have been cut off from the outside world for a long time. It feels intrusive to enter this heterotopic space, where time has accumulated, slowed down, and become compressed. There is an expectancy in the rooms layout, as though wandering into an absurd theatrical production with the chairs acting as proxy for their earlier occupants.



Fig 151. Stone, A. 2020. *The chairs*. [Oil on canvas].60cm x 81cm

The possibility of paintings moving beyond representation is a subject explored by Judith Tucker who speculates that paintings can be a “way of mediating the external

world which offers the possibility or bridge for some sort of possibility of fusion between the internal and the external” (Tucker, 2002, p.73). In this way, paintings can become an intersection between the memory and experiences, a real place in their own right, which can be inhabited by participant viewers. An example of this type of experience is found in a short statement given by one online viewer in relation to the painting ‘The Chairs’, “It feels like I am in the room feeling the atmosphere” (wendyronaldsonfineart, 2020). This response suggests that the painting conveys something of the original lived experience, an embodied perception of being there in the space. This resonates with what Deleuze termed the ‘encountered sign’ which describes a sensory rather than cognitive response, highlighting the potential of painting to transmit a felt experience. Writing on Francis Bacon, Deleuze sees the painter as engaged with articulating sensation to the viewer through a playfulness with medium, affecting the viewer viscerally (Bennett, J, 2005, p.38). It is this type of deeply felt emotional and sensorial connection, provoked through the medium of painting, which this study argues becomes a vital mechanism for the paintings in the investigation to directly articulate new understandings of the Centre.

### **Chapter Summary**

In responding to the research questions, this chapter sought to interrogate painting practice and paintings developed during the study. It set out to critically examine in what ways paintings combined with the various research activities towards new understandings of the Merrion Centre. Reviewing the varied practical approaches used to develop the work, it is argued that the paintings should be seen as a site of intersection where memory, experience and materials combine to investigate the Centre. The research highlighted distinctive areas within the site and reviewed the varied field work practices and documentation approaches which contributed to the painting of these different places. It was noted that photography significantly informed the development of the work. Recognising that different types of photographs, such as aerial archive footage and onsite snapshots in combination with digital editing techniques, offered alternative readings of the Centre. Additionally, it was suggested that onsite fieldwork activities, such as walking and loitering, had a key influence upon the outcome of the photographs and that both

these elements were central to the development of the paintings. Reviewing studio-based activities, it was also argued that projection processes had a significant impact on the paintings, proposing that the layering of successive images signified a temporal collapse, which gave the work an immediacy and revealed the layered character of place.

This chapter also touched on the significant role of memory within the painting process, acknowledging that embodied memories established through lived experience, coupled with personal childhood recollections and film memory could potentially be transmitted through the indexical properties found within paintings. In addressing some of the concerns of the research questions, this chapter proposes that paintings can be more “than a substitute for the experience in the location” (Tucker, cited in Durrant, 2007, p.64). This is achieved through the correspondence and reciprocity between ourselves and our environment, which the artist, can re-implace within paintings through “for its self” (Casey, 2002, p.254)) material experimentation.

## Chapter 6: Memory of Place



Fig 152. Abraham and Dora Levine Entry Books. At: Taryn Rock Archive

Abraham and Dora travelled to Leeds in 1901 from Polotsk, Russia (now Belarus). They lived above their Grocers shop in Camp Road (fig 153), with their daughter Annie and her husband Max. This locality was redeveloped to make way for the Merrion Centre and other schemes during the 1950s and 1960s.



Fig 153. Levine & Sons: Grocers Shop, Camp Road, Leeds. Camp Road grocers shop registered to Abraham and Dora Levine.



Fig 154. Leeds Library and Information Services Static Water Supply, Merrion Street, 1941, Leodis <https://www.leodis.net/>

11th September 1941 Water supply tank on Merrion Street, this had been the site of the Albion Brewery, now the Merrion Centre. Property to the left is on Wade Lane, block of shops to the right is Merrion Street. (Leeds Library and Information Services Static Water Supply, Merrion Street, 1941, <https://www.leodis.net/>)



Figure 155. West Yorkshire Archive services Claremont Place no .17 1949. Leodis <https://www.leodis.net/viewimage/98732>

1949 On the right is a semi-demolished number 17 Claremont Place. Other houses are derelict with bricked up windows and doors. Just visible behind number 17 is Claremont Terrace. This area was demolished in the 1950s and redeveloped into the Merrion Centre. The image was taken in late 1949. ( West Yorkshire Archive services Claremont Place no .17 1949. <https://www.leodis.net/>)



Fig 156. West Yorkshire Archive Services, Rockingham Street, 1946, Leodis <https://www.leodis.net/viewimage/62309>

1st August 1946. Looking south at corner with Cross Rockingham Street. No 3, premises of H. Weiss Turf Commission Agent, and "Equitable Gent's Hairdresser". Striped barber's pole projecting from doorway of the three storey fake stone faced building. Suited man wearing trilby standing in doorway. Centre, older brick built workshop, faint wall sign reads "J. Rogall and Sons, Confectionery Works". Gas lamp with two boys, to their right, upper loading bay door with pulley. Section of housing marked "L. Nathan". Ginnel between houses, cobbled street. Now site of Merrion Centre. (West Yorkshire Archive Services, Rockingham Street, 1946. <https://www.leodis.net/>)



Fig 157. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Queens Place, undated, Leodis <https://www.leodis.net/>

Undated, Image shows a row of back-to-back terraced properties separated between numbers 68 and 70 by a shared outside toilet yard. The area is derelict and run down, windows are smashed and missing while walls crumble. During the 1950s and 60s the area would be demolished and redeveloped as the Merrion Centre. (West Yorkshire Archive Service, Queens Place. <https://www.leodis.net/>)



Fig 158. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Queen's Place numbers 85-91, undated, Leodis. <https://www.leodis.net/>

Undated. This view shows a small square off Queen's Place formed by numbers 85 - 91. On the left is the side of 83 with 85 next. The door in the centre is number 87 (85 and 87 went through to Cobourg Street at 82, 80). On the right side are 89 and 91. Photo taken before clearance to provide land for the Merrion Centre development and the Inner Ring Road.

(West Yorkshire Archive Service, Queen's Place, nos 85-91, <https://www.leodis.net/>)



Fig 159. Leeds Library & Information Services Albion Brewery Yard, 1937, Leodis. <https://www.leodis.net/viewimage/77087>

28th October 1937. Situated at the junction of Woodhouse Lane and Merrion Street, former Albion Brewery premises. On the left property used by H. Nendrick, Decorator. Some residential property is also visible. Albion Brewery had opened in 1897 and closed in 1933, the buildings were demolished in 1939 and the site is now part of the Merrion Centre. (Leeds Library and Information Service, <https://www.leodis.net/>)

My descendent worked there in 1861 until 1901. Source England census, in 1861, 1871, 1881, 1901, so it was operating long before the stated opening date of 1897.

Chris, 2012. Albion Brewery Yard, <https://www.leodis.net/>





Fig 160. *Brunswick Terrace/ Wade Passage excavation, 1965.*[Photograph]. Leodis. <https://www.leodis.net/>

Circa 1965. This view shows site excavations for the new building as part of the Merrion Centre development scheme by Town Centre Securities Ltd., a successful Leeds based property company led by Arnold Ziff. Brunswick Terrace is in the background and at number 32, left of centre, is R.S. Whitworth, a manufacturer of uniforms. (Leeds Library and information service, <https://www.leodis.net/>)

This was the former site of the Albion Brewery which had a deep water well below ground level in the 1800s.

Cohen, S.2012. Brunswick Terrace, <https://www.leodis.net/>



Fig 161. *Construction of Merrion Centre,1964.* [Photograph]. At: Town Centre Securities Archive



Fig 162. Yorkshire Post Newspapers, Merrion Hotel and the Merrion Centre, 1966. Leodis. <https://www.leodis.net/>

8th November 1966. Image shows the newly built Merrion Hotel and Merrion Centre as seen from Wade Lane. The Merrion Hotel opened on 12th January 1966.



Fig 163. Image shows the same view (fifty-five years later) as shown in fig 162 of the Merrion Hotel and Merrion Centre, taken from the intersection of Merrion street and Wade Lane.

## **Introduction**

We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.  
 Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*.

Nora's concern for the atrophy of memory forms part of a growing contemporary debate on the collapse of memory through the commodification of history and the emergence of new digital technologies which are viewed as eroding 'real' memory (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010). This chapter seeks to reveal in what ways memory reveals itself within practice, drawing together and examining the various ways in which memory has shown itself within the study. As memory studies is an extensive field crossing many disciplinary boundaries, this chapter will only focus on discourse with direct implications for painting practice and the Merrion Centre. This will include a number of speculative texts on memory by leading thinkers on the subject, exploring notions of the lived experience and 'vanished memory' as proposed by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010.p123). It will also consider the relationship between memory and perception, through the writing of Bergson, Deleuze and Noé, as well as examining the implications of individual and collective memory in relation to places of memory, as discussed by Pierre Nora.

### **Memory in Practice**

Throughout the investigation, memory appeared so ubiquitous it seemed a fundamental medium, connecting and lubricating the processes and techniques of creative practice as well as operating through site visits and archive research. An example of its centrality within practice is seen in the use of procedural memory which develops through years of repetition and training. This type of memory was key to the development of the paintings, established through prior knowledge and understanding of different processes, materials and mediums, as well as through retaining new knowledge and practical skills acquired during the making of the paintings. Thought to be activated through kinaesthetic, embodied and performative practices, this memory is formed through a dynamic learning process of "spontaneous transparent coping" (Dreyfus cited in Radstone and Schwarz, 2010, p.225). This notion of knowledge through action corresponds with ideas discussed earlier in the study in relation to Schön and the generative potential of practice

described by Bolt. The activity of memory was also recognised within the making of the work, through the remembering of earlier site visits which occurred whilst painting from the photographs in the studio. Triggered by time spent working on projected images of the Centre, these returns to the moment of being in place were vague fragments of visual, auditory and sensory experience. The images, taken in situ contained a personal connection, perhaps what Barthes termed the ‘punctum’ and gave an opportunity to dwell at great length on an earlier lived moment. Painting these experiences drew a direct relationship between the site and the studio.

### **Embodied Memory**

The operations of embodied memory and the porosity between body and environment were discussed at length in chapter three in relation to fieldwork activities. This discussion used New Materialist thinking to understand the body as enmeshed within its locality, that body and place are inseparably intertwined. This was seen to be an important foundational concept, which was returned to earlier in this chapter in support of a claim for the reading of paintings as place and the potential for the re-implacement of place within the painting. These notions of place and memory appear to be tightly bound; however, it was noted that at times during the fieldwork there was “a discord between memory and site” (Sillars, 2011, p.23). This was felt as a sense of detachment from a space once known yet strangely unfamiliar. Previously noted in relation to visiting the Merrion Cinema, this uncanny sensation of the return to a known place is also explored by the painter George Shaw.

Wandering the lost landscape of his youth with his father on the Tile Hill estate in Coventry, Shaw represents the tarmac, broken-down garages and concrete school buildings that populate many of my own memories of growing up in the suburbs during the 1970s. They seem both generic, connecting to a collective memory of that era and simultaneously deeply personal, reflecting what often seems a melancholic return to once familiar territory. The painting ‘Back of the Club 2’ (fig 164) shares a common interest in the concrete Brutalist buildings of that time and similarly examines the uneasy tranquillity of the quotidian. Besides the visual differences in representation of place, Shaw’s interest in memory contrast with that of this study through a sense of nostalgia for a lost past, whereas in this study there is an attempt

to revitalise and reconcile the past with the present towards a new understanding of place.



Fig 164. Shaw, G. 2001. *Back of the Club 2*, [Oil on canvas]. At: Private Collection.

### **Remembering and Forgetting**

In the study, remembering and forgetting became important ways of understanding place. Initially the Merrion Centre had seemed an unlikely site for individual or community memories to take hold because of the continual turnover of retailers, its many years of redevelopment and its mutability as a busy retail space. The geographer Edward Relph, writing on ‘placeless places’, recognises a loss of connection with our environment brought about by “the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that result from an insensitivity to the significance of place” (Relph, 1976, cited in Seamon and Sowers, 2008, p.4). Foreshadowing this situation, the theorist Siegfried Kracauer writing in the 1930s, describes Berlin as “the embodiment of empty flowing time, where nothing persists” (Radstone & Schwarz, p.123). He suggested that the excessive pace of economic and technological change was causing people’s lives and environments to become fundamentally unstable. In Kracauer’s opinion, this instability included a lack of continuity of place which was leading to individual and cultural amnesia. In relation to this study, such forgetting was evident in the online discussions about the Centre, through anecdotes which misremembered places,

events and pub names, sometimes even confusing the Centre with other places. As will be discussed later in the chapter, it is to some extent this loss of “real environments of memory” (Farrar, 2011, p.729) and cultural amnesia spurred by the proliferation of temporary place which prompts Nora to investigate the ‘lieux de mémoire’.

Forgetting was also revealed through the study in flawed personal recollections of different areas of the Centre, for instance the lobby and stairwell in the Merrion cinema, which as a child seemed larger and grander than they were in more recent visits. It was also apparent through visits to the mini market, always getting lost in the maze of shops. This type of disorientation and confusion was perhaps unsurprising in light of the fluid nature of the site, in its continual redevelopment which gradual concealed its Brutalist design to keep up with contemporary taste. The paintings ‘Making Place’ (fig 144) and ‘Build’ (fig 143) discussed in the previous chapter, are two works in the study which reflect this notion of disorientation through the layering of images from different time frames. In these paintings, time and place become fractured and compressed, with an ambiguous view point making it confusing to locate the viewers position in place.

Correspondence with the artist Robbie Bushe brought new understandings of how these ideas of misremembering and recollection can be understood within a contemporary painting practice. For Bushe, “forgetting is as important as ‘remembering’ in the role of conjuring up events, periods, places and threads from my past, as visualised paintings” (Bushe, cited in Stone, 2021). His work operates in the interstitial space between remembering and forgetting in which the gaps in memory, far from being a problem, become an opportunity for improvisation and revision of the past. In ‘Learney Incantations’ (fig 165) Bushe mines fragmented childhood memories, excavating, aggregating and rewiring his past through frenetic drawings and paintings which he suggests are “enabling and extending the memory as an event which travels with us rather than a moment in time” (Bushe, cited in Stone, 2021). In this way, the paintings become a threshold for visual speculation on places of memory, with the collaborative activities of the painter and materials, a way of becoming “conversant and fluid with the memory until it becomes a thing, an event it itself, which exists now” (Bushe, cited in Stone, 2021). This notion of

practice as a way of teasing out and re-acquainting one-self with faded memories is an insightful perspective which has resonance with paintings in the study such as ‘Late shift’, where distant recollections fused with more recent experiences of the same place. When painting ‘Late shift’, there was a sense of this dissipating memory drawing closer and coming back into focus, but perhaps this was a rewriting of the past, filling in the holes of a past which cannot ever be fully reclaimed. What can such paintings tell us about place and memory? Bushe suggests his paintings are not just a surrogate or sign for his memories, or a way to get to a given truth. Instead, he proposes that they become a part of the original memory, in some cases overwriting or even erasing those earlier memories. This notion of rewriting the past plays out in subsequent visits to the Centre, in which completed paintings become part of the memory of the site. I often find myself lingering in areas which have been the subject of a painting, matching what is seen with what was painted. Often, it is noted that things have changed, furnishing have been moved or structural alterations have been made, highlighting the Centre’s temporality. In this sense, the paintings have also become places of memory.



Fig 165. Bushe, R. 2021. *Learney Incantations (Tornaveen)*, [Oil on canvas]. At: Private Collection.

### **Lived Memory**

As found in this study, lived memory offers a less linear understanding of the past than a photograph. As a composite of fleeting personal impressions, it provides a broader less detailed and often disjointed recollection of an experience. The memory image has an ‘innerness’ or depth which cannot be conveyed through a photograph and its persistence through time relies upon the continued presence of those who remember. The depth of these fragmented memory images is of a sensorial, experiential nature, a having ‘being there-ness’, which is often unexpectedly triggered by a corresponding experience or smell. In contrast to the spectral memory image the photograph can be printed, scrutinised, magnified and edited.

In the exhibition ‘The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art’ (Roelstraete, 2013) Dieter Roelstraete recognises the contemporary “historiographic impulse in art” (Roelstraete, 2013, p.21) for archival research. He suggests that such research often digs up “facts, snippets of non-knowledge unearthed from the recent past” (Roelstraete, 2013, p.21). This critique of what the archive might offer is developed further in another essay from the exhibition, ‘The Art of the Past: Before and after Archaeology’ (Russell, 2013), in which Ian Alden Russell questions photography’s authenticity, highlighting how archaeological photography had been used “for documenting and registering a ‘real’ past ... fostering an illusion that the past could be made to appear real, to appear present” (Russell, 2013, p.302). These perspectives challenge culturally held assumptions on the truthfulness of the photographic image and the integrity of the archives from which they emerge. Perhaps then, it is through the previously mentioned lived memory of individual experience that a closer connection with the past may be drawn.

In relation to this, Benjamin argues for memory’s superiority in a search for knowledge and truth, suggesting that memory is more than an ‘instrument for exploring the past, it is a medium of that which is experienced’ (Bullock, Jennings et al, 2005). In this sense, a genuine memory should reveal as much about the person remembering as it does about the past. He also suggests that one of the actions of memory is an involuntary unearthing of the unconscious which explosively connects now with then, unexpectedly returning us to an earlier time. In addressing the research question, this activity of memory resonates within the practice, especially



through the unexpected moments of remembering, effected through fieldwork and also when back in the studio making paintings of the Centre. It relates to re-emergent traces of embodied memory from childhood, triggered by a return to the place of the original experience as seen in paintings like 'Night shift' and those made in reference to the Merrion cinema.

### **Photography and Memory**

Writing on photography, Kracauer claims that misguided perceptions of photography's superiority to human memory have led to a loss of cultural remembering. In his analysis of photographs, Kracauer argues that, despite their detailed rendering, photographs lack essential content, tracing an emergent present within the continuum and so recording little more than the surface of a moment.

For Barthes, the fleeting mimetic qualities of a photograph produce in the viewer "a micro- version of death" (Barthes, 1981, p.15), "the subject of the photograph is always in the shadow of death: the photographic image is a testament to what-has-been-but-is-no-longer." (Barthes, cited in Lury, 1998, p.86). Kracauer also sees death within the photograph, albeit a deferred passing, through its physical presence beyond living memory. Eventually, through time the photograph becomes an empty husk, meaningless to an audience that can no longer connect with the represented events. In this way, photographs eventually enter the modern archive, converted to the binary code of digital memory for ethnographic purposes as part of a 'prosthetic culture' (Lury, 1998). For Benjamin, the brief recognition photography affords, "offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars" (Benjamin cited in Lury, 1998, p.36). This reading of the photographic image certainly applies to the temporal distance of the found archive photographs, which do not give a lived understanding of how it was at the time. However, the photographs taken on site bridge this gap, become a more intimate aid to memory, through correspondence with my own lived memory of the original event.

### **Augmented Memory**

Benjamin also recognised a shared reflective quality within photography, film and lived memory, where the disinterested lens unconsciously captures everything in its field of vision and only later, upon development and reflection, is an understanding

achieved. He further suggested the potential for photography and cinema to augment memory by offering a permanent recording, arguing that:

The techniques based on the use of the camera and of subsequent analogous mechanical devices extend the range of the *mémoire volontaire*; by means of these devices they make it possible for an event at any time to be permanently recorded in terms of sound and sight (Benjamin, cited in Farr, 2012, p229).

For Benjamin, memory becomes a tool of class oppression where the false memories of mass-produced mementos create hollowed out ‘objectifications of vacated memory’ (Radstone & Schwarz, p.132). More positively, he also recognised that such technologies offer a new level of perception and understanding of modern life through the use of slow motion and close up techniques, discussed earlier in relation to the optical unconscious. As previously noted, this use of digital technology in combination with photography helped to uncover small details and micro-histories found on the margins of photographs.

### **Edgelands**

Developed in tandem with this research into memory and practice were a series of small paintings entitled ‘Peripherals’ discussed in Chapter one and ‘Edgelands’ (figs 166,167, 169-172). These works experimented with painting sections of lost urban landscapes found on the periphery of selected archive photographs, a process which helped to contextualise the Centre as a new and dramatic presence in the urban landscape of Leeds. The paintings in the series ‘Edgeland’ are very small in scale, hiding the fact they were actually substantially enlarged fragments of barely perceptible areas of the original image. Digitally projected at a large scale, the images became pixelated patterns making the forms virtually unreadable. Reconstructing these images through the analogue of paint, mark and gesture combined with a shift from monochrome to colour acted as a process of reanimation, giving them the “now or recognisability, [which] illuminates the past in the present” (Lury, 1998, p.36). The handleable dimensions of the paintings echoed their photographic origins, but was contradicted by the depth of the reclaimed timber supports, which gave the paintings the weight, density and presence of an object. The paint partially concealed the materials earlier history as a window sill, although

the pitted and scarred surface of the wood, a product of decades of weathering, lent the paintings a textural quality and the gravity of compressed time that is impossible to fake. The traces of erosion and material decay offer a different type of memory of place to that found in the modern photograph. This is a memory which is etched into the material over time, an index of accumulated environmental history.

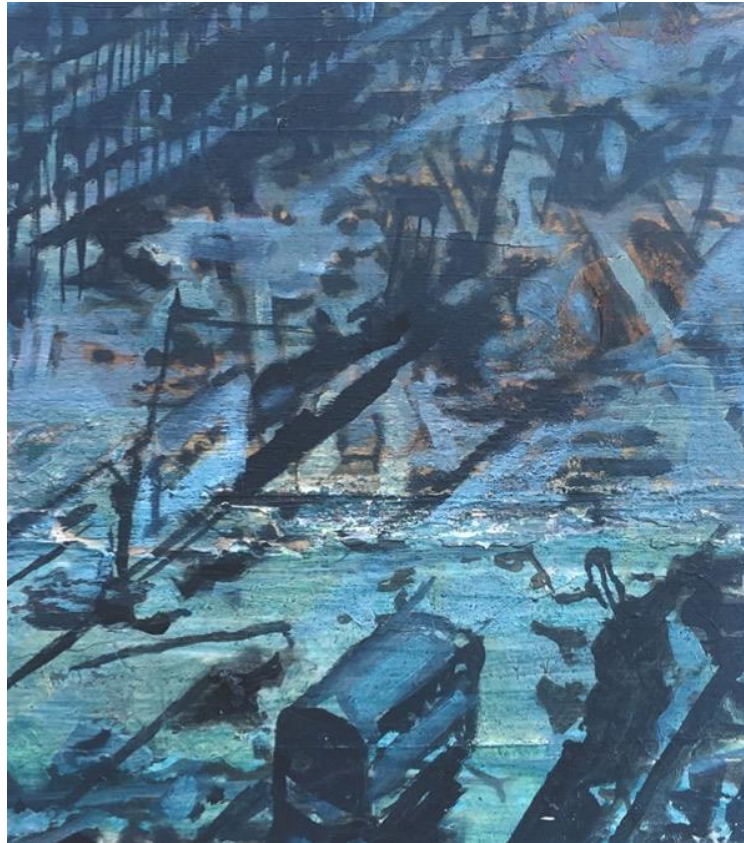


Fig 166. Stone, A. 2019. *Edgelands I*, [Oil on board]. 14cm x 16cm.

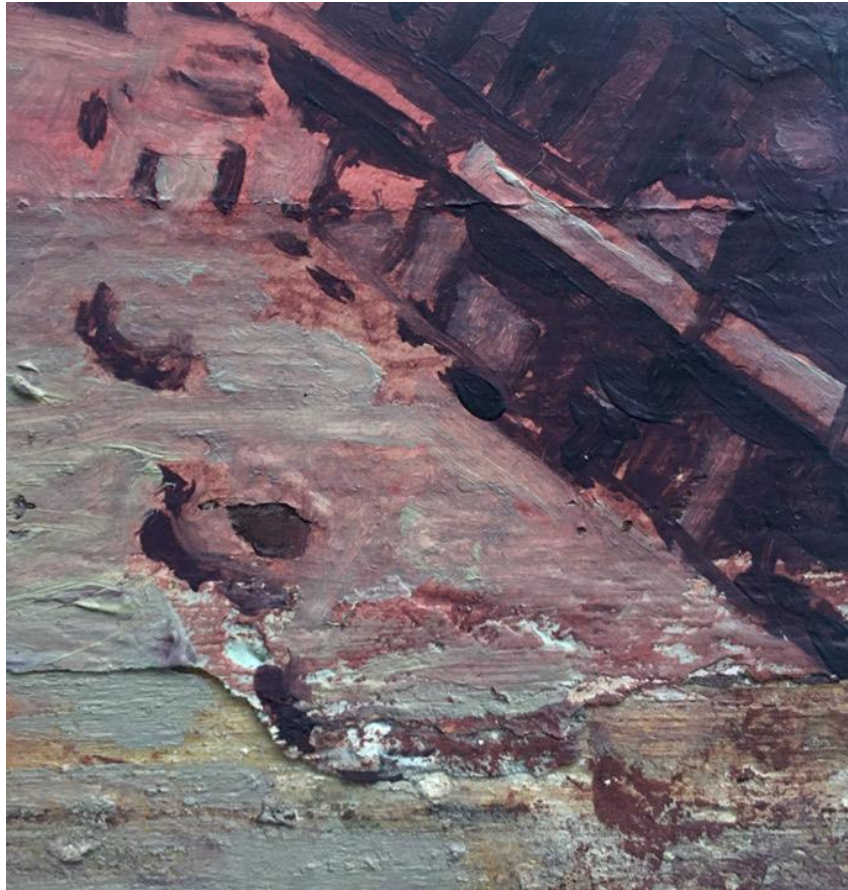


Fig 167. Stone, A. 2019. *Edgelands 2*, [Oil on board]. 7cm x 7cm.

### **Material Memory**

Thinking further about the materials within practice and the memory residing within them, it was noted that there was a collaborative nature to the paintings which involved ‘working with’ the mediums and processes rather than rigidly imposing upon them. In paintings like ‘Making Place’ (fig 144), tried and tested techniques including projection and tracing combined with more experimental processes of pouring, dragging and spattering which allowed the paint to operate with greater agency. In relation to notions of material memory, it seemed at times, that these inert mixtures of mediums (pigment, oil, turpentine, etc.) which slid, flowed and congealed on the pitted surface, were ‘returning to’ or remembering, a previous more active state of being, perhaps a memory from the manufacturing process or, earlier still, from their origins as raw materials.



Fig 168. Magill, E. 2009. *Blue Hold*, [Oil on Canvas]. At: Private Collection.

The painter Elizabeth Magill explores this material liveliness through her landscape paintings. Often working on the canvases horizontally, Magill encourages layers of paint to wash, pool and spill creating colour fields unconnected to any representational image. As seen in ‘Blue Hold’ (fig 168) traces of this activity are left visible as the image emerges through trial and error, creating a scarred and bruised skin-like surface. This sedimentary process of accumulated pigments and mediums lends Magill’s work a geological quality through which they become not just “paintings of landscapes they are also landscapes of paintings”. (Wilson, 2004). The subjects in Magill’s work are sourced from photographs, memories and imagination but they appear to have grown like bacteria from an accumulation of paint, grounded in the surface not on the surface. The balance between making a picture and a painting is delicately achieved through sensitivity to the materials allowing for controlled application whilst permitting a looser playfulness, causing a visual tension between the spatial illusion and the surface materiality.

It is these same tensions between process, materiality, representation and surface which are found within paintings in this study such as the 'Edgeland' series and the construction series from the Centre's development. In this sense, within these paintings several types of memory are seen to intersect. These include: the ingrained history of the wood through its trajectory to window sill and then painting surface, the memory of the reanimated photograph through its transformation from chemical to digital to paint and the memory and absent presence of the maker, presented through the varied marks and gestures from which the paintings are constructed. Within this reading there are also the historical trajectories of the pigments and other materials which collaborate in the work, their histories from raw material to tool and medium being equally significant to the existence of the paintings. This accumulation of memories combined with lively passages of paint and translation to non-representational colour animate the images, giving the work a vitality, which transports the scene into the here-and-now, prompting a contemporary reading.



Fig 169. Stone, A. 2019. *Edgelands 3*, [Oil on board]. 7.5 cm x 8cm.

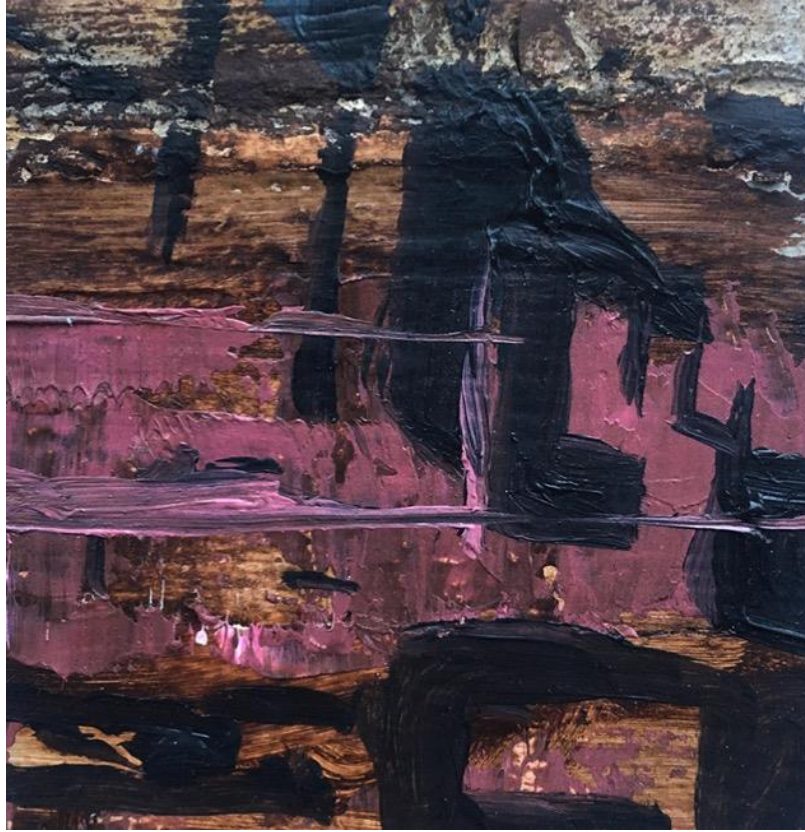


Fig 170. Stone, A.2019. *Edgelands 4*, [Oil on board]. 2019, 7cm x 7cm.

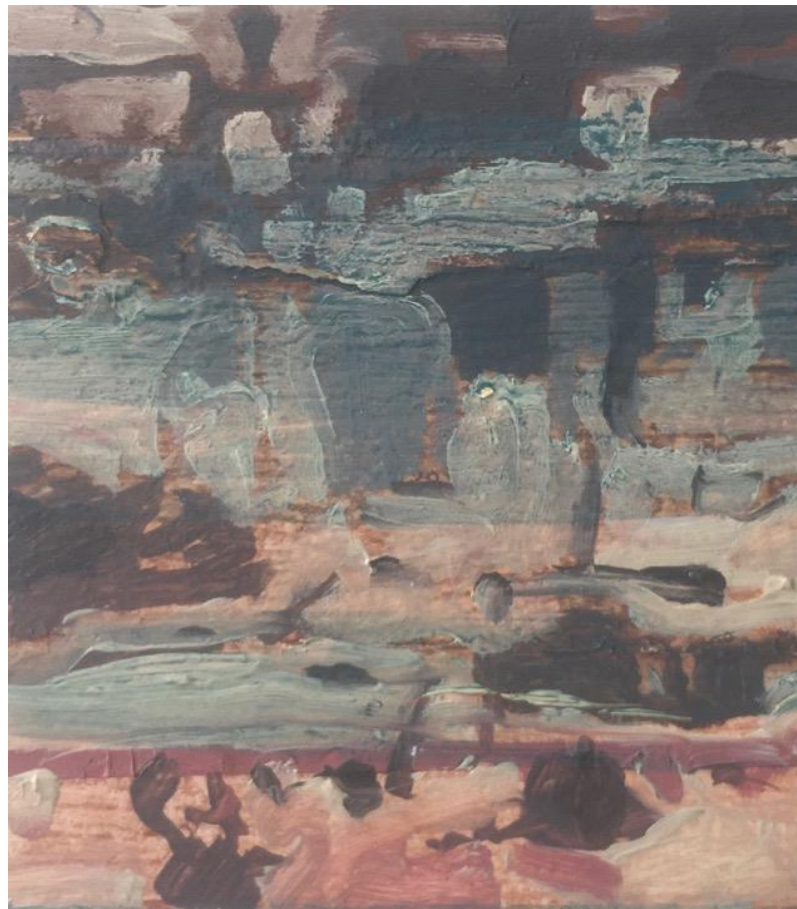


Fig 171. Stone, A.2019. *Edgelands 5*, [Oil on board]. 7cm x 7cm.

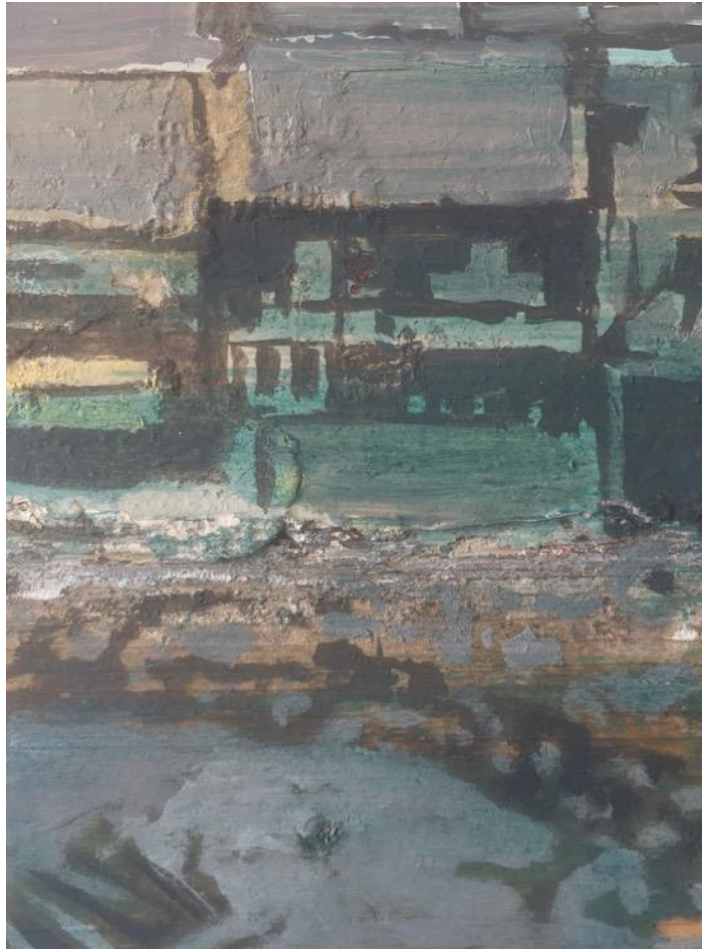


Fig 172. Stone, A. 2019. *Edgelands 6*, [Oil on board]. 7cm x 7cm.

So, what are the implications of these arguments in regard to the painting of place? Reviewing Benjamin, Kracauer, Barthes and others, it would seem the photograph's integrity as an index of the past is questionable, providing a thin, superficial memory of earlier events, a fiction which seems real (Swinnen cited in Elkins, 2007, p.295). Nonetheless, as has previously been noted, photographs can present details of events that would otherwise be lost to the lived experience. This is acknowledged by the contemporary painter Mandy Payne, who sees photographs as useful "to get an accurate representation of what is there before it is lost" (Payne, cited in Stone, 2019) and Robbie Bushe who uses photographs to confirm what was actually there at the time. This reclaiming of memory through photography is also evidenced in the study through the visual manipulation and analysis of the archive photographs. As discussed previously in relation to the *Edgelands* series, this process reveals peripheral details which give an insight into an earlier Leeds, glimpsed through the hoardings surrounding the site, with buses, cars and people caught moving around



the streets adjacent to the site works. An example of a painting which examines such peripheral everyday moments is the piece, 'Players' (fig 173) in which a couple pause for a chat under a smoldering six-foot cigarette, the man in the advert looks upwards to the words 'Only Players please so much'. The image is surprising in relation to contemporary advertising ethics, whilst the curved forms of 1960s car design add to the sense of a scene out of kilter with the modern world. In defence of photography, this type of marginal narrative would otherwise have been lost were it not for the photographic archives which offer an opportunity to resurrect the moment and see again. As Nora argues, "the archive has become the deliberate and calculated secretion of lost memory" (Nora, 1989, p.14), presenting the "anonymous biographies of ordinary people" (Nora, 1989, p.17) a point which will be returned to shortly, in relation to the 'lieux de mémoire'.

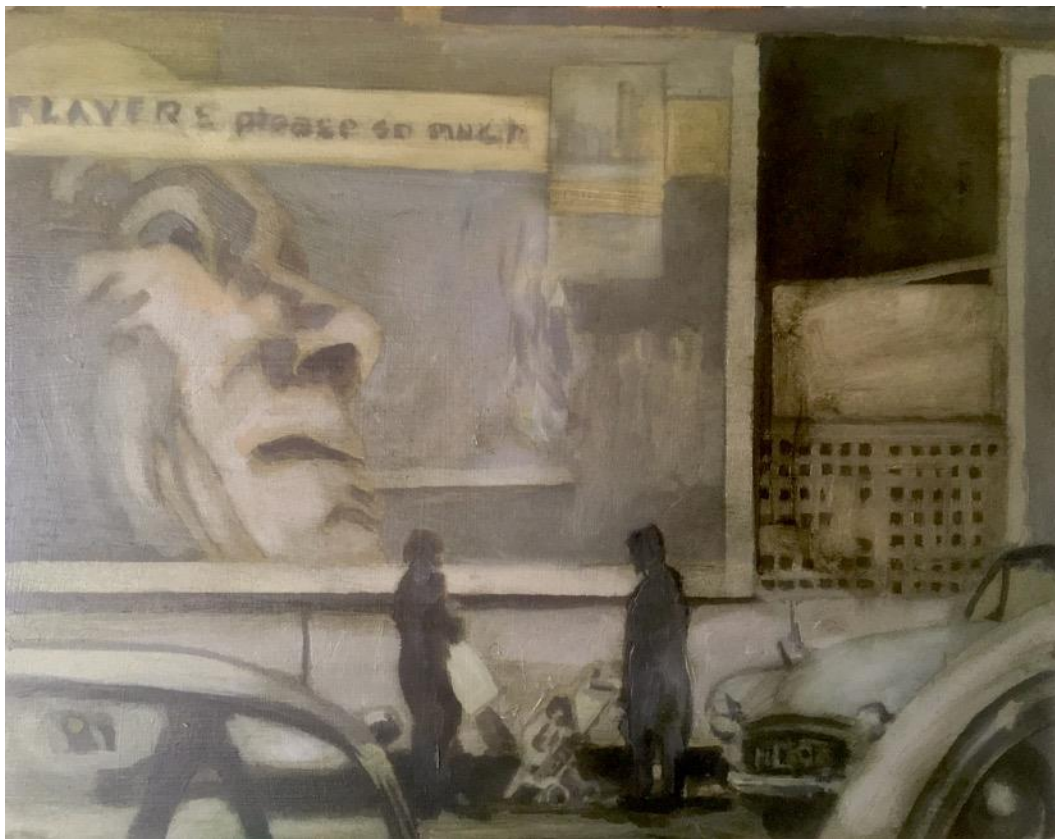


Fig 173. Stone, A. 2017. *Players*, [Oil on board]. 23cm x 29cm.

The painting 'Players' is significant in that it was one of the few construction photographs from the archive which had been taken at ground level. This made it possible to stand in the spot from which the original photograph had been taken. Visiting the site of the original photograph provokes what Sillars describes as "a discord between memory and site" (Sillars, 2011, p.23), an uncanny sensation of the

familiar unfamiliar, of standing in both the past and the present of a transformed place. In relation to this, Bergson notes an “intermediary or mixed memory...halfway between pure memory and memory re-inscribed in perception at the stage where recognition blossoms in the feeling of Deja-vu” (Farr, 2012, p.14). This feeling of being between times occurred often whilst wandering the Centre and whilst painting in the studio, suggesting a close bond between these two activities. At these moments, the past seems to have returned to the present. Husserl recognised our potential to consciously be in several time zones at any given moment, that we might be aware of a perceptual present, “built up by impression, retention and protention (expectation)” (Birnbaum, cited in Farr,2012, p.139) whilst simultaneously recollecting a past. Daniel Birnbaum suggests this ‘Temporal Polyphony’ (Birnbaum, cited in Farr, 2012, p.140) is a state of consciousness we all experience continuously due to the nature and flow of time and our immersion within a perpetually unfolding world.

### **Les Lieux de Mémoire**

The research identifies the Merrion Centre as a place of memory and of forgetting. This is seen through its symbolic value as a city landmark known by generations of locals and remembered by online communities. It is also argued that the Centre’s physical presence prompts personal involuntary memories and that within the site can be found the marks and traces of previous communities as well as the secreted memories of more recent events. The Centre’s archive, in which decades of data about the site’s history have accumulated, contributes to this notion of the Centre as a place of memory. Writing on the subject of the archive in ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire (1989), Pierre Nora identifies important differences between archived history and individual memory. For Nora, the archive is seen as “sifted and sorted historical traces” (Nora,1989, p.8) contrasting with memory, which is described as “experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral” (Nora,1989, p.8). Echoing Kracauer, Nora sees cultural acceleration as the root cause of this “rapid slippage of the present into a historical past” (Nora,1989, p.7), resulting in memory’s displacement to partisan views of history, as found within contemporary archives, museums and data clouds. Assmann terms this shift, ‘objectivised culture’ where:

the group relationship and the contemporary reference are lost and therefore the character of this knowledge as a *memoire collective* disappears as well. “Memoire” is transformed into “histoire” (Assmann, 1995, p.128).

The Merrion Centre archive, with its less formal collection of news clippings, historical objects and customer memories does allow for a broader perspective of the Centre’s history, yet inevitably its collating and editing of footage casts a particular light on the site’s legacy making it a micro-version of the legitimised history which concerns Nora. In contrast, as noted in previous chapters, the individual memories found through online forums, by talking to those who knew the site well and through personal experiences of onsite fieldwork, are what Nora describes as true memory:

which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body's inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories, and memory transformed by its passage through history (Nora, 1989, p.13).

These are memories by those that have a lived experience of the site, whose identities have in some way been affected by that experience and whose presence has (however imperceptibly) been left within the Centre. Maurice Halbwaches termed these types of shared oral histories ‘communicative memory’, a collective of lived experiences which demonstrate a close bond between identity, memory and place. In relation to the research, the Centre is inseparably entwined in these community memories, as Trigg suggests, place “is not simply the context on which memories hang, but the very texture of the content itself” (Trigg, 2012, p.53). In this sense, the site remains a place in which ‘memory crystallizes and secretes itself... where a sense of historical continuity persists’ (Nora, 1989). As such, despite the site’s unstable temporality, the Centre continues to act as a powerful, shared place of memory.

### **Chapter Summary**

Having considered the different modes of memory that are active within the Merrion Centre, and through the practice of painting, it seems arguable that the Centre and the paintings could be termed ‘places of memory’. In relation to the Centre, it has been shown that despite its continued redevelopment the site still retains memories through the communities that use it and the everyday events which leave their mark

on the building. It also highlighted how certain areas of site have the potential to trigger the re-emergence of my own memories, remembering and in some cases misremembering earlier visits and places which no longer exist. The sensitivity of memory is also evident in the communities, who through sharing old photographs of the Centre, are able to recall in great detail, people, events and experiences which had occurred decades earlier. By using digital methods to investigate photographs of the Centre found in the archive, it was also possible to uncover obscured details, narratives and micro-histories from the past and examine these further through painting.

Triangulating these accumulated rememberings with the embodied and material memory found within the process of painting suggests a bridge of correspondence exists between site and studio, through which qualities of the place of origin might be reterritorialised, onto and within the painting. This notion of an intimate bond between the Centre and the paintings was broached earlier in Chapter four in relation to re-implacement, where it was argued painting practice could offer a medium through which place could be resituated. What seems evident from this study is the importance of memory to the continuation of place and its significance as a key component in the painting of the Centre.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

In this concluding chapter, the key concerns and findings of this inquiry will be reviewed in relation to the research questions posed at the beginning of the study. These questions sought to interrogate the ways in which embodied painting practice and its outcomes can contribute new knowledge and understanding of both the Merrion Shopping Centre and the broader cultural narratives of everyday place. They also interrogated how photography and fieldwork practices can meaningfully contribute to the interpretation of the Centre and examined how memory might reveal itself within the research. Addressing each of these concerns, this final chapter will draw together and reflect upon key findings and their implications, highlighting how the investigation contributes new knowledge within the fields of painting and place studies. In relation to this, it will argue that a critical aspect of this project's originality relates to how this study's painting practices worked in correspondence with the novel combination of other research approaches used throughout the investigation, it will also consider the value of applying these methods to similar investigations elsewhere. Additionally, it will review speculative exhibitions of paintings from the study, examining their impact upon the development of the research and the significant connections found between the Centre, the studio, the paintings and the exhibitions.

To address the questions posed at the beginning of this investigation the study applied a bricolage methodology, bringing together a specialist research tool-kit specifically tailored for investigating the Merrion Centre. These varied methods of interrogation included the primary approaches of painting and field work which were triangulated with theory from the field of memory and place studies and the practice of contemporary painters with an interest in place. As will be discussed shortly, this integration of diverse research methods had never previously been applied in a study of the Centre and it is argued was an original approach to investigating the site.

### **On Cultural Narratives of Place**

Chapter two offered a detailed review of the research methodologies utilised in the study and established painting as a key method for developing new understandings of the Centre and the broader cultural narratives of place. Research identified the site as an important Brutalist inspired architectural landmark and highlighted how this type of architecture was of increasing interest in contemporary practice as seen through the work of painters Mandy Payne, David Hopher, the printmaker Louise Hayward and the multi-media work of Jane and Louise Wilson and Runa Islam. This chapter also acknowledged the Centre's historical context and examining its legacy as a pioneering retail and leisure development (Watson, 2005), highlighting its socio-economic and cultural importance within the city. The Centre's cultural and spatial identity was analysed further through reference to contemporary discourses on place in the work of Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), Shields (1991), Augé (1995), Lippard (1988) and others. These accounts, coupled with research on the site's history through the Centre's archives and the impassioned memories of local communities in online forums. and onsite fieldwork built a strong argument for the Centre as a place of memory and lived experience. Contradicting previously held assumptions of the site as a homogeneous, 'Non-place' (Augé, 2008), this new perspective highlighted the Centre's 'social centrality' (Lefebvre, 1975), as a community space, harbouring varied spatial textures and characteristics. Applying a quotidian lens to the Centre's varied topography, the study reviewed the site in relation to contemporary theories on the everyday, drawing a comparison with Walter Benjamin's observations of the Parisian Arcades and the spectacle of mass consumerism. Further onsite fieldwork identified several unique peripheral spaces such as the abandoned Merrion Hotel, the Merrion Mini-Market and the derelict Odeon cinema, establishing these as sites of the uncanny and in some areas, such as the cinema, exhibiting heterotopian temporal spatial qualities as outlined by Foucault (1986).

Through this research the Centre was understood as both a layered place of memory and a collective of different types of place. This perspective of the site led to painting in series, with each group of work engaging with specific areas of the site in distinct ways. The collaboration of theoretical and onsite research prompted different painting approaches, such as projection and image montage, to convey

notions of layered place. This unfolding dialogue led to decisions on composition, colour palette, scale and perspective to convey new perceptions of the places being observed. In this way, as will be discussed shortly, the paintings began to articulate an understanding of the Merrion Centre's nuanced spatiality and layered history, presenting it as a heterogeneous mix of different types of place.

### **On Psychogeographic Activities**

Chapter three directly addressed psycho-geographic strategies within painting practice by reviewing onsite experience of walking and documenting the Centre. These forays into place were open to experiences and unfolding situations encountered on the ground, aiming "to give up conscious control, submit to risk and chance, and reveal the unconscious zones of urban life" (Bassett, 2004, p.399). In contrast with the chaotic and unpredictable character of public spaces, the Centre was a managed and orderly environment which presented a superficial ordinariness, the type of place Lefebvre describes as "a representation of space masquerading as a representational space" (Lefebvre cited in McDowell, 1997, p.278). To critically engage with such a carefully managed environment required a sensitivity to the less obvious encounters within the everyday unfolding of the site. This led the research to document fleeting moments of lived experience from within the Centre such as the reflections in shop windows and the traces of human activity through objects found on site.

The fieldwork overlapped with interests in subjectivity, personal memories and the lived experience, with onsite walks creating a familiarity and sensory connection with place and causing involuntary memories of earlier visits. This push and pull of the past and present produced an uncomfortable temporality of a place which is familiar yet not quite as remembered. Navigating the Centre in this way allowed for an open correspondence with the site and its history and helped to develop a familiarity with the less visited areas of the buildings. Photographs from these visits, memories of visiting the Centre and the embodied experiences of walking the site worked together back in the studio to inform and connect the paintings to their subject. It did this partly through the re-emerging memories of experiences triggered by the photographs, but also in a less obvious way through the tacit transference of embodied memory. These were memories acquired through "physical and mental

touching” (Walker Barker, 2007) of a locality and reterritorialized through the process of painting, as discussed by Walker Barker in the introduction. Through this description, Walker Barker appears to be describing sensory memory which Deleuze defines as, “a membrane which puts an outside and an inside into contact, makes them present to each other, confronts them or makes them clash” (Deleuze cited in Bennett, 2005, p. 44). Extending this notion of a reciprocity between body and environment it is then argued that a similar mechanism could articulate these sensory or embodied memories through the activities, processes and mediums of painting, due to the indexical nature and projected quasi-agency of paintings (Graw, 2018).

Taking these ideas a stage further, it is speculated that through the transformative potential of embodied memory and tacit knowing, the paintings in the study are able to advance beyond representation, sign or surrogate, to become a re-implacement of the Centre. This idea builds upon Tucker’s claim that the physical and sensory manipulation of materials within painting create more than a reflective response or illustration of the original experience, instead becoming “a new site of the imagination. The paint becomes both a metaphor for a place and a ‘real’ place in itself” (Tucker, 2002, p.62) a notion which resonates with Casey’s reading of Cézanne, who claims that “a painting is not a separate plane of projection on which representations of the visual world are collected, but is itself a place of presentation for this world- and for us as its direct viewers” (Casey, 2002, p.254). If a painting is to become a place in the world then it relies on the participant observer inhabiting the painting as they do the world. For Ingold, the observer “inhabits these things as he inhabits the world, by moving through and among them, and by participating with his entire being in the generative movement of their formation” (Ingold, 2010, p.22). This movement by the viewer, could be a visual and tactile touching through the marks and gestures of the paintings which echo’s my own movements through the Centre and the active making of the paintings. By inhabiting the paintings in this way, the viewer moves closer to the creative processes and the original experience of the site. These speculations propose that the sensorial experiences of the Merrion Centre can be transferred, contained and sensed within the paintings. They suggest that the paintings combined with the specific fieldwork approaches used in the study



can convey an original perspective by silently articulating embodied memory and sensory experience.

### **On the Activity of Memory**

As well as the embodied memories of being in place, the study also examined memories of the communities who inhabited the land prior to the Centre's construction. The area was found to be of mixed use, including tenement-type housing, workplaces and places of worship as well as more social areas such as the 'Rockingham Arms'. Through research into the Jewish community which lived in the area and through family archives a connection was made with my own ancestry. This research evidenced the site as a place of significance to my own story, but also as an important site of community memory which was corroborated through conversations with a forum member on 'Old Photographs of Leeds', who fondly recalled stories of visiting his father's factory and homes of workers in the area. There were also other stories and recollections found on forums such as Leodis of people working and socialising in the area before the Merrion development. This information showed the Centre as a place in which people made important social connection and had significant life experiences which often shaped their identity. Their memories gave an insight into the Centre's cultural history, as well as illuminating broader, socio-political conditions at different times in the site's history. These varied perspectives suggested that even before the Centre's development, the land had already been a place of memory and that these memories remain in place long after the communities have vanished.

Through the work of Nora, Benjamin and Kracauer, the integrity of the information and memories found in the Centre's archive were questioned. Acknowledging its limitations as a curated space, the study found that there were many different types of memory at work within the archive which could offer a deepening understanding of the site's past and present. This included photographs of the Centres development which acted as memories of past events and the sculpture 'Androgyne', whose weathered surface and angular form had imbued the spirit of the site. The activities of involuntary memory were found within the fieldwork, through which the uncanny familiarity of past childhood visits to the site collided with a similar yet strangely altered present. Exploring this notion of a past which seeps through to the present

were the paintings ‘Making place’ (fig 144) and ‘Build’ (fig 143), which presented a new understanding of the site as a palimpsest through the layering of disjointed timelines from the Centres history. There were also the involuntary memories of revisiting the cinema, where I was momentarily transported back to childhood visits as explored in ‘Stairwell’ (fig 99) and the haunting absent presence of past activity which was found in the Merrion hotel and examined in the paintings ‘Lobby’ (fig 107) and ‘Chairs’ (fig 151).

Memory was also at work in the autoethnographic aspects of the study, evidenced through my own and others experiences of the site, but also in the work of practitioners who held similar interest in place and the everyday. Through correspondence with the artists Mandy Payne and Robbie Bushe it became clear that the activities of memory in their own practice could offer valuable insight into this study. Payne saw experiential memory as a key component of understanding her subjects, “I think it's essential (if you can) to spend time in a location to really get to know (and feel of) a place.” (Payne, cited in Stone, 2019). This approach connected with my own fieldwork strategies mentioned earlier, of walking the site to actively engage with the locality on a sensory level. Such tactics help memories to take root and understand the three-dimensional qualities of the space under investigation. This approach was found to be especially important when working back in the studio with photographs which convey very little of the temporal and relational dynamics of place. Some differences in practice were found with the painter Robbie Bushe, who described how forgetting was equally important to remembering as it allowed for the retracing and creative reconfiguring of the past. This approach contrasted with the painting process in this investigation in which paintings referenced their photographic source more literally. This important dialogue with contemporary practitioners revealed shared interests and differences in the different types of memory at work within practice which will be discussed shortly in relation to the study’s findings and contributions to knowledge.

### **On Photography and the Unconscious**

Often associated with memory, photographs became central to the investigation in documenting the many walks and guided visits made around the Centre during the study. As noted earlier, the amateur snapshot aesthetic of photographs taken in the

main shopping area gave the images a personal and spontaneous quality, a sense of having 'been there'. As discussed, these images were often badly composed, mundane and ordinary scenes, capturing architectural features, traces of human presence or ephemeral phenomena. These quotidian images led to a series of paintings which aimed to express a poignant moment of experience, notably contrasting with the paintings of everyday place by the artist Narbi Price, where the viewer can sense the underlying trauma and hidden narrative embedded within the subject. Mimicking the snapshot photographs, the paintings informed by these images were quickly executed to retain the freshness of the moment and convey what Elkins suggests are the superficial qualities of a snatched instant extracted from the continuum of experience (Elkins, 2007, p.113). In this way the photographs acted as an aide-memoire, but also "a spur, or a prick, that breaches the division between the self and the world." (Pollock,1997,p.4). Corresponding with experiences and memories gleaned from the walks, the photographs prompted remembering and presented details of an event which would otherwise have been lost.

In contrast, the photographs from the archives offered a different perspective, evidencing a world and events from before my time. These images were used in a different way to inform the paintings which included experimenting with digital manipulation such as light dark contrast and tonal value adjustments. Selected areas were magnified and projected on a large scale, this approach allowed previously unseen details and hidden micro-narratives to emerge from the periphery of the images. The magnified and enlarged projection broke down the image into a pixelated grid which was echoed in the underpainting of some of the canvases. This can be seen in the large-scale, blown up construction paintings such as 'Taskscape', in which the landscape became a series of abstract geometric forms, with the painting process transforming the striated digital image into the smooth space of the building site through painterly gestures and sweeping brush strokes. A similar process was adopted on smaller wood panels in the series 'Peripheral' and 'Edgelands' in which painting the subtle spatial shifts and architectural features found in the streets bordering the building site, gave an insight into the Centre's geographical and historical context, as though walking through the terrain. In this

way, the photographs became a temporal threshold and painting from them became a way to touch a time beyond personal experience.

Experimenting with the archive images, site visit photographs and film stills led to a process of layering disjointed time frames within a painting which disrupted the image narrative, obstructed a clear reading of the images and fractured the surface of the paintings. In the paintings ‘Build’ and ‘Making Place’ this montage technique in which the past and present converge conveys the Centre as a palimpsest but also as Mieves suggests (in relation to Idris Khan), causes a temporal compression and representational collapse. This anomaly produces an intense presence in the work which draws the viewer into the painting encouraging the participant to move across and through the folds and ruptures on the surface of the work, sensing the layered temporality of the Centre. This immersive inhabiting of the painting is explained by Casey as “an active collaboration between ourselves as viewers and the painting as a place of viewing, [through which] we enter into the work of art in its full radiance” (Casey, 2002, p.254). These ideas further build the argument for the inhabiting of painting as place, where the work exceeds itself as a place of presentation, becoming a place in itself and transforming into a re-imagined re-implacement of the Centre.

### **Speculative Exhibitions**

During this study, paintings were shown in a solo exhibition ‘Double Vision’, 2018 at the Studio One Gallery, London (fig 174) and a collaborative exhibition ‘Imagined City’, 2020, at The Corn Exchange, Leeds. Presenting the work at these two different venues provided new ways of understanding the paintings and provoked further thoughts on their presentation. In ‘Double Vision’, the gallery was a large converted Victorian house, with an uncanny resemblance to housing found on the land prior to the Centre’s development. A warren of small rooms limited a serial presentation of connected images and forced viewers into a close relationship with individual paintings. This proximity resulted in larger work engulfing the participants’ field of vision, encouraging the spectator to engage closely with the painted surface to examine drips, marks and gestures as though inspecting the topography of a map. This relationship with the picture plane connected the viewer to the painter, emulating their intimacy with the surface. In the exhibition, smaller

paintings informed by onsite fieldwork (fig 177) were presented as a group in an arrangement which sought to echo the saccadic scanning of a visual field, as would be done when walking a locality. This approach worked well to emphasise the ‘snapshot’ qualities of the paintings but diluted the presence of the individual image. This led to alternative presentation approaches as will be discussed shortly in relation to the virtual gallery.

A further significant observation from this exhibition related to the geographical distance of the gallery in London to the original site in Leeds. Presenting the work outside its regional context to an audience that might not be aware of the Centre gave the paintings independence as objects in themselves. Audience memory and personal experiences of the Centre were less likely to contribute to a reading of the work, liberating the viewer to see through the pictorial to the material and the process of making the work. The location also created an awkward tension between the paintings and the original site, as though fragments of the Centre had been relocated to alien territory.

Adam Stone  
Double Vision

Private View Thursday 1 March 6–9pm  
Open weekends 3–11 March 12–6pm

Studio One Gallery  
7–9 Wandsworth Plain  
East Putney  
SW18 1ES  
www.studio1gallery.co.uk  
studio1gallerylondon@gmail.com

studio  
|one  
gallery

Adam Stone the Studio One Gallery, London opening 1st March 2018

Lorca would have told us that a photograph can never possess *el duende*; that quality of human movement that makes something unforgettable. Lorca believed *duende* could be found in all the arts, not just in dance, and that it can only come into existence when someone is totally possessed by an outside of the body experience, one where subject and object are conjoined, where the physical world and the artist merge with the spirit; and when this happens forms arrive as if “shaped like wind on sand” (Lorca, in Berger, 2016, p.99)

The best of Adam Stone’s paintings give to his investigations of a photographic archive that *duende* that Lorca saw as essential to the recreation of a lived experience. Stone’s striving to find a something in the act of painting, means that images arrive and then retreat in a maze of mark-making. Each painting as it emerges through the fragments of a previous image picks up traces of other lives, “enough suggestion of a double life” to ensure that his audience is always engaged. The painter in his painterly dance is at his best at one with his painting, or as Cezanne put it, “At this moment I am one with my picture. We are an iridescent chaos”. (Cixous, 2000, p.588)

Because of a photograph’s supposedly ‘indexical’ relationship with the world, the distinction between image and reality has often been blurred, but by adding a further painted layer Stone opens a door into another reading, one that questions the basic assumption of the relationship between a photograph and reality.

A photograph is seen as evidence of a subject’s existence. But it is also an absence. Its very momentariness makes us aware of the time that was not captured, its framing makes us aware of what was not in the frame. In these spaces and times not recorded lies nostalgia, and in nostalgia we draw away from reality and internalise the world, constructing it of memories and reflections, rather than experiencing as something real. In being shorn of time, a photograph sucks us into it, so that we give to it the time it doesn’t possess.

Stone understands that a second layer of vision is needed in order to construct a base for meaning that was only a possibility in the first; his paintings reach down deeply into the time and spaces that the photographs cut and sliced into and they begin to repair the wounds of absence by giving back the richness of a life’s existence, by hand crafting and leaving traces of a bodily dance embedded into the materiality of oil paint as it runs and smears and is brushed across the ghostly textures of previous images. These are paintings about the difference between reality and what is real, and Stone shows us what it is like to be a ‘real’ painter.

Garry Barker

Fig 174. Exhibition poster ‘Double Vision’ and press release :Garry Barker, 2018.



Fig 175. Exhibition 'Double Vision' 2018, One Gallery, London



Fig 176. Exhibition image 'Double Vision' 2018, One Gallery, London



Fig 177. Exhibition image 'Double Vision' 2018, One Gallery, London

In contrast to 'Double Vision', the exhibition 'Imagined City' was shown in the Corn Exchange in Leeds, which is now a boutique retail site. Built in 1863, its grandiose design and cavernous internal space allowed the paintings to be viewed as a group from a distance (fig 178- 179). The dramatic surroundings made the paintings seem very small whilst the buildings permanent bright pink surrounding walls worked as a complimentary to the teal blue in the paintings 'Wade' and 'Model', pushing these images forwards towards the viewers eye. The opposite was true for the cadmium red hues found in the painting 'Taskscape', which visually appeared to sink backward into the wall. Viewing at a distance the buildings original text which surrounded the space, "We build firm foundations that turn into skyscrapers", serendipitously acted as a subliminal message which resonated with the concerns of the paintings.



Fig 178. Exhibition 'Imagined City', 2020, Corn Exchange, Leeds



Fig 179. Exhibition 'Imagined City', 2020, Corn Exchange, Leeds

The paintings provoked a tension between the Corn Exchange and the Merrion Centre, they were a message from a future which had already arrived, a new type of consumerism which would erase the Exchange if it failed to adapt. The friction between the past and present was amplified by the pink walls and the ring of iron railings, this dialogue brought into sharp focus how at the time of the Centre's construction this vision of the future must have seemed shockingly new in relation to its Victorian surroundings.

Further thinking about these exhibitions led to speculation of how the paintings might operate within the Centre, for instance placing the painting 'Lobby' in the refurbished hotel or the painting 'Stairwell' into the old Odeon cinema, which is



currently undergoing extensive renovation. Reinstating the paintings back in to their place of origin might create unexpected connections or revelations. What happens for instance, when the uncanny absent presence of the Merrion hotels earlier abandonment, which now inhabits the paintings, comes into contact with the equally unhomely refurbished Ibis hotel? Perhaps the paintings would summon those earlier spectres, or act as a temporal scar through which that earlier absence and decay might infiltrate and propagate. How then might the paintings respond to presentation in a more formal exhibition space within a vacant shop unit? Perhaps presenting these images of the everyday, forgotten memories and uncanny corners of the Centre in a busy public space would intensify their meaning through the contrast of their context. It might also offer the audience an opportunity to look again at a place they unconsciously pass through as a backdrop to their daily lives and recognise its historical value or remarkable character or perhaps its significance to their own narrative.

### **Findings and Contributions**

Having outlined the key areas of interest, the investigation will now review and draw together the research findings and outcomes to demonstrate this study's original contributions within the arena of painting. It will do this in relation to the context of the Merrion Centre as a significant retail development with an important architectural legacy, the novel bricolage of methodologies applied within the investigation, contemporary painting as a valuable research methodology for understanding place and the role of memory within painting practice and presentation. It will also review the presentation of the paintings in a virtual gallery context, discussing the implications and potential for new understandings of the Centre through the translation of the paintings into a digital format.

As previously discussed, Chapter two drew attention to the Merrion Centre's historical importance as a pioneer for a new type of retail experience and recognised its architectural significance as one of a dwindling group of Brutalist buildings remaining in the country. The gradual disappearance of this type of building underscores the importance of this study in relation to the Centre and its architectural legacy offering a timely new contribution to a resurging cultural interest in these iconic buildings. Supporting the claim for this study's originality it

was noted that other than a publication commissioned by the site's developer Town Centre Securities (TCS, 2014), reviewing the Centres history through archive materials and contemporary photographs, the site has never been the subject of a painting-led investigation combining such a specific bricolage of research methodologies including: spatial bricolage; schizocartography; autoethnography; the archive and memory.

To affirm the originality of the project this investigation also conducted a comprehensive review of other painting and place related practice-research studies including: Tucker, J. (2002), 'Painting Landscape: Mediating Dislocation'; Griffiths, R. (2015), 'Re-imagining the Margins: The Art of the Urban Fringe'; Slatter, N. 2015, 'Painting Place: Picturing experience and feeling in the Urban Landscape'; Borg, T. 2016, 'Reading Place'; Dobson, F. 2017, 'Barren (Yeld)'; Richardson, E. 2018, 'Articulating Space' and Price, N. 2019, 'Repainting the Pitmen'. This research highlighted an increasing recognition for the value of combining painting practice with qualitative methodologies and that this approach can yield original contributions to our cultural understanding of place. Although there were many corresponding areas of concern and parallel interests which were found to be of value for this investigation, none of these earlier research projects applied the specific array of methodologies used here in relation to locations comparable to the Merrion Centre. Further research on contemporary discourse on place and the everyday, through the work of key theorists in these fields including: De Certeau (1984); Shields (1991); Daniels (1992); Lippard (1997); Casey (2001, 2002); Augé (2008), Trigg (2012) and Seamon (2018) also informed the research approaches applied in this study. However, it was noted that the use of painting as a primary research method in relation to place was less common within these fields, suggesting that this research can contribute and extend knowledge in the arena of place with a focus on retail sites like the Merrion Centre. From this research, it is argued that an important aspect of this studies originality is in its use of painting in combination with a novel toolkit of research methodologies sensitive to the complex character of the Centre.

In the study, the paintings became a keystone for this bricolage of methods, acting as a point of convergence for the many perspectives emerging from the research.

They were sites of enquiry through which to question and challenge assumptions and think through new ways of understanding the Centre. As previously discussed, Pilkington (2015) makes a strong case for painting as an iterative, reflective and generative process through which new knowledge can emerge. In this way, painting practice through its sensitivity to conveying the embodied experience, a process described by Joselit as the “painstaking process of transforming sensation into form” (Joselit cited in Graw and Lajer-Burchard, 2016, p.13), complimented the active perceptions of onsite fieldwork, working together as a vital approach for investigating the more subjective characteristics and qualities of the Centre. In unison, these approaches engaged with the site’s ordinary and uneventful everyday moments, the personal memories of childhood visits, the collective memories of communities and the unsettling and uncanny experiences of abandoned place.

The use of painting as an investigative tool was also recognised in the work of several contemporary painters discussed previously, who were chosen for their parallel interests and significant contributions to the painting of place. Through a review of their work the study highlighted a common interest in the field of memory and its relationship to painting practice. This was noted in Mandy Payne’s work, where the trace memories of community found within the Brutalist housing schemes in Sheffield are evoked through the pitted concrete surfaces upon which she paints, whilst Elizabeth Magill captures the history and materiality of her subject through the organic surfaces and textures which seem to grow naturally from the canvas. For George Shaw, the strangely familiar memories of everyday suburbia are conveyed through the medium of the model aircraft enthusiast (Umbro enamels), to become uncanny theatrical backdrops to unknown personal histories, whilst in contrast, Narbi Price excavates half-forgotten cultural histories of place to examine in what ways the myths and traumas of the past bleed through to the present. Exploring the gaps between remembering and forgetting within his own experiences, Robbie Bushe reconfigures the past to draft new memories and narratives, whilst Simon Ling navigates the irregularities and uncertainties of perception through the anomalies which arise between embodied memories of the quotidian experience and the photographic image. In relation of these innovative contemporary artists, it is argued that part of this studies originality lies in the breadth of different sources of memory implicated within the research including: archive materials such as

photographs, sculptures and news clippings; community and individual remembering as seen through post in forums on Facebook, Leodis, Secret Leeds and site visits through embodied and involuntary memory, fieldwork and painting practices. When drawn together, these varied elements led to new and original perspectives of the Centre, including the perception of the site as a palimpsest of layered place in which earlier communities were superseded though their memories persisted. It also emphasised the site as a place of immanence and becoming through the contingent nature of the quotidian experience and as a place of personal and community memory through the remembering and forgetting of my own childhood visits and others who also knew the site.

Whilst this study has many interests and practices in common with the artists profiled, the paintings in this investigation visualise place in a markedly different way. This is because of the distinct practical approaches used when making the work such as layering still and moving image projections, collaging images from different time frames, merging archive photographs and snapshots from lived experience and memories, painting with restricted time constraints and working from architectural models. These varied practices reimagine the Centre in new ways, with specific visual qualities including the use of colour, contrast and texture to express different characteristics and aspects of the site. An example of this is the painting 'Build' (fig 30) in which personal memories from site merge with archive images, resulting in passages of paint which drip and congeal as though two moments in the Centres history are slowly folding into one another. In contrast, the painting 'The Flâneur' (fig 100) expresses the indeterminacy and fleeting character of the Centre as experienced through site visits. It does this through layers of glaze which create spatial ambiguity and give the forms of the shop mannequins and reflections of passing customers an indistinct ghostly quality.

As discussed in Chapter four walking was to be instrumental in becoming familiar with the Centre, allowing for attentive onsite observation and "a larger synergy of place" (Seamon, 2010, p.8.) This method of engagement with the Centre through movement in many ways seems counter intuitive to the static nature of painting. How could such movement through the site be effectively transmuted within the paintings? Chapter five addressed this concern through a review of the different

practical approaches the study employed both on site and in the studio, reviewing photographic methods and the use of the snapshot to give a sense of being in place, a quality which was then conveyed in the paintings in varied ways such as by restricting production time, cropping compositions and skewed perspectives. There was also a recognised correspondence between the active perception achieved through walking and the paintings, experiences evoked through the tactile, indexical quality of paint and the subsequent marks and gestural traces left on the surface. In this way, resonating with lived experience and embodied memories of the site, the paintings move beyond representation to offer an original experience of place by becoming a re-implacement of the Centre. It is then argued with reference to Casey (2002) and Ingold (2010), that the viewer can inhabit this new place and connect much more closely with the original site.

### **Virtual Exhibition**

**Link to exhibition :** [\*Painting as Poiesis: Encounters with the Merrion Centre\*](#)

**adamstoneart.com :** [http://adamstoneart.com/webgl\\_files/index.html](http://adamstoneart.com/webgl_files/index.html)

An important later outcome of the project has been the virtual presentation of the paintings completed during the study. The restrictions of the Covid pandemic led to difficulties in presenting work in a physical exhibition, although as will be discussed this may still happen. A viable alternative solution was to display the paintings in a virtual gallery, which has been created in collaboration with the artist and VR designer Christopher Farrell. The transition from digital to the analogue gestures of the painting were touched upon in Chapter two in relation to working from projected archive images. This activity was described as an enlivening process which resurrected the scene, giving the images an immediacy of the lived experience. In contrast, the opposite process occurs through digitising the paintings into a virtual gallery. This translation onto the screen raises the issue of the paintings lost specificity, its non-materiality and lack of physical presence. Through the mediation of the screen it is difficult to sense the time it took to make the work, the methods of constructions, the authors gesture, the scale and weight of the materials. In this way, the images, as this is truly what they are now, become uncanny simulacra like the

mannequins in the shop window, or the reanimated zombie which from a distance appear real but drawing closer reveal their emptiness.

To address this issue and bring the audience closer to the experience of seeing the work in the real world, the exhibition is presented in a convincing three-dimensional space through which the participant can navigate to see the paintings individually or in groups at varying distances. The space has been carefully designed to give a clear view of all the work with directional spot lighting to emulate the conditions of a real gallery space (fig 180). The show also tries to situate the audience and the work within the Centre by presenting actual views from the building, suggesting a real space beyond the virtual gallery windows (fig 182). To augment this illusion the gallery space has an original sound recording from the site which alternates depending on where you are in the space. This reinforces the idea of the display being situated within the Centre. It was important to record an appropriate level of sounds to make it appear as though the gallery was a unit in the main shopping area. For this reason, the sound was recorded in the evening just before the Centre closed, capturing the ambient sounds of the last passing shoppers and the distant voices of excited young children echoing through the Centre. To further enhance the viewer's experience of the work the exhibition presents a response to the paintings by the artist, educator and curator Derek Horton, which captures some of the projects key concerns. Horton notes a phenomenological connection between the paintings and the Centre and suggests they are capable of being experienced as "triggers of memory, as uncanny superimpositions of the past and present" (Horton, 2021). It might then be possible that despite the digital barriers, the paintings may still evoke some remembered experience of similar places in the mind of the viewer. It could also be argued that the most important lesson the virtual exhibition offers is to highlight what is lost and therefore bring into sharper focus what is essential about the actual work.

Despite these varied efforts to connect the exhibition to the Centre the virtual exhibition space is not quite convincing as a shop unit and could have been developed further by digitally rendering an actual shop space in the Centre. A step further would be to physically exhibit the work in the Centre which is currently being planned. The online exhibition has provoked a number of interesting

observations regarding future presentation, including demonstrating that a large open plan space does not encourage dynamic relationships between the paintings. It also confirmed that presenting the paintings in subject groups limits the potential to juxtapose different timeframes in the Centres history and closes down any relational dialogue about the layered and temporal nature of place. It did however create interesting relationships between larger and smaller scale works and how thoughtful presentation of that difference might be used to draw the viewer in to look more closely at larger work. It also highlighted the relationship between colour palette and subject, with bold and bright colours dominating the archive-based work and a much cooler tonal range used in the paintings of the shopping area and the uncanny places within the hotel.

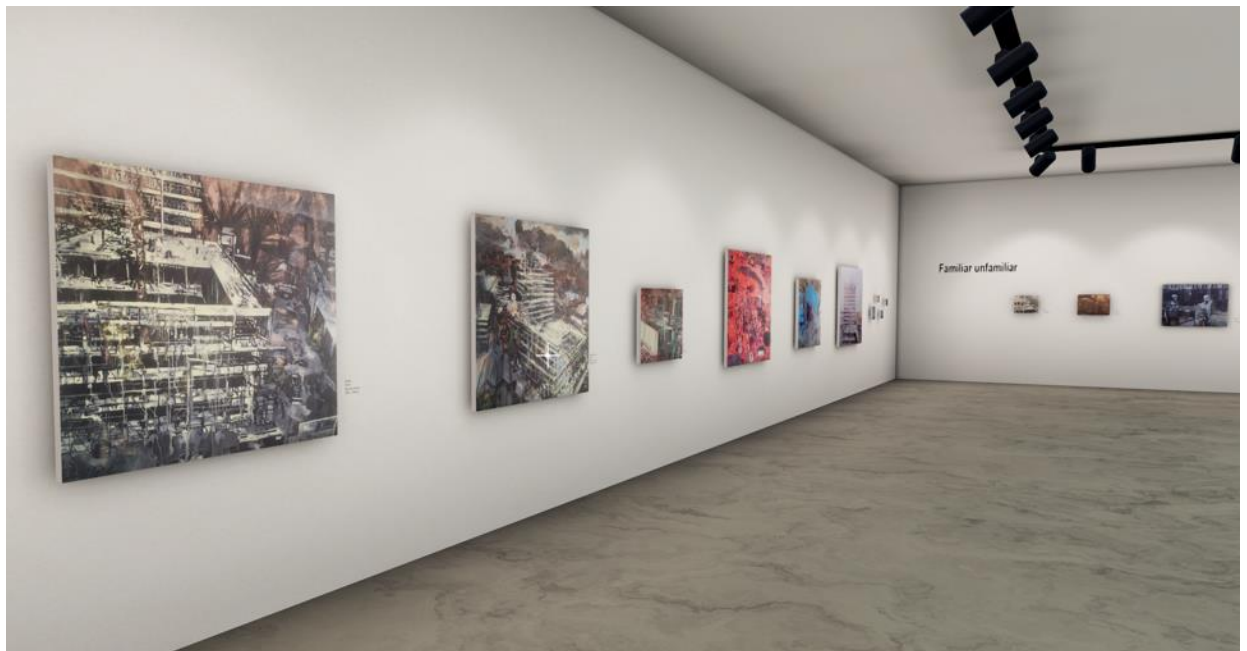


Fig 180. 'Familiar Unfamiliar' 2021, Screen capture of virtual exhibition.



Fig 181. 'Familiar Unfamiliar' 2021, Screen capture of virtual exhibition.



Fig 182. 'Familiar Unfamiliar' 2021, Screen capture of virtual exhibition.

To conclude, this research contributes new knowledge in the field of contemporary painting of place in three key ways. Firstly, it provides an effective and novel toolkit of methodologies which work synergistically with a specific range of painting practices to investigate the Merrion Centre. This bricolage of painting (led) methods was shown to be sensitive to the complex spatial characteristics found in the different areas within the Centre, effectively engaging with the lived experience and



residual presence found in uncanny places such as the Merrion Hotel and the Mini-market, as well as the liminal, heterotopian space of the Odeon Cinema and other areas, some of which no longer exist except in individual and community memory. These approaches work together to produce original perspectives and understandings of the Centre as a place of social and historical significance in which individual and community memory continue to dwell, as well as recognising the site as an unpredictable place of unfolding indeterminate events and relational interactions.

Secondly, through this research approach it was claimed that the paintings in the study became more than a metaphor or representation of the Centre, emerging to exist as independent places. Referencing ideas found in work by Campanella, Casey, Noé, Trigg, Walker-Barker and others, it then went on to speculate that in the same way that we touch and are touched by the environments we inhabit, so to the painter's personal memories and experiences of place can be reterritorialized within the paintings and through the same relational mechanism touch the viewer. A further final claim for this project as an original contribution to knowledge is based on the Merrion Centre never previously having been examined in this way, using the varied research methodologies applied in this study. The research demonstrated that this type of painting-led approach which combines painting with photography, the archive, psychogeographic strategies and memory can produce new ways of understanding the Merrion Centre and it is argued, would also be highly effective in supporting other artists investigations into sites with similarly intricate spatial identities such as airports and hotels.

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