Displaced Vignettes/Memory Trace

Elizabeth Gafarian

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DISPLACED VIGNETTES/MEMORY TRACE

BY

Elizabeth Gafarian

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
June, 1985

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Title of Thesis: **Displaced Vignettes/Memory Trace**

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Date: June 7, 1985

Elizabeth Gafarian
Signature
Displaced Vignettes/Memory Trace

Beth Gafarian
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DISPLACED VIGNETTES: COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS

Introduction
The photographs from my thesis exhibition are part of the series Displaced Vignettes. They are 8 x 10-in. color contact dye transfer prints. The images are vignettes that suggest an imaginary tale that can be interpreted broadly. The staging of the photographs is theatrical and deliberate. The objects have been fabricated from a variety of materials to function in each piece. These symbolic narratives are part of an evolving personal mythology.

Background-Investigations
For several years prior to this work I was involved with nonsilver and extended photo media. This way of working allowed me to expand the surface and explore the possibilities beyond "straight" photographic conventions. The work was primarily figurative combining different processes and techniques. The emotional content was achieved through manipulation and alteration of the photographic surface.

During my first year of graduate school I took a workshop with John Wood dealing with collage and montage, studied extended photo media with Bea Nettles and the structure of the visual book with Keith Smith. These experiences were very valuable. I began to think of combining materials in new ways. The book format was
especially challenging, dealing with issues of sequence, transition, movement and memory. Bookmaking emphasizes the nature of observation as an experience in space and time. This kind of process liberated my notions of the art object and furthered my understanding of more complex and integrated visual relationships.

I was inspired by the tactile nature of creating a visual book. I completed my book Passage while taking a class from Nathan Lyons at the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York. The book deals with the figurative and symbolic passage from life to death.
During this time I felt a need to follow the notions of tactility and craft. I began to investigate other forms outside photography. My experience of viewing and making photographs lacked the physical presence and immediacy that I was interested in. To further these investigations I began working with various sculptural materials. I wanted to work figuratively so I used casting materials. I experimented with direct plaster body casts, rubberized molds and handmade paper casts.
I did not see these figurative forms as finished pieces, but saw the possibilities of using them as props for photographs. I began to work with these and other objects in my studio creating private and personal still lifes. I was able to manipulate the subject matter freely and choose appropriate sites. The still lifes developed slowly evolving conceptual and visual ideas. They possessed a theatrical quality, color and lighting being important tools. Each piece was designed for a specific camera position and lens. I worked with an 8 x 10-in. view camera to emphasize a sense of hyper-reality.

*Studio documentation: still life set-up, 1983*
These still lifes lead to the series of photographs Displaced Vignettes. Displaced Vignettes could be considered part of the genre called tableau photography. The theatrical nature of a tableau tends to be literary and historical, influenced by Symbolist and Surrealist thinking.

I am interested in work that can be described as Symbolist in that there is another order of meaning. I have used symbols as a one-to-one equivalence between the symbol used and the meaning intended as well as a deliberate suggestion or metaphor of something other.

Surrealism implies in the broadest philosophical sense a tendency to draw from the realm of the irrational. Dreams, fantasy, imagination and free play are the resources for art and thought.¹ My interests are related to the development of Jungian thought. I have interpreted Jung's concepts of the collective unconscious and evolving archetypal figures as a rich visual source. Sallie Nichols' book, Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey was a strong influence on my work. She uses the twenty-two trump cards of the Marseilles Tarot as projection holders which symbolically represent the autonomous and instinctual forces of the archetypes. In

Displaced Vignettes I have used specific cards as references to particular aspects and events in the Jungian evolution of self.²

Another significant influence I have had regarding this work was the short stories by author Raymond Carver. In particular, What We Talk About When We Talk About Love and Will You Please Be Quiet, Please. These are meticulously assembled collections with characters emerging as subtly and sickeningly familiar. There is a persistent echo of recognition. These stories inspired the title Displaced Vignettes and offered the possibility of fabricating situations that are both commonplace and bizarre, fictitious and very true.

Often the power of a photograph is derived from an immediate recognition. I am interested in work that disquietingly challenges this recognition and disassembles familiar conceptions of reality and appearance. The idea of suspended belief intrigues me. I am interested in the perceptual tension between found and artificial situations.

The following pages are from my sketchbook. They illustrate the origins and evolution of specific symbols used in the photographs.
Fortunately, there is evidence that the Tarot Emperor will not fall prey to the ego's archetypal shadow. His number four suggests that this ruler's perspective, not limited to tunnel vision, includes all four dimensions of life.

The number four is symbolic of wholeness. It marks out our orientation in the human dimension. Its geometric equivalent, the square, represents law and order superimposed on the chaotic disorder of Mother Nature. The four directions of the compass keep us from feeling lost in uncharted areas. The four walls of a room give us a feeling of secure containment which helps us to concentrate our energies and pinpoint our attention in a rational human way. The rectangual windows of a house serve to scale down to human size the wide panorama of nature, so that its essence and detail can be more readily encompassed by the human eye and brain. Similarly, the guiding spirit of the Emperor helps us to examine the realities of our human condition and to relate to them in a conscious and creative way, a talent which is specifically human.

The Emperor's number four brings us into reality in many ways. The three dimensions of time (past, present, and future) are more abstractions until we have located them in space. Similarly, events in three-dimensional space do not become concrete until we pinpoint them in time. To become civilized, man needs to place himself in space and time. The Emperor brings permanence, stability, and perspective. He stands as the figurehead for the state. He represents the principle upon which the fertility and the welfare of the kingdom depends. If he is harmed, the entire community suffers. (Significantly, in the legend of the Wasteland, it was the wounding of its Fisher King that caused the kingdom to become sterile and unproductive.)

At this stage of cultural development, the structure of the royal kingdom or state mirrored the imagined structure of the cosmos. In this phase in the development of civilization, "the archetypal formation of myth," John Perry discusses it further in The Far Side of Modernity:

in that brief epoch the human world and the mythical world were seen as reflections of each other, and the government of society was regarded as fashioned in the image of the ordering of the cosmos. The mythical world was expressed in social forms, and the city kingdom was a model of that order on the human plane. In this the king at the head of the kingdom was the counterpart of the king god in the divine realm, who was now "King of the Universe" or "Lord of Quarters."

As Perry goes on to say, it was at this point in human history that the first differentiation of the mythical gods took place. He elucidates this as follows:

Sallie Nichols
The triangle is the 1st geometric form.

Perhaps the red canvas should be triangular shape.

The #3 Tarot Trump is the Empress.

Symbols the fundamental human reality connected with the soul.

(Reference pg 90-91)
**July 17, 1967**

**Window in the turret**

**#1 ORNAMENTAL**

The 13th window is strictly ornamental. However it must make a connection with the other activity in the turret and in the installation.

This turret piece is a pivotal one. OK is the one photograph that deals most directly with the interior/ exterior paradox, so it is important to relate to the installation.

Rather than try to make the connection literally (in color) I will make it symbolically and have a real triangle as the central decorative element on the window.
Window #7
DISPLACED VIGNETTES: COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS

The Images

The photographs in the series Displaced Vignettes function as contained and separate symbolic narratives. However, when seen as a group they are related in specific ways. The content of each image can be modified and extended by its relationship to the series. There is an evolution and clarification of symbols occurring within the group.

The following page illustrates some of the connections between the images. The photographs deal broadly with three areas: a relationship, a personal environment and introspection.
A relationship

Personal Environment

Displaced Licorices! Color Photographs

Table Setting for One

Mirror Reflection

Feminine / Earth

The Empress

The Fool Card
Emergence of ONE  
(1st Tarot Trump "Magician")

The Raspberry Turret

△ The Red Triangle

Windows  
Remedies for perception

"A" Anonymous figures

The grid of mirrors  
(a personal rejection) vehicle for perception
The photographs opened up possibilities for me. Six months
prior to the exhibition I felt the energy and confidence to
spontaneously explore. I knew I had to do an installation
piece as part of my exhibition. I imagined I could create
an environment that trans-
formed a space creating a
clear and unified other reality.
DISPLACED VIGNETTES/MEMORY TRACE: AN INSTALLATION

Introduction
Displaced Vignettes/Memory Trace was a multi-media installation that was part of my thesis exhibition. It was exhibited at the Visual Studies Workshop from November 5-16, 1984. The piece incorporated sculptural forms, video, light and sound. The installation dealt with the non-linear qualities of memory addressing the way in which personal memory is recalled. Conceptually it was related to the ideas I was working with in the "raspberry turret" photograph from the Displaced Vignettes series. The installation evolved from this image as an extension of its fabrication and symbolism.

Background-Investigations
Since my earliest explorations in visual media my approach could be considered combinational. Installation work is another step towards refining this approach. I do not see this as a rejection of a particular medium's inherent characteristics but as a natural extension of drawing personal conclusions about how different visual systems can function in my work.

My specific interest in combining media was to integrate my diverse sculptural concerns with my photographic work. My sculptural work from the mid 1970's was primarily concerned with formal explorations of space, time and movement in an environmental context as well as
the figurative form.

These early investigations were wood frame constructions based on the triangle. They were intended to be seen outdoors to work with the environment as a blend of landscape and architecture. I also completed a series of large scale site specific geometric forms built for temporary installation. Two pieces, Wind Time/Platform and Shadow Curtain were designed to utilize the wind and the trees on the site. The pieces created a situation for the viewer to experience particular qualities of the site, the wind, light and shadow.
In addition to the windpieces I pursued figurative work creating two distinct directions of sculptural interest. I was involved with the study and construction of marionettes. I began to experiment with different ways of making moveable figures. The two marionettes below are examples of this figurative work.

![Marionettes](image1)

The installation *Displaced Vignettes/Memory Trace* integrated these diverse sculptural concerns. The piece was an environment affected primarily by colored light emphasizing the physical and emotional qualities of the space. The content of the piece was implied through the sculptural forms existing in the space. The figures represented humans who are consciously remembering. The frames and mirrors represented vehicles for their perception.
The primary concern in designing the installation was how the exhibition space would function and how the viewer would interact with the space. The room needed to be considered as a whole and unified environment with the sculptural forms an integrated part of the space. I wanted all the elements in the installation to be perceived as highly deliberate creating the effect of a refined space. The work required total physical and psychological involvement.

In addition to the physical fabrication, the working process involved contacting people in various professional fields. I established a network of experts whose invaluable assistance created a connection and appreciation for the Rochester community and its resources. I worked very closely with a woodworker, a paint specialist and an automotive painter. Through the interaction with these people I felt a level of understanding and sharing. I consider these activities as research and part of a series of investigations that necessitate stepping out of the traditional art environment.
The following drawings are from my sketchbook. They illustrate the evolution of my concepts for the installation.
Installation Idea

Large reflective surfaces

Could be colored

Light projections

Built into canvas at ends

Exterior of black figures
Videotape-Collaboration

While in graduate school I was exposed to some very strong video installation work. This confirmed my desire to familiarize myself with the technology and hardware of video. I took a class at the Visual Studies Workshop with Pat Byrne with the intention of producing a videotape together as a collaborative effort. Pat Byrne is an installation artist who uses projected imagery on translucent scrims to layer and transform space. For the last three years we have worked on projects together in the Rochester area. We found that our working patterns were compatible and that we shared an interest in the possibility of using video as part of installation work.

We shot and logged about eight hours of footage before editing the material. We developed a storyboard and experimented with various image combinations before the content of the tape began to take shape. It became clear that there were connections between the videotape, my photographs, sculpture and ideas for the installation. Because my working ideas were developing simultaneously the form

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4 Pat Byrne received her M.F.A. from SUNY/Buffalo at the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y., 1983. Her thesis exhibition Transition was exhibited at the Visual Studies Workshop in November 1982. Her book Traces documents her work and is part of the graduate collection at the Research Center, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y.
INSTALLATION VIEW: DESPLACED VIGNETTES/MEMORY TRACE
SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURE FOR VIDEO MONITOR
and the content of each medium was integrated. We decided to continue development of the videotape to be an integral part of the installation. The content of the tape took three distinct forms, literal, formal and metaphoric. The connections to the installation had to operate on these three levels. As a result the conceptual and emotional basis for the installation as a whole was continually examined and clarified.

The tape began to evolve as a visualized memory of the sculptural figures in the space. The imagery in the tape utilized similar forms and lighting conditions that would be part of the installation. The symbolic elements in the installation were repeated and further contextualized in the videotape.

I designed a red triangle hinged at the center to hold the monitor. I wanted to conceal the "television box" so that the video imagery would appear to be generating from the triangle. The triangle is a shape that I have often used. In the installation it represented the "primary site", the source of a collective memory for the figurative participants in the space.

We titled the videotape Memory Trace. The finished tape was approximately seven minutes in length and played continually in the space.
Throughout this videotape project the collaborative aspect was a very significant and rewarding experience. The working process was an active one characterized by a free exchange of ideas and feelings. I feel that collaboration is an interesting and energetic alternative to the working individual artist. The process has enriched my work and the art making experience. This way of working interests me for future projects producing the context for larger artistic statements. I have a great deal of respect and admiration for Pat Byrne and consider myself very fortunate to have collaborated with her. We have plans to continue working in a collaborative environment with the hope of further expanding into cross-disciplinary work.

**INSTALLATION VIEW: TRANSITION** by Pat Byrne
**VISUAL STUDIES WORKSHOP, ROCHESTER, NY 1982**
MEMORY TRACE
A VIDEO TAPE COLLABORATION

The editing of the video tape was done according to a storyboard. The storyboard was useful in developing, organizing and questioning the structure and sequence of the tape.
DOCUMENTATION: VIDEOTAPE

The imagery in the videotape was related to the configuration in the installation. These images are photographed from the monitor.

TURRET
INTERIOR SURREAL SPACE: SCANS.

FIGURES ON MIRROR GRID
SMALL SCALE MODELS OF LIFE-SIZE FIGURES.
FRAMES/WINDOWS
SUSPENDED, SLOW MOVEMENT.
SAME FRAMES USED IN
INSTALLATION.

FIGURES WITH SHADOWS
Duplicating lighting design
in installation.
Videotape-Soundtrack

The audio portion of the videotape provided a framework for the imagery. The audio element was an important part of the final presentation. The soundtrack was mixed with the facilities at the Visual Studies Workshop with assistance from Bob Doyle, Media Center Coordinator. We used four sources including human arterial and natural environmental sound, musical chimes and electronically generated sound.

The diagram below is a portion of the graph we used to mix the sound. The four sources are color coded indicating their relative relationship to one another.
The Final Presentation

An important aspect of installation work is that it is site specific. One must consider the dimensions of the space, the electrical system and the extent to which alterations can be made. Inherent to installation work is the need to maintain a responsiveness to the space and flexibility regarding variables as they occur.

Displaced Vignettes/Memory Trace was installed in one of the galleries at the Visual Studies Workshop. Glenn Knudson, Gallery Director at the Workshop was very supportive. His enthusiasm and cooperation were greatly appreciated. I had help from a core group of family and friends who were involved with all stages of installing the work in the gallery. These people Pat Byrne, Andy Gafarian and Buck Majors worked collaboratively with me. Without their support the installation would not have been possible. We worked under a great deal of tension yet maintained an atmosphere of warmth, sharing and concern for the project.

We had five days to prepare the gallery and install the piece. Many things needed to be done. Pat and I prepared the gallery and painted the floor prior to working in the space. The monitor needed to be mounted, the sound system installed, the frames hung, the mirrors and figures placed and the lighting design determined.
There were major unanticipated problems. The mounting of the monitor presented the most difficulties. For two days we tried various solutions to an apparent physical impossibility. My father, Andy Gafarian, an engineer worked out a design to mount the monitor under a seemingly suspended 120 pound hinged triangle.

After a majority of the preparation was done the video and audio systems were installed. We had an unexpected problem with the audio track. Because of the loud volume necessary for the piece, there was an unacceptable amount of noise and distortion. It became necessary to use additional sound filtering components. Mike Morgan, an audio consultant from Gala Sound in Rochester generously donated his equipment and time. He was able to achieve clean, undistorted sound at a high volume.

The final stage of preparing the piece involved the placement of the sculpture and lights. This step was the most important in determining the overall effect of the environment and a synthesis of all the elements.
**DISPLACED VIGNETTES/MEMORY TRACE**

**FLOOR PLAN**

**VISUAL STUDIES WORKSHOP, ROCHELLE, NEW YORK**

**NOVEMBER 1984**

- **Speaker suspended from ceiling**
- **Spotlight: Projecting magenta light into corner of gallery**
- **4th figure, stands alone**
- **(3) Hanging frames 36"x48" suspended at angles from ceiling**
- **Spotlight: Projecting blue/green light forming a circle on the floor**
- **Continual display "MEMORY/TRACE"**
- **Red triangle raised at angle from floor, aligned with center, supportive structure for monitor**
- **Measures 9' x 4'**
- **Speaker suspended from ceiling**
- **Walls and floor of gallery painted "linen white"**
- **View of installation when entering the space**

- **3 androgynous figures hinged at center**
  - Color: light fawn metallic
- **Spotlight: Projecting white light, casts 3 distinct shadows of the figures**
- **Single hanging window frame with circular mirror**
- **Mirrored grid (2) 24" square plexiglass panels raised 1" from floor**
DISPLACED VIGNETTES/MEMORY TRACE

Beth Gafarian

Visual Studies Workshop
31 Prince Street, Rochester, New York

Gallery Hours: Monday-Friday, Noon-5pm

November 5–November 16, 1984

Reception: November 5, 1984 (8pm-10pm)
AFTERTHOUGHTS

The thesis presentation represented for me a culmination of an open-ended and independent investigation. When I came to graduate school I did not have a predetermined plan or body of work that I wanted to pursue. But rather came with the notion of following an intuitive path characterized by experimentation. My goals were to integrate my concerns with sculpture and photography. It became clear very early that the installation format was a way to incorporate the multi-media nature of my work. I feel that the work represents honest development. I have reached some personal conclusions about what my work will involve to be authentically mine.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special appreciation to Pat Byrne, Andy Gafarian and Buck Majors whose continued caring, understanding and support made this entire project possible.

I would like to thank my advisors Professors Robert Heinecken, Bea Nettles and Richard Zakia.

The following people have individually contributed in helping to make this exhibition possible:

Caralee Aber  
Ray Bink  
Leif Brush  
Tim Callahan  
Brook Dobbs  
Bob Doyle  
Mary Lou Gafarian  
Blair Hornbuckle  
Glenn Knudson  
Faith Ledermann  
Nathan Lyons  
Mike Morgan  
Nancy Norwood  
Bill Paris  
Dory Thanhauser  
Alan Winer
APPENDIX

The following list of businesses and organizations were sources for supplies, services and consultation.

All listings are located in Rochester, N.Y. unless otherwise noted.

Alan Winer Fine Hardwood Furniture
Asymmetrical Press
Auto Finishers Supply Co.
Bix Red Q-Quickprint Centers
Brighton Lites, Inc.
Cadillac Plastic and Chemical Co.
Carolyn Steinkirchner Silkscreen
Chase Pitkin Home Center
Color Methods, Inc.
Commercial Art Supply
Cook Iron Store Company
Die-Kuts, Inc.
Fabrics and Findings, Inc.
Foxglove Graphics
Gala Sound
Hyatt's The Art People
Instructional Media Services, Rochester Institute of Technology
Lakeshore Record Exchange
Large-Kildea Lumber Co.
Light Impressions Corporation
Max T. Doland, Inc.
Mayer Paint and Hardware
Maynard's Sound World
Media Center, Visual Studies Workshop
Monroe Glass and Mirror
The Paper Shop
Park Ave. Photo Inc.
Pittsford Lumber
Print Shop, Visual Studies Workshop
Record Archive
Rochester Institute of Technology, School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Scrantom's Book and Stationary
Snap & Flash
The Sound Chamber
Spoto Camera Repair, Inc.
Video Showplace, Inc.
Visual Studies Workshop
Woodstock Percussion, Inc., West Hurley, N.Y.
Thesis Proposal

DISPLACED VIGNETTES

BY

Elizabeth Gafarian

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
September, 1983

Bea Nettles, Chairperson
Associate Professor, Photography
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Richard D. Zakia
Professor, Photography
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Robert Heinecken
Professor of Art
University of California at Los Angeles
PURPOSE

Through a combined media strategy I intend to clarify aspects of interpersonal relationships and to investigate emotional states in terms of context and content. I intend to juxtapose a sense of theatre with a sense of reality that is neither fantasy nor documentation.

BACKGROUND

The basis for my investigations are strongly emotional and reflect my interests in the visual arts, fiction and psychotherapy. My previous work dealt with the physical affects of emotion, seeking isolated climaxed and exaggerated moments. Often the images were of fabricated arrangements utilizing lighting, costume and staging to intensify a particular state. Others were collages that reduced specific information to emphasize gesture.

I began to feel that my approach was working contradictory to my intentions. The work began to limit psychological states rather than to imply complexity, becoming too heavy-handed and didactic. A new series of large format color photographs began which contextualized emotional states, dealing more with the implication of action and motivation rather than as isolated events.

During this time I also became frustrated with the
selective quality of the single image. It began to limit the interpretative possibilities of the subject, making the fabrication of the subject more significant than the resulting images. This led to investigations in non-silver photography, applied arts, visual books and sculpture, in an attempt to expand the viewing experience, to involve tactile, spatial and kinesthetic senses. I began a series of arrangements intended to be directly interactive with the space, utilizing theatrical concepts and human proportion as a gauge for scale.

PROCEDURE

The thesis work involves a clarifying of concerns and a broadening of approach toward these concerns.

To clarify concerns I will continue to engage in critical exercises with my work, seeking responses especially from board members. The study of history and criticism will be instrumental in forming a context for my work, as well as related areas such as theatre and literature. The straight photographic work encourages clarification. I will continue to explore large format color still lifes and to test and refine printing and presentation methods.

The arrangement projects expand my approach, emphasizing viewer interaction. The investigations for this work are primarily spatial and sculptural involving materials such as plaster and hand-made paper casts as
possible component parts.

PRESENTATION

The proposed date for the thesis presentation is November, 1984.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Books-Catalogs


Journals-Periodicals


Exhibitions


Miscellaneous


