Wesleyan University The Honors College

Portraits of Memory

by

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Introduction

When I first read *Fictions* by Jorge Luis Borges, I was struck by the simplicity of lying in narrative, the ways in which Borges tricked me into truth. The moments of belief always outweighed the moments of disbelief, even though I knew Borges uses language to construct fictions. I enjoyed the way I wanted to believe him, the way I trusted his stories. In "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" Borges reviews the non-existent Pierre Menard's translation of *Don Quixote*. The story reads as a true review, in format and content; it would be easy to assume, at first read, that Menard exists. In terms of evidence and form, Borges offers a list of previous works by Menard,

> Having carefully examined his private archives, I have been able to verify that it consists of the following: a) A symbolist sonnet which appeared twice (with variations) in the magazine *La Conque* (the March and October issues of 1899). b) A monograph on the possibility of constructing a poetic vocabulary of concepts that would not be synonyms or periphrases...[1]

The literary critique praises Menard for his passion in writing although Borges is actually toying with the ideas of text reproduction and post-modern criticism. But the reality of the literary criticism remains, as Borges is truly taking on issues of narration and translation. About the same time as I read *Fictions*, I first visited the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Culver City, California. The museum is dark, small, and squeezed between an Indian restaurant and a marketplace. Inside, the historical dioramas and explanatory sculptures taught me of famous opera singers and noted mathematical breakthroughs. Only when I read about extraordinary monkeys flying through physical material did I realize that the museum is mostly a host of fictions disguised as fact. One exhibit, titled *Megolaponera Foetens: Stink Ant of the Cameroon of West Central Africa* describes an ant and fungus seemingly made out of science fiction. From the exhibit,

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[1] Jorge Luis Borges, Fictions (Buenos Aires: Emece Editores, 1956) 43.

> On occasion one of these ants, while looking for food is infected by inhaling a microscopic spore from a fungus of the genus Tomentella. After being inhaled, the spore seats in the ant's tiny brain and begins to grow, causing changes in the ant's patterns of behavior. The Ant appears troubled and confused; for the first time in its life the ant leaves the forest floor and begins to climb.
>
> Driven on by the growth of the fungus, the ant embarks on a long and exhaustive climb. Completely spent and having reached a prescribed height, the ant impales the plant with its mandibles.

> Thus affixed, the ant waits to die. Ants that have met their ends in this fashion are quite common in some sections of the forest.
>
> The fungus continues to consume first the nerve cells and finally all the soft tissue that remains of the ant. After approximately two weeks a spike appears from what had been the head of the ant. This spike is about an inch and a half in length and has a bright orange tip heavy with spores which rain down onto the rain forest floor for other unsuspecting ants to inhale.[2]

The case of the Tomentella fungus is actually not a fiction, but an almost unbelievable truth from the jungle. Both the fungus and ant exist, yet their story reads as an unreality because it is so unique and distant from what the observer knows. The placement of this fact within a setting of fictions condemns it to suspicion, just as the setting of fictions is suspected as fact when placed within a hermeneutic language of truth. I think it's inclusion within the Museum is not by chance; rather, the directors of the museum wish for the fungus to act as an analogy for knowledge transmission (an eerie but powerful image). With Borges' factual critique of a fictional author and the Museum's mysterious retelling of science, I find recollection and presentation to be entirely fascinating and mischievous.

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[2] "Megolaponera Foetens, Stink Ant of the Cameroon of West Central Africa," Museum of Jurassic Technology, 2008, 1 April 2009 <http://www.mjt.com>.

We have a particular language, a simple language, for truth and fact. I tend to trust authority (or whatever looks like it) if it extends a certain type of written construction or physical presentation. My desire to believe Borges and the Museum of Jurassic Technology (and my subsequent disappointments or confirmations) alert me to the readiness of gullibility—conscious and subconscious.

I wondered how many other times I have been tricked into believing fictions. While I could conduct research to disprove or prove Borges or the Museum, I had no discerning power over the personal narratives of others.

I have grown up in a world of fictions—perhaps not entirely fictional, perhaps not entirely fact—like the world of *Fictions* and the Museum. Family stories and photographs not only twist the truth but also intertwine it with myth. As most are, I am fascinated with my family's history. It is, after all, the step-by-step path that leads to me. This may be narcissism, but it is true.

My mother is from England, and I never met her father as he died of a heart attack before I was born. He— or the absence of him— has made me curious about my mother's family. The amount I know is very little compared to the amount I do not know. I was very young when my mother first told me this story about my grandfather. As an engineer during World War II, he sometimes acted as a foot soldier. One time, in a dark, wooded area in Germany, he came across a German soldier in a clearing. At first, he thought the other man was a mirage. The two men looked at each other for a moment. Then, slowly, they turned their backs and walked in opposite directions.

As a child (and even now), I was moved by this story. It is really one of the few moments of him that I can visualize. I am unsure if this is because I have heard it many times by now or because it resonated with me as a young girl interested and petrified of war. I could see my grandfather as a sort of peaceful hero, both a soldier and a kind of pacifist.

Yet I know I have this story wrong. Philip could have been in another country. I don't quite know his rank. I don't quite know if the story is true.

Philip is long dead, and with him, the experience behind the story. My mother remembers that he did not talk much about the war. This is one of the few stories he shared. But it is conceivable that he may have created this story out of his trauma or the hateful horrors of war.

So perhaps he wanted to present himself as peaceful in light of a most violent war.

Perhaps something like this happened, but not this exactly.

Perhaps this happened to his friend, or a friend of a friend.

You see, I have no way of knowing what the truth is behind many of my family's favorite stories; this is no different with the stories of every other family. I have my trust, but I also have my suspicions.

Curious to discover the truths in my family's history, especially those about my maternal grandfather, I interviewed my mother's family. What emerged from the interviews was something spectacular in its own right. As I listened to my family members recall their personal histories and our family stories, I found I was listening not to permanent narratives but to changing recollections. Each person spoke and remembered in a different way, although there were trends to their manners of recollection. The stories began to glide over me, as I found myself pondering the ways they answered my questions. I could identify two different filters determining their answers: first, they filtered their answers by how much (or how little) they were willing to share. Second, their memories were not perfect, so they were at the whim of the unconscious in deciding what stories to tell. Memory is not perfect—in fact, it is far from perfect. Every memory is in part a creation, and every oral performance of that memory is another creation.

Among Borges' short stories, one has always stood out to me. The story "Funes, the Memorious" describes a man who, after falling from a horse, could remember everything. Borges writes,

> These recollections were not simple; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his fancies. Two or three times he had reconstructed an entire day. He told me: *I have more memories in myself alone than all men have had since the world was a world.* And again: *My dreams are like your vigils.* And again, toward dawn: *My memory, sir, is like a garbage disposal*[3]

With my reading of this short story, the ideas of memory, truth, and narrative came together for me. The significance of forgetting and remembering—their codependence—lies in the result of personal identity constructed through memory. As memory is the keeper of our past, present, and future, it helps to define us. What we remember and how we remember certainly matter to us. It is what memories we choose to tell, however, and how we choose to tell these memories that create our identity as seen by the external world.

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[3] Borges 102

The two stories that follow explore the memories of my mother and aunt. I attempt to reflect the fleeting nature of narrative within recollection as I retell their stories. The stories are meant to embody the type of sporadic yet transitory ways in which our memory functions. The tales are simple yet important; not all moments are moments that were told to me, as some are fictions I have included. However, I find that the term "fictions" can apply to any type of recorded memory—as memory is malleable and elusive.

The first story is most immediate to me, as it chronicles my mother's journey from England to California. Her memory seemed like a screenplay in the way she explained her history—fitting for a woman who lives near Hollywood. The presence of film and media shapes the way we see the world and the way we now see ourselves. I have drawn parallels between the way my mother remembers and the way in which film remembers.

My aunt Gabriela remembers differently from my mother (or at least she presents her memories differently). She shares much less with me, focusing on precise moments of perfection. As a model in the 1960s, she was constantly photographed before photography became the everyday event it is today. I think it is no accident that she remembers in beautiful sequences, like photo spreads. I record her memories most immediately remembered via photographic image—namely her time as a model.

While I interviewed more members of my mother's family, my mother and aunt were special interviewees. Their stories and ways of remembering functioned interestingly together. My mother and aunt both have led lives influenced by film, and thus their stories relate to one another. Moreover, the portraits of their memories function like a diptych. Diptych art places two images—identical or different—together to form one artistic statement. The images rely upon each other for significance and strength. While the stories of my mother and aunt differ, they also collide; the subtle intertwines give the two portraits their power.

Their recollections focused mainly on the years of young adulthood. As John Kotre, a theorist on memory, explains, "Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five we normally experience more that is worth remembering. Someone recalls the events that have turned him into what he now is."[4] While their stories emerge in many time frames, it is their youth that proves its power upon memory and identity.

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[4] John Kotre, White Gloves: How We Create Ourselves Through Memory (New York: The Free Press, 1995) 32.

Peta

The first time she was in Los Angeles, it took her two days to cross the street, Sunset Boulevard. Sunset stretches four lanes, maybe six. In England, the highways were narrower—surrounded by loose hedges, not deserts of concrete. She pressed the crosswalk button.

Blink

Blink

Blink

Red Man: Don't Walk

Red Man: Don't Walk

Blink

Blink

Blink

Green Man: Walk

Green Man: Walk

Green Man: Walk

But as she began to cross the street, the sign started blinking again

Don't Walk

Don't Walk

She retreated, and tried again. Defeated, she went back to the hotel. The hotel reminded her of the first hotel she ever stayed in, when she was a young girl.

The summers in England were wet but beautiful, and Peta's family would travel south to Cornwall to camp and vacation. Her family's life was simple, as were most English families' lives in the wake of World War II. They never ate out, and she had one new party dress a year (her favorite was a deep purple, with gold lace trim right around the Victorian collar). This simplicity meant that August was a highlight in their lives. For some reason (she could not quite remember), her mother Petronilla and she would stay one night in a hotel on their trip down South. They would meet the rest of her family (her father Philip, her sister Gabriela, and her brother Nigel) on the coast. She could never quite recall why she was allowed to travel with her mum.

Maybe Peta's school lasted longer than those of her siblings.

Maybe they did not all fit in the car.

Maybe Petronilla wanted a night a year of luxury.

Maybe they never stayed in a hotel.

Memory works mysteriously, with all senses recalling different moments at once. There is little cohesion between moments of reminiscence, as one moment jumps to the next. We tend to tell stories chronologically, somehow incessantly placing narrative upon our lives, for our own sake. Our minds have no special affection for traditional narrative—we have little control over what we remember and when. But we do consciously control how we remember our memories. Our memories are reconstructions, after all; they are not simple facts that reappear exactly the way they disappeared.

Our minds do have a tendency to remember the particular moments in chronological order (although a single event may leap to an event of years past). Although there is no definitive answer as to why we remember looking forwards, science has a theory. Scientists believe our minds always look for future actions. As we remember in the present, our brains believe that what happened in the past only matters inasmuch as it enables us to anticipate our future, thus creating strength. This changes the notion that memory is solely concerned with the past. It seems memory wonders about what is yet to come, and so we recollect facing the future. Remembrance serves expectation. Like a film, memory may be rewinded or fastforwarded, but it can only be seen and evaluated properly when it plays forward.[5]

Peta was a tiny woman—petite like a bluebell, with long brown hair, and turquoise eyeliner around her eyes. She dressed in long skirts, and her fair skin was covered in small freckles. Her crooked smile took up half her face, and her dimples reached the beginning of her high cheekbones. She walked as if she were skipping—with a little bob and a little sway. She was not much different from the swarms of hippies who hung out around Santa Monica—except her English accent and her eagerness followed her everywhere. Also, she couldn't smoke marijuana; this often left her as an innocent onlooker to a bevel of debaucheries. A month after her wedding she came downstairs to see her husband Paul devouring the last piece of their wedding cake—which had been frozen as a keepsake to everything holy in their marriage. He was overcome with the munchies, and smeared the stale white icing on her lips as he kissed her as an apology.

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[5] Douwe Draaisma, Why Life Speeds Up As Your Get Older (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001) 57.

But even before she met Paul, she was in love with California. Every chance she had, she held her face to the sun as if her cold English bones would never get warm. She still does that.

Maybe it reminds her that she got out of England.

Maybe it reminds her how lucky she is.

Maybe it reminds her of why she left England in the first place.

Listening to the Beach Boys in her London apartment, Peta swore she would get to the land of "don't worry, baby." The girls on the album covers had long blonde hair and golden tans. Peta thought if she could only get to California, then she would grow five inches (all in her legs) and her hair would turn to gold. She is still short with brown locks. But her skin is a deep brown.

Peta had been listening to California ever since she was a kid, sometimes staying up late at night to listen to the radio under her covers. She would go to bed dreaming of California.

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In class, the girls were learning of imports and exports. They were ten, and their schoolgirl socks hung loosely around their scrawny knees—threatening to slide down their pale calves at any moment. The elementary school was in Sheffield, a grey—in building, in sky, in attitude—industrial town. Peta sat at her desk, a year younger than all the other girls, and colored the exports of California along with a map of the state. She had dreams of becoming an artist, and used her blues, pinks, and yellows to color in the Pacific Ocean, the grapefruits, and the sandy beaches along the coast. Streaks of Crayola yellow zig-zagged from above San Francisco down into Mexico. The teacher later thought Peta was drawing lightening hitting the golden state. The coloring book was Peta's first experience of California.

Thirty years later, California was on fire. Los Angeles was an inferno, and the fat sky filled with a heavy haze. The air smelled of burnt sage and dust. The dry hills around her home glowed as evening fell, and Peta left her home without knowing what would happen to it. Flashes of English countryside blazed in her mind as she drove through the canyon. The radio newscaster spent the next few hours talking about the areas of the Santa Monica Mountains that had been eaten away by the flames. On the 10 o'clock news California fires formed a zig-zag through the state.

Our memories physically live in our minds. While elusive, memory takes space. We know that somehow the thought of childhood or emergency is embedded in brain tissue. However, the physical space in our minds depletes over time, like brush in a forest fire. One way in which memories can decay is if neurotransmitters stored in our vesicles diminishes with time. The brain cannot maintain its levels of neurotransmitter indefinitely; so slowly we lose memories or parts of them. Soon the network forgets *older memories in preference for newer ones.[6] Memories are not stored in any one particular neuron, but are distributed over a wide area of the brain involving many neurons, possibly many millions. Thus, when someone creates a memory, she pulls from all parts of her brain—the auditory, the visual…etc.[7] Her memory of red lingers in a semi-specific space—the memory of a red house in England and a red door in California sit close to one another in the mind. It cannot distinguish between the life that was and the life that is. All memories register in the present. This is why Peta cannot recall her journey to California perfectly or chronologically. Bites of memory jump in, as senses rise and fall in her mind. She can remember a lot—but not everything. She remembers England and America almost simultaneously--- the only way she knows how to be in two places at once.*

What we do not remember fades or jumps into oblivion. The cells disappear, and with them days or months or years or moments. Our life stories become fragments, entangled and intertwined, but with no linear connection. The narratives we create—the narratives of our memories—are thus our creations. We write our own scripts, and we remember as we go along.

Perhaps because of her slowly decaying memory, or perhaps because of her life in Hollywood, my mother always made her life seem like a movie. When I ask her to remember, she wrings her hands. In her recollections she fades in and out of the face

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[6] Patricia Bauer, Remembering the Times of Our Lives (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007) 52.
[7] Bauer 112

of a young woman at a crossroads. The camera pans London. Then suddenly the girl is on a plane, in an apartment, in a marriage, in a home. The camera focuses on her hand movements as the older woman says, "I thought I would be gone for a year, maybe two." But then, like Saturday night movies, the film captures a moment of triumph over tragedy. We see she is sitting by a pool, with mountains all around her. She is tan, like the girls who gaze at Brian Wilson. The camera is on her—she is both the filmmaker and the movie star.

She looks natural in her environment—in a house in the hills in an area near Hollywood. She has learned to navigate six-lane highways and chew bubblegum. Her accent has faded, and her English sense of propriety wanes. Her daughters are American—in identification, in action, in privilege-- but her memories will always be English.

As her daughter, I find that it is both easy and difficult to remember she is an immigrant to the states and an emigrant from England. I have always known her as my American mother. But then there are the times of misspoken words, of accidental snobbery, and the trips back to her home. And every time there is a brushfire, she recalls England—romanticizing walks on the moors, croquet in the summer, and marmite at teatime.

She remembers differently depending when I ask her. Sometimes England is the hell she escaped. Sometimes it is home she never planned on leaving. Either way, her memories are tightly intertwined with her emotions. Emotions especially hold an important place in memory. Strong emotions have a stronger tie to neurons—

allowing emotional meaningful events to be remembered longer than general information.

She would come back to the states, but her fist visit was fleeting. Peta left Los Angeles soon after she arrived—the tour lasted only a week or so. For months in London she survived on the memories of beach sunsets. One Sunday she walked through a large market in central London. Vendors all around her sold ceramics and umbrellas and scarves and jewelry. There was one booth with outstanding color—oranges, pinks, and green. The items were from Peru, a country Peta only knew geographically. She bought a wool sweater, one with neon llamas strolling across it. A sweater I wear now. Somehow (and she can't quite remember how), my mother made a connection between California and Peru. If she could only get back to California, she could save enough money for a trip to South America. This time she would go to San Francisco. She told her family she would be back. She has been here for thirty-five years. She has never been to Peru.

She arrived in San Francisco on Halloween. She stepped out of the airport and was greeted by goblins and fairies and witches. She was young and beautiful and wore American well. She made good friends with her apartment roommates. They all loved John Lennon and peace and the city. Nights consisted of long talks in the living room, where everyone was comfortably crowded. A record player sang on top of the fridge, and sometimes the player and the fridge motor would harmonize.

During the day Peta worked at a hospital in Russian Hill. When she had graduated from secondary school, her mother sent her to secretarial program. That was a job for lovely, middle class women who were looking for husbands. My mother had not been looking for a husband, but her typing skills did serve her well in the hospital. And eventually, however indirectly, her typing skills led her to my father anyway.

Peta sat at her desk, typing timesheets and timetables, as the busy insides of the hospital moved around her. She could type very quickly, and sometimes finished early enough to just watch the action. Her boss, her lover, had awarded her with employee of the month; and she was a hard-worker and a responsible employee, despite falling asleep in the park during her lunch break on her very first day of work. Her boss had been kind to her, not only because he wanted to date her but also because he was compassionate and forgiving. His family was in Chicago, and although the windy city is closer than England, he empathized with Peta's position as a woman without a home nearby.

There was a lot of commotion. Peta had scheduled the details of the movie shoot herself, working out times and locations so the hospital could work as normally as possible. The hospital had rented out a hallway for a movie, and today the crew had taken over half the floor. There was one crew-member, a cinematographer with shaggy hair and a tanned face. When he came over to ask Peta on a date, she said yes despite the fact that her boss was standing behind her.

Maybe she felt a cosmic connection.

Maybe there is love at first sight.

Maybe Paul was just charming.

In the van, the other members of the film crew talked about how beautiful the secretary on Floor Two was. One man announced he was going to ask her for her number. My father told them he already had.

When my mother talks about my birth, she prefaces that memory with this one. The meeting of fate and chance—that is me.

I do not attempt to record all of my mother's memories. Nor do I think I am aiding her in writing an autobiography. If these memories show me anything about my mother, it is that her memories are not concrete. Instead, they are a creation of hers. Her autobiographical memory only shares qualities of all autobiographies in that the memories in it are fitted into themes, motives, story lines. She perhaps unassumingly writes herself into a film—a Hollywood screenplay. Her screenplay carries the repetitive themes of love, home away from home, and a search for identity.

My mother's memories are more than stories to me. They are explanations of my existence. These initial memories of my father are the beginnings of my life. They are the beginnings of Peta's life as an American. They are a beginning of a whole new set of memories, stories, and explanations. Her identity leaks into mine, as she meets my future father. Her memories, her ownership of her memories, are now mine as well. I don't assume she would ever lie to me. However, her truth is her own. I have no choice but to believe her, to make her past mine. There is no attempt to decide if her film is fiction or nonfiction—it just is.

GABRIELA

My aunt remembers in photographs.

A young woman-- an old girl-- poses with snuff in front of an American photographer. He tilts her head, positioning the product perfectly for the camera. She looks like Twiggy, with smaller eyes and a harder mouth. She is nineteen, trying to find a way out of her secretarial school. The camera

snaps,
        snaps,
snaps,

until both it and the photographer are exhausted. But the young girl only becomes more excited, more energized, more ready for another shot.

After this, she is on the covers of magazines, lying on centerfolds, stretched on advertisements. She travels to Milan and New York. During her favorite jobs, she is showcasing the new string bikini in the Canary Islands. Something goes awry in customs, however, and the models and crew are stuck there for weeks. It is a cold December in London as Gabriela rolls in the warm sand.

She recalls this time of her life with a look of daze on her face. When I ask her about drugs and boyfriends, she just waves her hand and says "lots." I know certain secrets about her life. I know of a neglectful husband and an estranged family. I *know she joined a commune with her children and raised her kids without a husband. But when I ask her about this, she instead pulls out old photographs of herself.*

One is worn and torn, with the grainy texture I am so used to seeing in old advertisements. Her skin looks almost painted, and she looks beautiful.

This is the way in which she tells her story, her memories. Like a good photo editor, she sifts through hundreds of versions of the same story, until she finds one that suits her taste. There is no point in showing other people the bad copies, the overexposed film or the blurry snapshot.

Interviewing Gabriela is both easy and difficult. In one way, she knows what she wants to say. Forty years after her last interview, she is ready for mine. But, she doesn't quite answer questions, and she follows a narrative she enjoys to tell.

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The orange sweater was itchy and striped. It was wool, which was good for the winters in India, but much too warm for the spring. Gabriela scrunched the sweater's sleeves up her slender arms, and moved to therapy. One of the best aspects of the Rashneesh commune was the plethora of therapy options offered by those living there. The sessions weren't free, but Gabriela had enough cash left over from modeling to experiment with the different therapists. This morning she was meeting with a man who claimed he could open her heart through the process of recollection.

She had joined the Rajneesh organization after the divorce from her husband. The cult had offered healing, love, awareness, and community. Gabriela had no problem moving to India with her two kids—Lucy and Tavis, aged five and eight. The beliefs of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh mirrored her own: most poignantly the idea of personal freedom and empowerment. Everyone had to wear orange and pink, as these were colors of power.

In the meditation room, Gabriela recalled her childhood. The house in Sheffield was cold and damp. Her mother was exhausted of raising kids on rations, in the years following the war, and she had a short temper. Her father was kind but quiet, and his silence bore down upon the household. She recalled fighting about hemlines with her mother. She recalled teasing the nuns at her boarding school. She recalled the stifling feeling of boredom as a young girl in England. The eldest, she hated having her two younger siblings copying her every move. Her memories, one leading to the next, flooded back to her as she started to remember the feelings of childhood. The cruelty of oppression and propriety bound her heart, and suddenly she was sobbing right there in India...so far from the home of her mother, of the Catholic religion, of the class expectations.

The meditation room's floor was cool; it reminded her of the Central Park's grass at dawn. The magic light creeps over the young woman, posing with a special type of make-up. Her lipstick is a dark shade of red, one that will contrast her bright eyes in the black and white Kodak film. She keeps one print from every photo shoot so she can remember the city, the photographer, and the day. She had tried to keep a journal as a girl, but the process of writing was too tedious for her.

She writes, May 4 1969, on the print the agency gives her the following week. That day, she has a small shoot for a designer. In front of the camera, she sways and moves and dances. Gabriela is exhilarated, and everyone around her feels her energy. Film has become popular, but is still used mainly to capture special events. Gabriela is one of the few who makes her money simply by being recorded. She loves the camera—she isn't sure if it is the attention or the copy of the image that she covets.

***

In her house now, in Tisbury, photographs cover the walls. There are some pictures of her children, and some black and white prints of the past. But mostly, there are shots of her in her modeling days. They aren't meant to be showy, but they are portals to who she was. The cottage is small, with a thatched roof originally made four centuries ago. The building has been lived in by generations and generations of unknowns, their lives recorded by nothing except the stone walls and fences built on the house property. In Gabriela's living room, there is a VCR, TV, and computer. Everything around her records different movements and actions—whether it is the nightly news or an email from a friend.

She tries to explain to me the strangeness of modern technology. Everyone is a model now, she says. Everyone is a photographer. But before the burst of the *information age, there were only hints of its future. Gabriela was something special—she felt something when each photo was taken. Now, it is strange if we forget to record an event with photographs.*

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In the meditation room, a young Gabriela goes back to the past. She tries to explain what she sees and smells in her memory to the therapist.

She remembers this moment with me, explaining that she shared everything she could think of. When I ask what she shared, what moved her so, she just shakes her head. As if letting it out the first time was a mistake, she makes me understand that this is not a therapy session, this is an interview—this is a photograph she chooses to print.

The form of the photograph eludes narrative or story. There is only one moment, taken outside of time—that both speaks to one flash in time and speaks to everything that came before and after that flash. As the photography theorist Damian Sutton says, "The instantaneous photograph reverses our relationship to duration, a reversal that gives photography—both as optics and as imprint—its curious power. With a photograph we are presented with an image that is static but nonetheless can give a powerful sensation of time passing. We are suddenly internal to the change of the world and can glimpse the enormity of past and future that the photograph *suspends."[8] Like memory, photographs play with order and design. But unlike a fleeting memory, photographs last forever.*

The photographs of Gabriela capture her in one moment, one chapter of her life. When she says she left England for freedom, I can't but think of her trapped in photographs. The image allows a moment to last forever. Dead of alive, the photograph "embalms time."[9]

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On a shoot in Milan, the girl looked tired. Tiny lines crept out of her eyes. Her shoulders hunched, and she smoked a cigarette on the side of an old fountain. She looked at herself in the water, and decided never to model again. She had had her fun with it. And it had had its fun with her. She had thousands of photographs of herself spread throughout the world. No one could ever forget her now; she had left her imprint in the world—never to fear falling into English oblivion. She took a drag and placed herself in front of the Leika.

After that things sped up for Gabriela. Without the prints and dates, without the records, her life became a blur to her. She moved from boyfriend to boyfriend, from party to party, from city to city. She had nothing and everything; the stagnant

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[8] Damian Sutton, Photography, Cinema, Memory: The Crystal Image of Time (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Press, 2009) 38.

[9] Sutton 39

England she'd escaped from remained in the back of her mind. But she knew she would never return there.

Her favorite place in the world became Ibiza, Spain. On the island, there was little civilization, only great people and great parties. The land itself was amazing—like a hidden heaven rising from the ocean. The island, although not far from the mainland, created its own time. Life moved very slowly, almost not at all. Ibiza functioned outside of time, like a still image. There she had everything she needed. She visited the corner bar for a morning espresso. She lifted up her straw bag to her shoulder and made her way to the door. When she looked up, she saw him.

Gabriela does not have a photograph of Richard to show me. But the only way she can explain the moment she met him is by telling me what the photograph would look like. They are both young, of course, and good-looking, of course. The sun is almost oppressive in its strength, and that shows in their freckles and tans. They are smiling and they are immediately in love.

The term flashbulb memory usually refers to an event of collective memory—famous deaths or disasters for example. In the case of these events, memory preserves the moment with vividness and clarity. And, sometimes, these events have been described as seen from outside of the body—as if the person remembering were also a statue in the moment. While the analogy between photographs and memory is not perfect, it is close. Both ways of remembering have small details attached to the moment. And both have ways in which they lie. Many theorists, including Susan Sontag, assert that photographs are anything but slices of truth. What is important in *the photographs is what is left out—what is avoided in framing a shot. The image is a fiction—no matter if it is a documentation or a deliberate fabrication.*

Memory works in the same fictional way. It is defined by what is forgotten; moreover, what is forgotten actually creates memories. Marc Auge, draws an analogy between memory and the ocean. He believes, that in the mind, "what remains is the product of an erosion caused by oblivion."[10] *Only through the act of forgetting do we remember anything. I will never know if Gabriela simply has a gift for forgetting or if she crops her memories especially thoroughly.*

Richard and Gabriela fell in love and, eventually fell out of it. Lucy and Tavis grew up with the Rashneesh. Gabriela remembered it all within the meditation room. She emerged renewed, and left the commune with her children. Her recollections remain in India, far from her home in England. Now, she is a licensed therapist asking her clients to retell stories, relive memories, respond to her questions. Most of the clients' fears revolve around death and the afterlife. She lives in a tiny village in the country. But all over, in lost advertisements, in archived photographs, Gabriela remains bound in pictures. She is beautiful in them. She remembers, "I was drop dead gorgeous."

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[10] Marc Auge, Oblivion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 20.

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