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**Abstract:** Places and objects often hold disrupted narratives that give meaning in restricted spaces and controlled time. This control of people in time and its space has increased with institutionalisation over the past century (Brown and Lewis, 2011) and we show how this has a particular resonance in colonized countries. We argue that one of the methods for coping with institutional constraints lies in personal material objects and personalised spaces. Objects carry narratives that can transcend time and place but their intervention can also unsettle the stories of preceding time. We have selected the school and the office as examples that present particular parameters for both children and adults to conform to. We question how personal items come into these places as intimate investments in security and material proof of identity. The place and passage of the objects in time and through time will be a key focus of our paper as we seek to discursively dematerialise the objects as conduits of continuity.

**Keywords:** objects, school, office, narratives, interruptions, continuity.

## **Personal Objects in Institutional Places**

### **Introduction**

Personal and institutional can read as two extreme binaries, however both exist together in a more complex way as this paper will evidence. For the purposes of this paper 'personal' is used in alignment with a person's body, family, their sense of individualism, subjectivity and privacy; and 'institutional' is used here in conjunction with the workings and demands of an organisation, establishment and an external body of public significance. The personal embedded in an individual's subjectivity is not fixed in one location and neither are institutions fixed to one site. Therefore 'place', whilst more material than time is also shown to be layered and at times ambiguous in this paper.

Personal objects can be an extension of one's identity and they can also be a façade presenting a particular view for others to see, while hiding or keeping another face from being seen or recognised. Therefore we question how personal objects act to retain a sense of self in the controlled time and space environments of the office and the school. We argue that these material objects carry narratives that transcend time and place and serve to locate and anchor the owner in a space outside of obvious institutional constraints. The temporal constraints that we have selected are (1) the office and (2) the school. Both examples present particular parameters for people to conform to. These parameters are not only the structural walls of the office and classroom but also, the metered out time that is spent in those spaces and the expectations of productivity within those spaces. The demands are many and being

institutional spaces, they do not 'belong' to the user, which in the case of this paper ranges from the university lecturer, school children and school-teacher. The lecturer may represent an aspect of the university to the students and the teacher certainly represents the school if not the educational system to the school child, but all of these people are just that, people in spaces that they spend a large amount of time in. And for the spaces to generate an atmosphere conducive to meaningful work, it is not unexpected that such spaces will bear significant marks of their individual and collective 'user' identity. Consequently, we question how people bring their personal objects to these places as intimate investments in security and material proof of identity. We also question the ways in which object-spaces hold narratives, which give meaning to their owners in the face of regulated behaviour, restricted space and controlled time.

By exploring the narratives we aim to unravel the embodied meanings in objects that are taken out of their context (the privacy of the home) and placed in a relatively public context (the school and office). We will use material from a community project conducted in a primary school in Australia and 'object-space' narratives from our own university offices. We acknowledge that these university office spaces are not necessarily the same as other institutional offices but we show how both historical time and corporate time exert some influence upon both university and school spaces despite efforts to personalise them.

The paper is arranged into three overlapping sections: (1) *Once up(on) a time*; (2) *Time/space in the school*; and (3) *Time/ space intervention: Changing Lives*. The first section deals with narratives of offices on settled and invaded Indigenous land in South Africa and Australia. This leads into the discussion of a school that, while sitting on multiple sites of memory, creates a capsule for a collective classroom time scale. The third section deals specifically with the way in which we interrupted that time in our 'Changing Lives' community project, which engaged with one particular school in order to draw upon the histories of the children's families and how particular objects that they were encouraged to bring to school, told stories.

The paper is really about the connection between object, space and time. Therefore it often makes sense for us to use the hyphenated term object-space. In problematising the object-space, the subject and the institution, we draw upon Judith Butler, Mieke Bal and Elizabeth Grosz in addition to Paul Ricoeur in our attempts to understand how objects travel through time and temporal space. Remembering and forgetting, acknowledging and denying are all part of the ways in which histories are told and untold. Therefore we begin the exploration of what objects-spaces say about themselves in the light of constant change and movement through time.

### **Once Up(on) a 'Time'.**

Historical time alongside the historicity of time are discussed by both Paul Ricoeur (1980, 170) and Judith Butler (2006, p.54). Butler addresses historical time in the context of injustices saying that 'the historical time that we thought was past turns out to structure the contemporary field with a persistence that gives lie to history as chronology'. Ricoeur divides time into three levels: 'Within-time-ness'; 'Historicity'; 'Unity of future, past and present'; reemphasising that time is not linear and that the '... the ordinary representation of time as a linear series of "nows" hides the true constitution of time'. To Ricoeur, historicity is the sense of time that extends from the past through the present and into the future. The passages that are integrated into this section of the article below, are *once (up)on a time* examples, which include instances of historical time in places and spaces that give lie or shape to what is within the personal space.

The (im)materiality of time is encompassed by the markings of change upon things. The things are little bits of infinity. Elizabeth Grosz writes, "The thing is the point of intersection of space and time, the locus of the temporal narrowing and spatial localization that constitutes specificity or singularity. Things are localization of

materiality, the capacity of material organization to yield to parts, microsystems, units or entities. They express the capacity of material organization to divide itself, to be divided from without, so that they may become of use for the living” (Grosz, 2005, p.132). Grosz’s words explain the way in which objects cross over time and space and provide an interstitial point of familiarity, a localized and tangible bit of reality that can be related to personally and can also relate itself to larger spaces or entities. Grosz says here that such objects which are invested with this power to transcend time and spatial constraints, have an expressive ability to separate out into sections or pieces that can be more useful to us in this complex and ordered world. The things or material objects are in places, which are parts of greater spaces with various and contrasting histories as well as untold stories. Below is an extract from the first author’s office narrative:

*It started in a small temporary office that was an entrance to two other offices. It was informally known as the 'slide library' – I entrenched myself there with the bright yellow metal file cabinets for the history of art slide collection. The office was in a wonderful old colonial building beside the equally majestic town hall and library – all overlooking the Parade ground that had housed the first settlement of sailors from the Dutch East India Company since 1652. They planted a vegetable garden for the scurvy ridden sailors on the boats that rounded the Cape of Good Hope alternatively known as the Cape of Storms. Cape Town was the city of old and new beginnings, cradled beneath the towering mountain, Cape Town has since been called the Mother City of South Africa. This was where my first office was. To enter the building, I walked up wide marble stairs where old an Malay gentleman used to polish the brass banisters with pride; the double entrance doors were equally inspiring with thick wood panels and large brass knobs. You could smell the salt off the sea and hear the flower sellers on the Parade, which had become a lively market ground. Beyond were the taxi ranks and buses at constant war with each other over customers. On the surface this was friendly but at times buses were attacked and burned in what escalated into a full-blown war of the taxi barons who would eventually control the economy of post Apartheid South Africa.*

The above narrative acknowledges a colonial beginning, an idyllic position and a murmur of exploitation. Time is marked by the materials and dimensions of Colonialism, such as in the examples of marble and polished brass, sea journeys, trade and discreet power. Below is an extract from the second author’s narrative in another colonial country, Australia:

*We were accommodated in a transportable building. It sat lightly on the land and made it possible to imagine a time before any buildings existed there. Perhaps it was the river that flowed just outside the back door that always spoke of a longer timescale than that of the institution. I used to prop open that door with a stack of theses and let in the smell of grass and the sound of water.*

*Moving into B building at Underdale was a step up for me as an academic worker. All the members of the research centre had been occupying three transportable buildings on the river-bank and this was our first permanent building. An octagonal design meant that all the rooms had odd angles. The 'good' offices were those around the outside. In the building’s core were rooms without windows, which got light from glass panels looking into the corridor. My office was in the outer ring, and had a narrow window looking out onto a slice of concrete 'plaza' and the entrance to the stairs. I couldn't see the grassy river-bank – you had to be a senior researcher to get that view.*

The smell of grass and the sound of the water in the second author’s narrative are outside of the institutionalised reality of circumscribed interior offices, just as the scent of the sea is for the first author. Those encounters with nature’s time were fleeting and only possible when outdoors or in a temporary building. The move to a

permanent structure put a greater distance between the sensory experience of time and potentially inhibited this shifting spatio-temporal reality via an experience of an interior office. Moving is an important component of time because time is often measured by the way in which things travel in space. Tuan (1977) explains that we can only really experience space through movement, and for us this also means coping with the change that movement brings. Change is 'time travelling' and as Grosz stresses in her remarkable book, *Time Travels*, "it is we who are in time, rather than time that is within us" (2005, p.3). Ricoeur's thoughts echo Grosz's concept and he writes that time and narrative are mutually constitutive: "I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent" (1980, p.169).

The languages of space, time and story conflate in efforts to make sense of our pasts. The B building referred to was<sup>1</sup> part of a large concrete structure in the style of late Modernism. It sat heavily upon a flood plain of rivulets and fertile land inhabited for thousands of years by Indigenous Australians who understood the fluctuations of time and space and respected the need to move with the demands and bounty of nature. The two permanent buildings in the authors' narratives made statements of claim upon the land settled and invaded by Europeans. The authors are complicit in the claiming of space as a means of locating themselves in the continuum of time. The colonial moment lives on in the migrated subjectivities of the authors who carry the legacies of white colonial hegemony and simultaneously search for locatedness in invaded lands (Riggs & Angoustinos, 2005). Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004), an Indigenous Australian feminist scholar emphasizes the obligation for making one's subject position 'visible' (2004, p.81) whenever writing about place in colonized countries. Moreton-Robinson stresses that white people writing about Indigenous peoples in colonised countries rarely own up to this as "their [white people's] way of knowing[. It] is never thought of by white people as being racialised despite whiteness being exercised epistemologically" (2004, p.75). Both authors of this article are cognisant that telling personal stories of place and time as white immigrants can unwittingly evidence a systemically privileged knowledge production that could then be construed here as fundamentally flawed.

The narrative of moving and inhabiting space continues, bearing Moreton-Robinson's caution to white writers in mind. And below is another excerpt from the first author, recounting the destruction of an entire community in South Africa in order to build a 'white' university, where she had an office with a panoramic view.

*We were moved to the new campus - built on what some called 'blood ground'. Designed in long horizontal layered concrete slabs it moved up in sections supposedly echoing the gradient of the mountain upon which it was built. However in order to have the ground cleared, thousands of homes had been bulldozed. It was the site of 'District Six', home to several communities of varied ethnicities, from Jewish to Indian to Malay to Cape Coloured to African - these folk lived in humorous tolerance of their difference. Windy little streets with colourful shops and dwellings melted into the mountain like a garden. Then in 1968 the bulldozers moved in. District Six is one of the many scars of 'resettlement' that occurred in Apartheid South Africa.*

Below is a poem about the destruction of District Six:



Figure 1 Rosena. (1987). *Youthexpress*. Grassroots publication. Cape Town: Community Arts Centre. (Translated by the first author)

<p>In District six the bread was 5c the cheese 10c and the curry 25c</p> <p>We played outside until late in the evening week-ends it was very nice to visit friends and family</p> <p>look - the ice lollies is 5 for 20c the tomatoes 10c p/kg and Cyril the queer who plays netball dyed his hair</p> <p>Mogamat of the seven steps has a new horse cart with rubber wheels and Tiema from the fish market is pregnant again.</p> <p>The sweat runs off me and I realise I am lying on the ground. It was all a dream.</p> <p>District six is flat the bread is almost R1.00 and I know that I can no longer stay out late in the evening.</p> <p>People no longer eat roti and curry they eat sheep's heads</p>	<p>Cyril the queer is in detention He joined the struggle The struggle against all forms of oppression</p> <p>Mogamat of the seven steps became a merchant The police burned his house down He gave the comrades money for a pamphlet</p> <p>Tiema's baby was shot by the riot police their school boycotted There was a march and the police went into the school</p> <p>P.W. [the prime minister] has a peptic ulcer Elize [his wife] wears new leopard skin outfits Reagan is a born again and Samora Machel was killed in a plane accident plane accident's backside Machel always said 'Culture is the revolution'</p> <p>Mandela is still always in the jail Cyril [Ramaphosa a freedom fighter] and all of us still fight oppression all forms of oppression</p>
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Figure 2 (1990). Office in Cape Town. On the 'cleared' land of District Six.

*The view was breathtaking as it looked out from the mountain over the harbour and sea. It was an office that rose up out of the destruction of memory. It stood on the ghosts of homes - dislocated people, now strewn across the wind and crime swept plains known as 'the Cape Flats'. A gang land where death is a way of life. I covered the wall in pictures, anything I could find from the catalogues and photos, which were part of the material I taught in art and design history. I hung an old mirror found at a farm-house auction on the wall and opposite (reflected) hung two Victorian lace collars from a great aunt. I rescued a tattered arm-chair and covered it with hand-woven fabric; - I tried to erase the blood from the office walls. I created a fantasy of denial.*

The poem about the destruction of District Six was written by a high school student who had lived there as a young child. In it she recounts her memories in the typical half Afrikaans, half English vernacular of the hybrid peoples known more commonly as the Cape Coloureds. These hybrid people are descendants of the Dutch sailors and Khoi and Xhosa Indigenous peoples. The poem is darkly humorous but the reality of what was destroyed lies vividly in the lines and that reality also lies beneath the disguised office of the first author, despite the fact that this poem and the book it is in, exists somewhere on a bookshelf in that same office. Numerous images from art history attempted to create an aesthetic which could be used for individual and small group teaching, but all this without the acknowledgment of the specific violence upon which the arrogant building sat. Victorian lace collars and a kaleidoscope of art images drew down the blind on a time that *could* not be forgotten. That time of pain could not be denied no matter how much the walls were covered with distracting images which bore no relation to the trauma of the ground they stood on. In *Precarious Life*, Butler (2006, p.146) questions what a grievable life is and discusses how loss is remembered but also erased, saying that 'disidentification is part of the common practice of identification itself'.

The demand for a truer image, for more images, for images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering has its place and importance. The erasure of that suffering through the prohibition of images and representations more generally circumscribes the sphere of appearance, what we can see and what we can know (Butler, 2006, p.146).

The first author censored herself from displaying images of the stolen lives and the destroyed homes, because if they had been displayed in that institutional office which was a party to the crime, she may have found herself without a contract. The narratives emerging from these places represent an historical time, a time that gives grief a life, a time that also tragically re-enacts that violence through denial.

### **Time/Space in the School**

Like the university, the school is an institution that orders time/space with the goal of producing social subjects. But generally teachers do not have offices and the classroom is their space. The concept of a curriculum divides knowledge into domains and then allocates to each of these domains a measure of time within the timescale of the educational institution. The concept of a timescale is taken from Lemke (2000) who writes: "Each scale of an organization in an ecosocial system is an integration of faster, more local processes (i.e. activities, practices, doings, happenings) into longer time-scale, more global or extended networks" (Lemke, 2000, p.275).

Lemke poses the question, "What are the characteristic timescales of the processes and events that make "a classroom" for us?" (2000, p.275). At the end of a year, the teacher is meant to have 'covered' the curriculum. At a smaller timescale, that of the day, the timetable organizes teachers' and students' movements and interactions. Space works with time enabling the discursive practices of the educational institution. One of the ways this happens is through the way in which space regulates

the number of participants in a learning interaction, and thus the nature of the interaction. The size of the class, together with the time of the school day, creates the conditions for the attention economy, in which the teacher's time is the resource, which has to be measured out to the students (Delavan 2009). In a study of early childhood educators' time management, Wien (1996) refers to the 'production schedule' that dominates the day and determines adult decisions related to children's activities (see also Ball et al. 1984). The interrelatedness of time and space in achieving this regulation is indicated in the case of one teacher who 'broke the hold of the production schedule' in an attempt to create a more responsive and flexible educational environment. This move involved 'spatial redesign [and] redesign of routines' in order to accomplish variation in time management. Thus, challenging the temporal regimes of schooling entails challenging the spatial regimes and vice versa.

Institutional time in the school is expressed through the materiality of its spaces. In the timescale of a year, the materiality of the classroom undergoes a cycle beginning and ending with bare walls. From the school and teacher's perspective, these bare spaces exist to be filled with items produced by children in collective displays of their productivity. From the primary child's perspective the walls are where their work is displayed, day by day or week by week. And when considering the classroom as a vessel in time, the walls are part of its containment; a containment, which seeks to dissolve difference and combine project displays in unison.

Each year, the group of children see reflected only their own productions, with no reference to those who went before. This is an erasure of history that, on a smaller timescale, echoes the school itself in its act(uality) of building over and effacing traces of the lives of those who preceded its arrival. The school like the university materializes as a civil and social construction, which produces its own history by building over prior histories. The second author can remember as a migrant child a picture in an Australian history text book depicting a river, a man's head with a compass balanced on it and his arms raised in a swimming motion, and the dark-skinned near-naked figures poised on the bank with spears pointed at the swimmer. And yet, the reality that the land on which the new school stood, had been the homeland of the Kurna people a mere hundred years before, was never mentioned. The textual narrative of colonial encounter was completely disconnected from the material history of the school that these students attended.

From this brief discussion of some of the ways in which time/space is (de)materialized within the institution of schooling, we turn now to a particular school and to our interventions into time/space relations through the introduction of children's personal objects into that space.

### **A Time/Space Intervention: The Changing Lives Project**

In 2010 we approached a number of schools with an invitation to participate in an arts-based project on the theme of 'Changing Lives'. The wording was chosen to express becomingness and plurality in relationship to identity and history. *Holy Family* accepted our invitation and at the simplest level (with the teachers), the project invited the children to become self and family historians. The metaphor of 'catching history' was introduced to the children as a means of expressing how the flow of temporality can be interrupted through the transformation of the historical experience/event into a text or material artefact. We worked with teachers to adapt these ideas for each participating class to connect with children's prior knowledge and be appropriate for their stages of development. We were aware throughout that working with teachers in this way meant being enlisted into the institution's view of the children as members of the class collective in institutional space/time. However, it also meant significantly, if briefly, interrupting the dominant institutional narrative by treating each child as differently and individually within-time and within-space.

Holy Mother<sup>2</sup> is a neat little red brick primary school in an up-and-coming inner suburb of Adelaide, South Australia's capital city. The coming-up is still happening,



the bourgeois couples have not completely gentrified the area yet, and so it remains a transitional space. Partially cleared industrial land, nineteenth century workers' cottages and artists' studios constitute the urban mix (see images below).



Figure 3. Images of the environment around the school showing (a) demolished workshop sites; (b) remaining workers' cottages; (c) artist's studio; (d) the interior of one of the school rooms.

Transitional spaces that lie in-between now and then, lend themselves to both retro and prospective narrative trajectories. They are spaces where marginality thrives and where the home(less) make their marks like a montage on historicity. This condition is something that Jane Rendell expresses as "lean[ing] towards the allegorical ... in their modes of production, towards a melancholic contemplation, ruin and material transience on the one hand and towards juxtaposition and shock on the other" (2006, p.121). The vacant industrial land yawns with vacancy offered up to tagging and nocturnal gangs, as it lies beside densely packed cottages and converted warehouses. These are the environs as one approaches the lively little school whose enrolment reflects the neighbourhood; a mixture of children: a few new arrivals (refugees and new migrants) and plenty of old arrivals of Mediterranean family origin.

The school is like a fenced island amongst the varied narrative languages of its neighbourhood. It materializes the dominant educational discourse of productivity blended with the discourse of institutional religion. Thus, serried displays of children's work fills walls while statues and icons appear on shelves. Different time-scales operate through these materializations: the time-scale of the task, which produced the work displayed; the time-scale of the school year within which a class fills its walls with work; and the infinite timescale of spirituality in which the sacred being precedes and continues beyond all human existence.

What is lacking is the timescale of an individual life, as are the artefacts through which personal history is materialized. In its absence, children at Holy Mother seek to find signs of the personal in the institutional objects they have been required to produce. The second author observed during the school's 'Art Night', that a child brought her mother into the classroom to show her the girl's self-portrait. It was displayed in a grid of simple graphic heads, and the girl querying her mother said, 'Guess which one is mine!'. The mother could not guess and the child said 'It's that one! You know it's mine because of the long eye lashes!'. The teacher as a representative of the institutional purpose has reduced the possibility for difference even before the work is completed by always defining the medium and dimension of the work therefore when it comes to display, near uniformity is the result. However, the story illustrates the efforts to which children will go to produce and read even subtle signs of difference. The teacher counts on this because she wants the child to recognize her/himself in the display even as it presents as a sign of successful collectivity. This illustrates the 'compromise' described by Grosz "between the world as it is in its teaming and interminable multiplicity ... and the world as we need it to be or would like it to be – open, amenable to intention and purpose ..." (2005, p.133).



To initiate the changing lives project in the school, we introduced ourselves to the children as artist-historians, showed some of our personal objects, and shared our personal histories that led to discussions about the different ways in which history can be 'caught'. Then we invited the children to bring cherished objects from their families and homes which told stories about where they came from and who they were. Mindful of the possible loss of possessions experienced by refugee families and not wanting to privilege material goods, we also introduced the idea of the 'invisible treasure' to express the value of cultural resources such as stories, songs, recipes and memories in connecting children to self and family history.

The children brought an astonishing array of objects, some from grandparents and some from parents, all holding stories of identity and subjectivity. In considering the multiple mediums of narrativity and collecting, Mieke Bal (2006, p.271) looks to objects as tellers of meaning, calling them 'telling objects'. She says, 'Things, called objects for good reason, appear to be the most 'pure' form of objectivity'. Bal asks '... can things tell stories?' and suggests that objects are 'subjectivized elements in a narrative' therefore objects are imbued with memory and connected to their owner/carrier/ as an adjunct to story.

The youngest children often chose to bring their earliest attachment object such as a soft toy. These objects are often given at birth and represent the beginnings of a child's life and membership of a family.



Figure 4. Classroom display of objects children brought from home.

Material transformation of these personal objects was the next stage of the project. Children photographed their objects, made drawings of them, spoke about them onto digital audio and constructed multimedia digital texts. We worked with different media to encourage the children to transfer meaning from one object to another. So, for instance a child who brought in an 'invisible treasure' – a story about his grandfather's participation in World War 2 – was encouraged to transform this spoken account into a visual text in the form of a drawing.

One of the most compelling activities in terms of its materiality and connection to time, was the making of clay impressions. In this activity, children worked with a ceramicist and another team member to press their personal objects into porcelain. Later, the impressions were fired to make unglazed white tiles, which were photographed and then returned to the children.

In *figure 5* the children are seated outside of the classroom on the concrete playground so that their clay work would not dirty the classroom. They have taken imprints and impressions of some of their families' cherished objects and are remaking/ reproducing them in clay.



Figure 5. Children with objects and working with clay.

The act and process of reproduction is a revisiting and re-presentation of time held in objects. For example, a trophy won by a father or a coat of arms with the family crest are objects that mark significance of achievement and heritage but that is where it could remain, i.e., as merely historical signifiers held still/static in the material object. However, here the children, while outside of the limits of the classroom walls but nonetheless still held by its time, have one hour to reproduce in objects of treasure in clay. The objects, which they brought from home are cling-wrapped to protect them when making the impressions. Most of these objects are vessels of memory: a small leather case; a jewellery box; a photo frame. The objects the children brought with them to the classroom came from another time and place. As mentioned above they are precious parts of their and their families' identities and, these personal objects in transit each hold a family story. It is not customary for the children to bring items from home, as the teacher is nervous that such objects would get lost or damaged. It is for this reason why they were arranged together in an altar-like display. This display ensured that the teacher had control of the objects all in one place while simultaneously respecting their narrative value by elevating them on the display table (Fig 4). However the children's remaking of the objects gave those personal objects another life, an extended voice. This extended voice brought the child and the children in general much closer to the voices of history which they perhaps would not have focussed upon or shared. This process perpetuated the precious nature of their families' pasts and emphasised the importance of remembering in an interactive manner.

In the process of transformation, the meaning of the object in the child's life became interwoven with the meaning of the object in institutional space. This helped us understand more about the relationship between the personal and the institutional in time and space. For instance, when the Year 1 children added captions to their digital photographs, these often commented on the new and unfamiliar spatial circumstances of the object. Objects were attributed with subjectivity and made to speak of this strangeness: 'Where am I?'; 'What am I doing here?'. One girl wrote of her toy, 'Beadle is very shy. It is her first time to go out.' We can perhaps see here the child, through her object, re-enacting the strangeness of her first day of school, experiencing herself in narrative time. At the same time, the novel and transgressive nature of interpolating these personal objects into the classroom space, of which the children were evidently aware, draws attention to the everyday exclusion of the intimate personal narrative.

## Conclusion

We have attempted to situate time at the centre of two spaces of occupancy, the university office and the school classroom. However the uncanny reality is that time cannot be situated because as Grosz carefully points out, 'we are in time', time is not in us (2005, p.41). We are in time perhaps eternally but it is nonetheless a magical medium to contemplate because of its vastness. And it is some aspect of this vast infinity that we tried to foreground. The three sections of 'once (up)on a time', 'time/space in the school' and 'a time/space intervention: changing lives' provide a context for the narratives that have emerged out of this wonder of time. However ineffable time might be, we are also in it and are accountable for how we use it. In addressing this accountability, we provided the political registers of occupied land and place. And from these temporal spaces of occupation, the narratives of remembering and forgetting are significant registers for experience in terms of different ways of belonging. Belonging that is often fraught through dominant registers of occupation. One story is of belonging to a community that was destroyed by bulldozers, which speaks of a violent erasure of a time that should have been left to unfold naturally. Another story is the university that was built upon that same 'blood' ground of destruction; yet another is of a temporary office sitting lightly beside the rippling creek, land that was once a verdant floodplain for Indigenous Australians; and another is of a bright little school encompassing the time of community and migrant hope. However within the sadness of lost time and the daily risk of continuing to lose time memories, we tried to bring something back through material objects and, we have tried to show that in the absence of human voices, objects act as conduits of memory. The objects and the object-spaces are containers of stories, which when tapped open give material shape to something quite immaterial.

It must however be emphasised that despite efforts, the process of materialising the immateriality of time is filled with contradictions. Time is acknowledged to be an abstract (immaterial) concept but is nonetheless segmented into material stages in order to manage identities and productivity, for example in timetables where the autonomy of the classroom as a capsule of learning exists in the present.

Personal histories are as messy as they are fragile, therefore office decoration and classroom display are only the surface layer of narratives that are either denied or understated. Our paper went beneath the surface to uncover relationships between personal objects and their adopted spaces and to point to the disturbing regulation of political time which erases its colonised past; the analysis of the university offices and the intervention in the primary school revealed that the presence of the objects unsettle institutional time but do not dislodge it. The power differentials that exist in institutional time are not exterior to the subjects in this paper as all are caught up in the interplay between conformity and personal disclosure. It is important for the children to belong to the classroom collective - a unity the teacher takes pride in. And it is important for the academics to retain a sense of self in order to research and teach with authenticity. But our bodies are vessels in time and as they traverse their spaces, violences of disassociation and dislocation can render matter from the mind. Such ruptures of time are forgetful of precious and painful pasts but an effective way to give material shape to precarious histories and personal identities, is to complement visual examples with narratives of the objects and spaces and persistently insert them into institutional time. The objects hold historical time within them and act as vehicles between a tenuous past and a possible future. How that past is made known is dependent on the custodian and carrier and like a baton in a relay the objects are passed along and around to ensure continuities.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The B building has since been demolished along with the rest of the campus which was sold to property developers.

<sup>2</sup> Not the school's real name

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