

# Random-Access Memories

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the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
in Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design

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# Abstract

Following my archival impulse, I access memories in the form of 8mm footage shot in 2002 - 2004 by my family members to read my own history. Taking an anti-masterful approach and building upon and working with the media to better understand what constitutes my being here as a particular kind of subject, I simultaneously meditate on the notion of memory, access, sound and the state of the post-digital. The installation RAM (Random-Access Memory) consists of a set of digitally recreated images, aligned to their original 8mm footage projected on the opposite wall. The original footage playing on a loop, is displayed next to a collection of soundtracks inspired by the memories from my childhood and the footage shot by my uncle across India and Italy. When we think of ourselves outside of the Grid of 9-5, which physical form and form of thought do we assume then? To what extent are our everyday experiences shaped by the past and to what extent is the past still happening?

In this installation I extend a hand from somewhere within this bundle of knots, outward and inward, relentlessly trying to trace my formative narratives that in ways both clear and less accessible, have shaped my self-understanding as a particular kind of subject in this country and economy.

# Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement- I wish to acknowledge the land that my feet touch as I do this work.

The ancestral homelands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat peoples. I'm grateful to the Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island for allowing me to call this land my home.

I want to acknowledge my mother tongue Marathi, the first language I was taught to speak in. I hope for those who were forced to speak in the language of their colonizers and perhaps wish to stay in touch with their ancestral roots, that by acknowledging our first languages we can attempt to stay closer to our mother lands.

None of what I do would be possible without the everlasting, unceasing love of my parents from back home. I would like to thank my father for the time he spent advising me throughout this project and the difficult years after leaving home. You inspire me to write and be better every day. I wish to thank my mother for teaching me what caring really means, your letters remain etched in my memory as a forever source of strength. Thank you for being my muse ever since I could perceive the world around me.

# Dedication

I give thanks to my uncle who a brilliant artist himself has created a treasure-mine of work which will never cease to inspire me, propelling my work in directions I never thought I would reach.

Thank you, Mama, for always keeping the artist alive in you.

I extend thanks to my grandmother, Mothi Aai, for her relentless appreciation of creativity and intuition, and unmatched dedication toward family. My grandfather, Mothe Baba, for always encouraging us to push ourselves beyond the convention and keep creating and gathering. For teaching me that sky's the limit until we lost him four years ago. I'm thankful for your vision, your memories, and your life, which breathes through my body.

I wish to thank my friend Abhishek who I've had the honour to artistically collaborate with on multiple occasions and is one of the most talented artists I know. My friend Aadya, whose love and friendship, although from afar, shaped the parts of me that I'm most proud of today. I extend thanks to my best friend and partner, Ram, for being a consistent source of comfort at my lowest points through the course, and the partial inspiration behind the title of the work.

Last but not the least, I offer thanks to my advisors, Dr. Caroline Langill and Dr. Adam Tindale, two of the most inspiring creators I've had the privilege to share knowledge with. It's needless to say that this project wouldn't be the same without your continual advice, vulnerability, offerings and support. It is an honour to be able to able to learn from you. Thank you for listening, for your trust and most of all, time.

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# Introduction

*'I always felt like I was born into a sort of an after-every thingness': after independence, after the invention of phones & the Internet, after the IT bloom and so forth.<sup>1</sup>*

When I saw the massive collection of footage captured by my uncle Mama<sup>2</sup> between 2002 and 2004, I was mesmerized by the beautiful way in which it was shot, apart from all the family history and memories that they carried. I think myself lucky to have access and documentation of these times of our family's lives – back when cellphones were still considered a new, glittery invention. Curiosity, eagerness, and honesty bled through the multiple hour-long videos spanning from country to country and I viewed them as something of an affect treasure. I would randomly access this footage from time to time, over the years, continually drawn to it. Visiting the footage is a habit, a practice, a free fall, very much in contrast to the structured approach I usually follow in other, past segments of my work. 'Remembering' as creative practice is not in itself exceptional, for it goes on all the time in everyone's lives, involving applications of the mnemonic imagination in making meaning and deriving value out of all that has happened to us and to those we know in a series of interwoven pathways that we somehow retrace when we think of the past and what it makes of us<sup>3</sup>. The title Random-Access Memories is an ode to the same, and a play on the notion of human and digital memory.

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<sup>1</sup> Marsha Pearce, "Reimagining History as Narrative in Contemporary Art" in *Fragments of Epic Memory*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2023, 159: The first part of the quote is from the above citation, but I have added my own context after the colon in the intro quote.

<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Pickering, M. and Emily Keightley, *Photography, Music and Memory: Pieces of the Past in Everyday Life*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, England, 2015, pg. 23

Mama would often make music with miscellaneous objects that my cousin, his son, and I gathered from around the house. He would make his own compositions on the guitar while simultaneously playing the harmonica with his mouth. Mama later got into portraiture and sketch portraits of my grandparents and relatives on a whim with effortless skill. As a kid I always thought of him as an artist even before I fully understood the definition of the term. An artist by passion, not profession. Nobody in the family was aware of the profession's existence back then.

Although he dabbled across media and introduced us to many a film and sound project produced across the globe, Mama always worked in big corporations in the IT (Information Technology/engineering) sector. Like most of us, his 9-5s would often extend beyond 5pm and certain things about this grid often leave one with little spirit to contemplate or really exist in spaces outside of it. As much as I wished he would, I never saw him pursue his passions. I saw a lot of him as I spent a few of my early childhood years around their household – with Mothi Aai, Mothe Baba<sup>4</sup> and my brother, younger to me by two years - my parents worked overseas during my formative years as engineers.

The work culture and career relations back home across nation-wide organization has always been rigidly biased toward practical, application-based disciplines that potentially 'contribute' the most to society<sup>5</sup>, based on Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's vision for India – 'It is science alone that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening custom and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, or a rich country inhabited by starving people... The future belongs to science and to those who make

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<sup>4</sup> Mothi Aai translates to Big Mother (grandmother) and Mothe Baba means Big Father (grandfather).

<sup>5</sup> My mother, father, uncle, aunt and other relatives are software engineers by profession – it's the one, go-to career choice after high school.

friends with science.’ He believed that a newly independent nation should be best friends with science and science alone.

For this as one of the reasons, there had always been this gap or aperture between the field of science and humanities in institutions in the city I grew up in (Mumbai). About thirty percent of public schools had Science, Commerce and Humanities as departments to choose from, but most private schools, including the one I spent twelve years studying in, didn’t have a Humanities or Arts department because it wasn’t a viable option for money-making or ‘success.’ A student option to choose the field of humanities was almost looked down upon or considered foolish or incompetent. Instead, there were tuition organizations like FIITJEE (Forum for Indian Institute of Technology Joint Entrance Examination) funded by institutions like IIT (Indian Institutes of Technology<sup>6</sup>) which formed their bases in private schools, training students for free, for the cut-throat competition that comes with trying to get admission in the institute. At only about sixteen years of age, students enroll in a prep class where they’re drilled for the IIT entrance exam, sometimes even before they go to school. Getting here is the fervent dream of nearly every student, and every family for their children.<sup>7</sup> While the aim of this body of institutions was progress with nation-building, they instead had an unexpected effect when the United States imported engineers from India the same way they imported oils from Saudi Arabia, cars from Japan, TVs from Korea or whiskey from Scotland<sup>8</sup>. Thus, a certified engineering degree ended up more as a ticket to a comfortable, luxurious life abroad instead – which became the ultimate marker of success in a career for most families.

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<sup>6</sup> Founded between 1951-1959, four Indian Institutions of Technology (IIT) campuses were established, one in each direction of the country. A hallowed brand with a selection rate of 0.1%, getting admission into IIT is a rat race for students starting from an early age.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Leung, “Imported From India”, CBS News (June 19, 2023), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/imported-from-india/>.

<sup>8</sup> Prahasrh, FMF, “How did India’s Obsession With Engineering Begin?”, July 28, 2022, 5:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOdaWttN3Gk>.

Having grown considerably skeptical and aware of the pressures of the general understanding of ‘successful’, what it entails and the incredibly high moral ground it held, I was naturally inclined to continue pursuing arts as a field, dabbling in film, digital, analogue, and experimental imagery, something my parents were very supportive of and my uncle was skeptical of, all of them being engineers that couldn’t get admission into the prestigious IITs, but had engineering degrees from other reputed institutions instead. After all, a lot of my mother’s side of the family were artists in their own ways, starting with Mama. Stepping away from the societally accepted route of choosing a career path came with its own consequences that I face even today<sup>9</sup>, but there had always been a world beyond the problematic<sup>10</sup> ways in which our generation as a batch was misled into believing that engineering is the morally superior career option.

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<sup>9</sup> My family has often had trouble being taken seriously when asked why they ‘let me’ pursue the field I chose or what its significance is.

## **10**

Three IIT students died by suicide in 2023, eight in 2022, four in 2021, three in 2020, and the list continues., Sneha Belcin., “IIT suicides reveal toxic mix of academic pressure, official apathy and discrimination”, The New Indian Express (March 20, 2023), <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/Mar/16/iit-suicides-reveal-toxic-mixof-academic-pressure-official-apaty-and-discrimination-2556657.html>

# Methodology and Theory

Documenting (visual, sonic and literary) and journaling about my travel and / or life experiences in about 20 + journals, archiving has become an instinct. I often fumble around with an experimental approach of making images from the rough material I can gather online over the years – accessing the online archive, leading to a way of image-making resembling digital collage, an approach and technique similar to the one I used to create yearning(s).

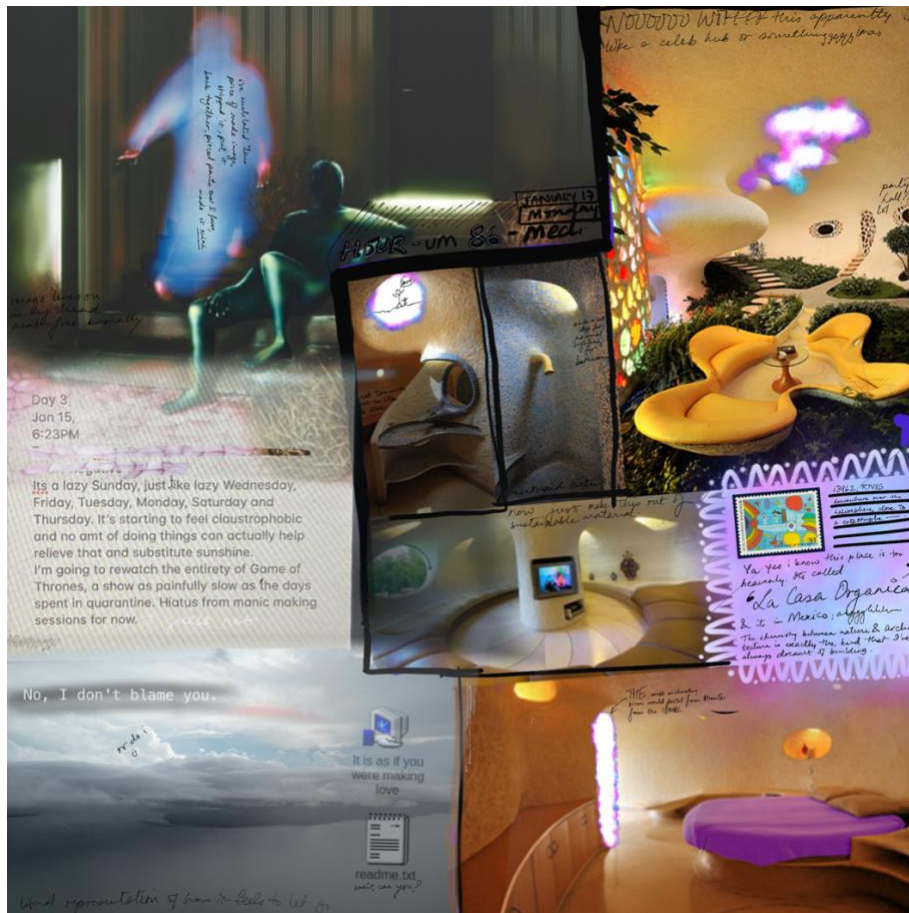


Figure 1: An journal-image created while in lockdown when I was diagnosed with COVID-19.

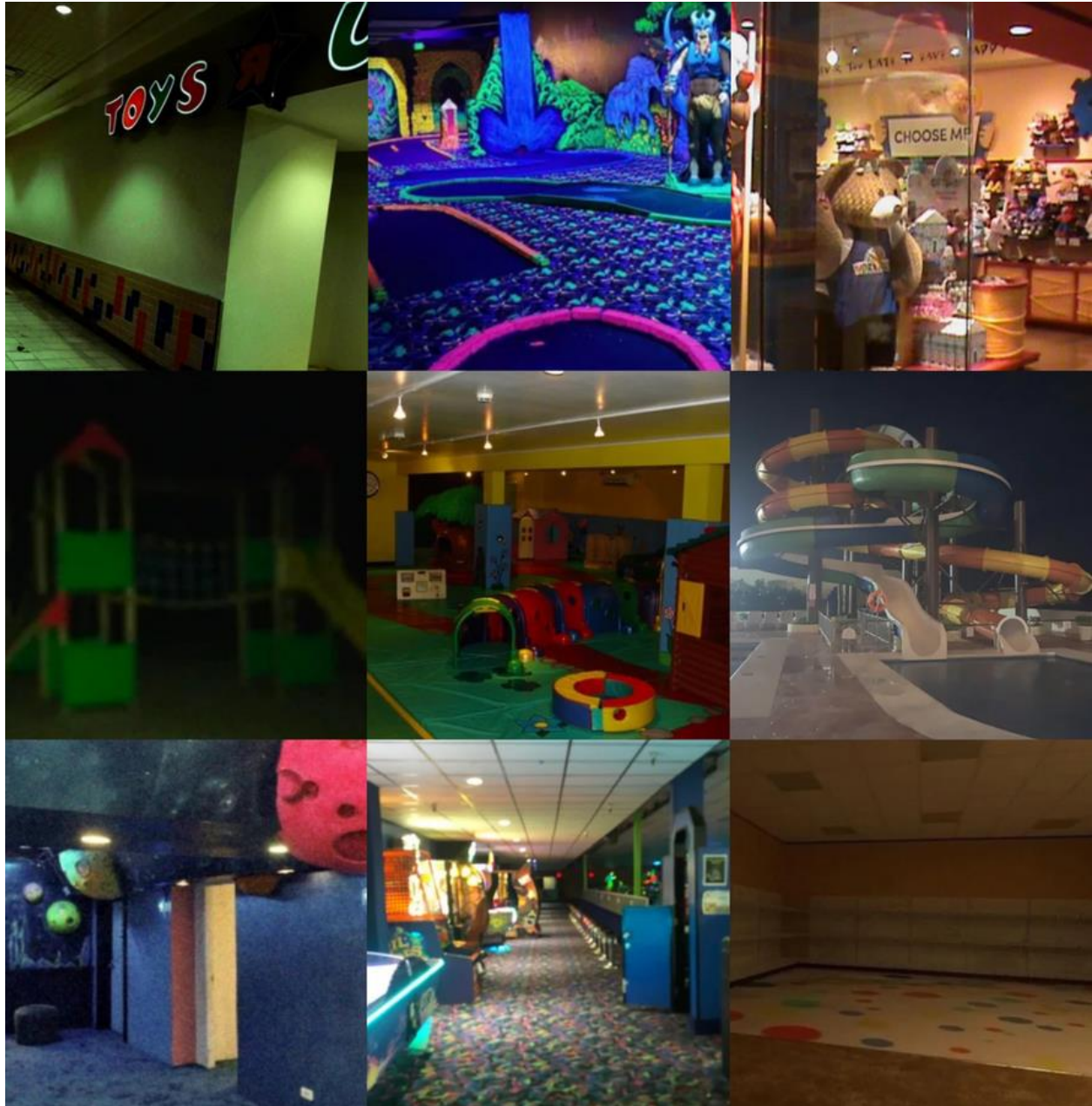
There exists a messy state of media that art and design is in after their digitization (or the digitization of the crucial aspects of the channels through which they are communicated).

Amidst the ocean of online archive exist cyber spaces that embody a sense of transition and nostalgia, like the backrooms<sup>11</sup>. Being-together as a concept has changed drastically since the advent of social media and the widespread use of smartphones, and especially post the COVID-19 era. These liminal cyber spaces don't have to be specific to anyone to be nostalgic, they just rekindle repressed memories by giving us spaces and scenarios that while we haven't been to, we've probably been to someplace very similar.



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<sup>11</sup> The Backrooms are a fictional concept originating from a legend posted on a 2019 4chan thread. One of the best-known examples of the Internet aesthetic of liminal spaces, which depicts usually busy locations as unnaturally empty, the Backrooms was first described as a maze of empty office rooms that can only be entered by "noclipping out of reality".



*Figure 2: A moodboard of liminal spaces in the global online archive*

These once crowded places filled with family and fun are now husks that only spell whispers of their past. Liminal spaces are very impersonal – things from the past that you never really think about being rekindled by imagery of empty rooms and places from our childhood, abandoned malls, shopping centres, playrooms – places that are no longer relevant, things left

behind by humanity. Places that are given life by the virtue of you being there; the virtue of people being there. So, when nobody can be seen anywhere and these places are rotting on the inside with faded décor from a time we never knew, once inhabited and now long abandoned; walls that if they could talk would say nothing, a strong sense of nostalgia is felt. This scenario is uncannily resembling of COVID times, when everywhere and everything around us looked like a dystopian version of itself.

Here, memory is split between the real and virtual. In the digital realm, images, too, are fleeting, just like our memories. To be remembered is to leave a lasting footprint, an inheritance, a legacy. We all leave behind fragments: memory is frustratingly incomplete, prone to fracture, constantly presenting itself in different ways to different people.<sup>12</sup> My uncle's intention to build a family archive was his way of leaving behind a footprint, and my understanding and accessing of these memories is an attempt to creatively use a form of temporal belonging (from afar) to create a sense of a continuous self and giving vitality to the present<sup>13</sup> and to the notion of belonging.

There would be no 'I' without a past, and our sense of self is forged out of memories, 'always recollected, forever being put together (again), re-membered, after the fact'<sup>14</sup> Remembering is one of the ways in which 'the self-attempts to anchor it- self in this changing world of people and things'<sup>15</sup>, that is, to achieve a sense of belonging. Memory is a crucial part of the 'unending work

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Bordo and Blake Fitzpatrick, *Place Matters: Ai Weiwei's Memory Work at Lesbos*, McGill Queen's University Press, 2022, Greece, 233

<sup>13</sup> Vanessa May, *Belonging from afar: Nostalgia, Time and Memory*, Sociological Review Publication Limited, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., USA, 2016, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Sayer, D., 'Incognito ergo sum: Language, memory and the subject', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2004, 76

<sup>15</sup> Prager, J., *Presenting the Past: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Misremembering*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, 125.



of selfhood' which entails aligning our memories 'with the memories of others who matter to us' and 'organizing and locating oneself in relation to' one's cultural environment.<sup>16</sup>

The relation between a sense of belonging and the past is a field that's been researched relatively recently. Henri Bergson is a key theorist of time, memory and self whose influence on memory studies is considerable. The key functions of memory for the self, according to Bergson, are to weave together past and present, and to 'gather together multiple moments of duration and contract them into a single intuition'<sup>17</sup>.

Going against conventional understandings of memory as 'the present remembering of a past event', Rebecca Coleman draws on Henri Bergson's notion of duration to explain that 'the past is not what *has* happened . . . but what *is* (still) happening' and that 'enduring things are not what a body has lived through but what a body *is* living (through) as non-linear durations'<sup>18</sup>. When the difference between the present and the past becomes palpable in this way, time is experienced as layered, which makes it more noticeable. When we remember a past time or place, our consciousness actualizes that particular memory as something that is of import to the present moment. Woven into any memory-image is its relationship to the present. Our present condition and perspective influences what we remember and how, and therefore our narratives about the past are always also about our present and expected future<sup>19</sup>. The past is not a living past in the

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<sup>16</sup> Pickering, M. and Keightley, E., *Photography, Music and Memory: Pieces of the Past in Everyday Life*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 43.

<sup>17</sup> Bergson, H. (1988 [1896]), *Matter and Memory* (trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer), Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books.

<sup>18</sup> Vanessa May, *Belonging from afar: Nostalgia, Time and Memory*, Sociological Review Publication Limited, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., USA, 2016, 7; Coleman, R., "'Things that stay": feminist theory, duration and the future', *Time&Society*, 2008, 85–102.

<sup>19</sup> Prager, J., *Presenting the Past: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Misremembering*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998; Bruner, J., 'Self-making and world-making', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 1991:

present, existing simultaneously with the present, but a memory-image of the past. In bringing this memory-image to conscious thought, the ‘slope of our past’<sup>20</sup> is very much in view, creating a clear distinction between then and now. At the point at which the memory-image materializes, it ‘leaves the state of pure memory and coincides with a certain part of my present’<sup>21</sup>. Our present needs and interests guide which aspects of pure memory become sharpened into memory-images: ‘memory, laden with the whole of the past, responds to the appeal of the present state’ by ‘presenting to it that side of itself which may prove to be most useful’<sup>22</sup>. These memory-images then intervene in the present, becoming part of perception in the present, thus borrowing their vitality from the present<sup>23</sup> (Deleuze, 1988: 68–69; Bergson, 1988 [1896]: 153, 168, 240). Our memory- images guide how we act and think in the now, and a memory-image of past belonging can become a perception of belonging in the now. In other words, memory can be used to ameliorate a present lack of belonging, a form of ‘biographical nostalgia’. In thinking of nostalgia as a tool to ‘orient to and engage with the past’ to creatively make sense of the ever-changing present and an unknown future, the footage in this manner is anchoring to my sense of self and belonging even under changing external circumstances.

Archiving/documentation and memory-creation or preservation can be called a life-force in a sense<sup>24</sup>. The constituents of the everyday, normal or boring, make up the effects worth

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67–78; Brockmeier, J., ‘Autobiographical time’, *Narrative Inquiry*, 1000: 51–73; Monteiro, B., ‘Nostalgia and the social perception of the past: the ethnographic revisit of an industrial community (1980 and 2010)’, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Bergson, H., *Matter and Memory* (trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer), Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1998, 81

<sup>21</sup> Bergson, H., *Matter and Memory* (trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer), Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1998, 168-169

<sup>22</sup> Bergson, H., *Matter and Memory* (trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer), Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1998, 168 - 169

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze, G., *Bergsonism* (trans H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam), New York: Zone Books, 1988, 68-69; Bergson, H., *Matter and Memory* (trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer), Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1998, 153, 168, 240

<sup>24</sup> Mine, as much as it seemed to be Mama’s.

preserving. In 2020, I took an observational approach in making this series of images during covid in which I attempt to document in a very non-spectacular fashion the changes in our everyday occurrences that we grew to accept as normal or ordinary, which relentlessly struck me as uncanny for the entirety of two years.



Figure 3 (above) : A mass-produced sticker on a home-delivered Dominos pizza box



Figure 4: Signage outside a general physician's clinic



Figure 5 (above): One of the signage on McDonalds menu display board



Figure 6: Receipt of a home-delivered order: The Body Temperatures of each employee was track and printed on it, where the price is usually printed



Figure 7 (above): Mandatory face shields for passengers on a domestic flight

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## Covid-19 Ads: How brands are promoting 'hope' and 'trust' through their campaigns

By [unreadable] on [unreadable]

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## Best Video Ads for COVID-19

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Figure 8: Average, popular article during the pandemic times





Figure 10: A seat on a metro (subway) station



Figure 11: A signage in my residential society



Figure 12: Poster on the wall of an airport in Mumbai, India

These shifts in our everyday realities, these undercurrents and happenings of the world, are where the flows of power literally take place. Events flicker like an apparition or land hard like a shard in a thigh muscle<sup>25</sup>. Ordinary affects are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. In his footage

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<sup>25</sup> Stewart, Kathleen, *Ordinary Affects*, Duke University, 2007.

too, my uncle captured a lot of these public feelings that form the force or the habits of the everyday back in the day. When I first saw it many years ago, I couldn't put my finger upon what made the archive so compelling, but having sat upon them over the years, it's evident that it's exactly the lack of anything spectacular that makes them appealing in a sub-real, liminal way. That, and the fact that the moments captured in it are objectively speaking, my past, but most of which I have no concrete recollection of.

The observation and documentation of the ordinary through the eyes of my uncle creates for me a context and potential for 'a contact zone for analysis', where the personal is political too. The lion from the footage he shot for example, the way he liked to frame those images and experiment with lighting and teach my brother and I the outcomes that he learnt from it, reveal an interest and passion unpursued and repressed from the pressures and obligations of societal expectations. The length and sheer size of his collection as a body of work didn't fall into any of the categories that the film world divides film into – fiction, documentary or experimental.



Figure 13: yearning\_003



For me, the nature of the footage mirrored the liminal state we all were in during the pandemic as a species overall. Ceaselessly waiting for reality to make sense again, it's no coincidence that the concept of the backrooms or cyber space game rooms started popping up in bulk when they did. Constant change, the lack of a beginning and an end and the liminal nature of this certain aesthetic can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. They guide us through the ups and downs, reminding us to seek comfort in the transition. In knowing that this was my past, perhaps not lived in the present but as sure fact nonetheless, I sought comfort in taking refuge in my sense of self. On archive, Julietta Singh writes "It felt as though the broken thing I was might be restored, and it felt like an embodied idea I would never stop desiring for myself and for the world"<sup>26</sup>. Like Singh, I too share this intense desire to consciously produce an "inventory", an accrual of stories, practices, experiences, and knowledges that move with me.

Edward Said writes, "Ever since I can remember I have felt that I belonged to both worlds, without being completely of either one or the other"<sup>27</sup>. I find myself and my voice taking on this role of being in-between two worlds, a transitional yet terminal space, a feeling of belonging on both and neither side, but yet being able to navigate between them almost seamlessly.

I find solace in the way that Foucault re-defines the arrangement of power in modern society, where it is more complex than what is commonly understood as a top-down way of distribution that monarchies, over time, have served as an ideal, central metaphor for, from official avenues of law and punishment<sup>28</sup>. Foucault argues that thinking of power in this manner

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<sup>26</sup> Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You*, Punctum Books, 2018, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto & Windus, 1993, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, "Objective" in *History Of Sexuality*, Editions Gallimard, 1985.

misses the way it operates, ignoring all the micro or capillary relations and instruments of itself. What individuals begin internalizing, what the everyday sees the most of, is all missed by this model that treats power as purely centralized. 'To the formal homogeneity of power in these various instances corresponds the general form of submission in the one who is constrained by it - whether the individual in question is the subject opposite the monarch, the citizen opposite the state, the child opposite the parent, or the disciple opposite the master. A legislative power on one side, and an obedient subject on the other.'<sup>29</sup> A power that was centered primarily around deduction and death, it is utterly incongruous with the new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus.<sup>30</sup>

I think the ordinary, affective every day is closely intertwined or at least, crosses paths with, the way power is laid out and overlooked<sup>31</sup>. It's never about the final, shiny outcome as much as it is about the details that lead up to it. Derrida's philosophy on Deconstruction or Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, which finds its origin in *A Thousand Plateaux*, strives to achieve a network of fragmented yet interlinked thoughts which sprout into various different directions, similar to plant roots. It rejects a linear understanding and instead suggests multiple points of entry without a beginning or an end. Picking up on old strands of thought, jumping ahead to new ones, transforming, and expanding<sup>32</sup>. Nevertheless, the rhizome

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<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, "Objective" in *History Of Sexuality*, Editions Gallimard, 1985, 85.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, "Objective" in *History Of Sexuality*, Editions Gallimard, 1985, 89.

<sup>31</sup> I think a lot of what contributes to or constitutes micro-aggressions can be uncovered in this context.

<sup>32</sup> Then & Now, "The Rhizome - A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari", 2018 , <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQ2rJWwXilw>.

is a concept of connection between the similar as well as the strange, the past as well as the present. Moving from one place and time to another, the footage and the images and frames that I recreate through my collages are dispersed across time, yet they simultaneously find ground within the rhizome, the everyday, the unfamiliar, the past/present and refusal to a sequential viewing.

I aspired to combine fictional and non-fictional elements in the made images, inspired also by writings of Kathleen Stewart and Maurice Blanchot. The memory I embody through the footage continuously ruptures itself, questioning the real and virtual, absence and presence, memory and the mundane, sometimes with comfort but every now and then, with hostility or doubt. I find myself silently questioning - Am I the one who looks at me or the one who has been seen?<sup>33</sup> I appreciate the way Singh addresses concepts of the other, the oriental and orientations through a writing style brimming with vulnerability and emotional depth, stemming from her personal experiences and an honest recollection of her past. I find refuge also in the notion of the 'other' as defined in Lacanian psychoanalysis. - I ponder:

A face that warps

Into another

Leaves no trace of itself

Who are you and who am I

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<sup>33</sup> Evans, D. 1996, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London. p.72

After Sartre, it is through the act of seeing and being-seen that the subject understands its own subjectivity through identifying the Other as another subject looking back. In Sartre's theory the gaze is set equal with the "act of looking", the seeing through the eye. Lacan moves on from Sartre's position and redefines the gaze as "(...) the object of the act of looking, or, to be more precise, the object of the scopic drive. The gaze is therefore, in Lacan's account, no longer on the side of the subject; it is the gaze of the Other."(Evans, D. 1996).

Without faces we walk towards the sky

Without your face, without mine —

Catatonic episodes

Sinking in the bed; Remembering

the warmth of a stranger's breath

Music that makes my mind numb

Nobody wants to smile at the sun.

# Production / Explication of the work

The photographs/images mounted on archival fine print paper and foam board are exhibited on a wall. They are titled: (top-left) yearning\_001, (top-right) yearning\_004, (bottom-left) yearning\_003, (bottom-right) yearning\_002.



*Figure 14: Wall containnig all images*



*Figure 15: Wall containing Untitled body of video work*

They are exhibited close to each other to create a sense of intimacy and togetherness like scattered, fragmented forms of memory. The untitled video work, shot by Mama and at once the source of inspiration and birth of the work, is displayed on a wall exactly opposite & parallel to the images, corresponding in size, position and overall arrangement. In choosing this arrangement, I wanted the audience to be situated, while viewing the work, in a space that is an in-between or transition, where they could be potentially transposed back to their own half-formed or sub-real recollections. Although not the same memories I wish to meet the audience in a similar space where I was extending a hand from. I intended to make a statement on identity construction beyond the instrumentalization of our bodies in this system of corporate and what it means to be defined by our profession in today's world and who we are or might be beyond it, by playing around with the artist label and with the background sound filling the space, in an

attempt to induce feelings similar to the ones that rise within a generic, white collared work environment.

Still frames were chosen from the archive that triggered another memory, or core memories that I believe might have shaped my formation, or not – some, I just liked for the way they were played around and thought around with, spent time with. For instance, one of the videos from the footage is about an hour long and consists of panned out, zoomed in imagery and video of The Colosseum and similar infrastructure, architecture and sculptures from Rome, Italy that yearning\_002 also depicts.



Figure 16: yearning\_002

While watching this part of the footage a memory from when I was a teenager resurfaced. It was a family gathering and a dinner table conversation in Mothi Aai's house. It was more of an argument to be honest, between Mama and Baba. Mama was insistent on the fact that Shah Rukh

Khan<sup>34</sup> undoubtedly had a fraudulent and 'evil' nature about him based solely on the fact that he was Muslim and all religions except Hinduism underwrites an evil force... My father of course contradicted this absurd and religious take at once saying we as educated people cannot be indulging in such ridiculous claims. As can be assumed, it got a bit better eventually and since that night we don't really talk about religion and politics or the nature of the state at dinner gatherings and gatherings in general. Well, Mama however, also shot hour-long videos of catholic infrastructure in Italy, Rome, covering minute sculptural details on the inside of churches, impressions of domes, The Colosseum, and other public sculptures including the one in yearning\_002. I never asked him, but I wonder if he doesn't comply by the same logic when it comes to appreciating and archiving, for the family<sup>35</sup>, the art that other religions created or have created since centuries. Yearning\_002 is a still frame from a part of that footage, with the body of the sculpture in the frame juxtaposed with a page from the Bhagavad Gita which is the religious book of the Hindus. It is a reminder of all the Bhagavad Gita stories I grew up hearing from Mothi Aai in the first few years of my childhood, when my parents were overseas<sup>36</sup>. The subject or the figurine itself

The medium of projection portrays what happened in a temporal setting, something not as tangible as a photograph or painting, but real, nonetheless. It carries the exact kind of liminality that I wish to show their original footage in an exhibition setting like this, where I extract certain moments guided by intuition and memory to recreate, recontextualize and experiment with made image and mixed media photography, something I find resonates with my understanding of the

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<sup>34</sup> Shah Rukh Khan (SRK) is Bollywood's most popular actor, known also as the King of Bollywood.

<sup>35</sup> Mama's intent with this archive acc. to him was to be able to show the later generation what their memories were, that the moments were procured to preserve and form a collective memory for the family.

<sup>36</sup> The hours and years spent discussing religion or listening to stories about religion in Mothi Aai's house have been very informative to say the least, and I think a potential contributor to the fact that I consider myself an atheist today.



post -digital and the state of the image today.



Figure 17: Untitled body of video work by Mama

The memory associated with yearning\_004 is the time when my brother and I were introduced to headphones as an equipment for the first time. Ved, two years younger to me, is a UI/UX designer by profession a music producer in his free time. He taught me how to produce music a few years ago and he is exponentially better at it than I am. He released his first album on Soundcloud a few years ago and continues to make videos of lessons for people who are interested in learning production the way he understands it. To me, he's a musician, a teacher and an innovator, if I had to put labels on what identity he embodies in a corporate system of a capitalist world.

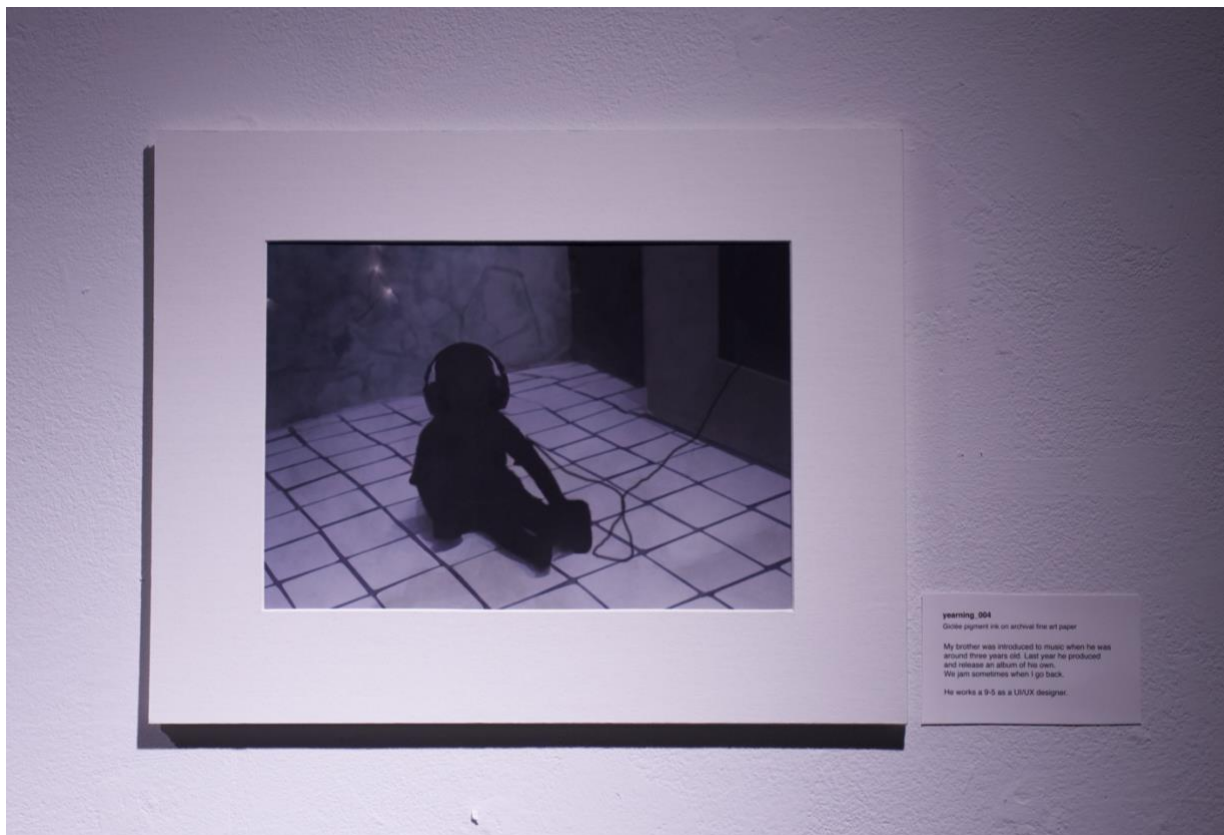


Figure 18: yearning\_004

The frame used for yearning\_001 from the footage resembled very much the long walks that my mother and I took until very recently that I came here on evenings when fireflies would crowd our backyard.



Figure 19: yearning\_001

In the still photographs drawn from the film reels, I erase the subjects to symbolize the ruptures in memory, at the same time creating a kind of void, or a general groundwork to lay base the events and remembrances after the moment.

# Conclusion

I worked formerly as a formal industrial designer for over 2 years before pursuing the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design course in OCAD U. Being able to work with and toward what that I'd always been naturally inclined to (the medium of sound, image and video) was a big step for me in the sense that I had to leave behind everything I knew and take a leap of faith. It has been a gratifying and cyclical experience for me - to be able to trace back my interest and sense of belonging is something I'm continually grateful for. The making of *Random-Access Memories* is my segue into the world of art from a corporate world that I was familiar with and continually disenchanted by, made possible by accessing Mama's body of work, that I see as carrying forward a legacy.

As for the mode of presentation, the choice of dim lighting for the exhibition worked well to evoke a sense of nostalgia and sentimentality. Another subtle hint toward the normalized notion of the corporate life and world is through the use of a soundscape in the installation space, the everyday click-clackety sounds of a formal white collared workspace – a background music for life - playing like an incessant drone hum. The evocative effect of sound as a medium I think is generally overlooked and under-discussed.

In the future, I want to experiment with objects that I carry with me that belong to Mothi Aai and Mama, and possibly include more of his voice in my work in some manner - but I would also like to further my research into sound studies in general, especially considering that a lot of what I work on tends to have an evocative quality to it. *Random-Access Memories* as body of work is drenched in the notions of remembrance, memory, identity construction and nostalgia,

and it would be befitting and crucial to see what the scope of sound can do for an installation such as RAM. The life that visiting this footage brings, now turned into a creative practice from a free fall, is a force that keeps me grounded in a now-ness of the Every Day. Remembrances of the past continually shape chunks of my understanding of the self/other and engaging with the source of it all is a perpetual meditation toward affect, memory and the ordinary – the only religions I follow.

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