

## **Re: Making Memory.** Making sense through the construction and re-construction of memory.

**Peter Maloney for the Remote Sensing Conference, Camberwell College of the Arts, UAL, London 2021**

### **Intangible Heritage**

For the In-Heritage project with the Camberwell Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) Collection I chose to work with the *Balance Building Set (W444H)*, a set of wooden building blocks manufactured by Tofa toys in Czechoslovakia. For me the blocks contain a latency that relates to ideas of the virtual – the blocks have a potential for becoming new through their infinite reconfiguration. The blocks are things in themselves but we can also make a house, a tower or a city. They allow us to recall memories of play and through play they allow us to project imaginary futures. We can construct, and re-construct memories and narratives. As a member of ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) I became interested in 'intangible heritage' and with this project there are questions about what memories are considered important to preserve, how they are preserved and then how they are experienced. How can we sense or *make sense* of the Museum, Gallery or Archive when it's closed or inaccessible? My activity was driven by this question.

### **Do Not Touch**

The theme of the conference 'Remote Sensing' is especially pertinent during the pandemic. During Lockdown our condition can be described as *disconnected*, *distant* and *remote* as we are separated from the world outside and confined to our homes, struggling to *get a grip* or feeling *out of touch*. This condition is also evident when working remotely with an artefact from a 'handling collection' that cannot be touched. Often when engaging with the archive and the museum artefact the signs also remind us *Do Not Touch*. For this project the only experience of the actual artefact was through the online archival photographs.

### **Becoming Virtual**

Lockdown has hastened our move towards what Pierre Lévy calls '*becoming virtual*'. Many aspects of our life are performed remotely through digital tools and images on the computer screen. Much of our experience of the world outside is currently through engagement with the digital image or representation. A pre-cognition is required to understand this representation. The online archive shows the image of the building blocks in their original box. From this there is a visual recognition and a sensory memory of the artefact. There is a sense of how it feels to touch and possibly even taste of the wood and the brightly coloured paint of the blocks. There is a sense of their weight in our hands and the click as they are placed against each other. We are reminded of the sound when our construction collapses.

### **Constructing Spatial Narratives**

I studied the archival photographs of the blocks and drew the individual blocks to understand their form, material, scale and proportion. 3D software was used to re-construct the blocks and configure them in digital space. I attempted to echo the online archival images, including recreating the illustration on the cover of the box containing the blocks. The software affords a sense of physicality when positioning the objects in digital space through collision detection that prevents objects from passing into each other. The ILEA collection's archivist, Jacqueline Winston-Silk mentioned that the collection was kept on the roof of one of the UAL sites. This added a new spatial context to the remote research around the artefact's location. I used Google Earth to survey the site remotely. I was able to look down on the

location of the archive in Google Maps as if looking down at the building blocks on the table while trying to think about where they were stored.

### **Making Sense**

These activities of research and practice were my way of making sense of the collection. As a final outcome I merged research about the artefact and its location to create new fictional spatial narratives in the form of a building block kit of the site. It made me think of the ways we are currently re-thinking and re-constructing the art school in response to social and political contexts as well as the effect the pandemic has had on our ideas of place and work. The next steps in this process are to bring the digital model into the actual through projection or material construction.

### **Reflections**

Through this project I explored remote engagement with the archive and artefact in a playful and open way, developing an imaginary narrative through my research findings in order to make sense of it. Heritage is a critical practice with some difficult histories and problems to resolve. It is important that archives are open and accessible in as many forms as possible to encourage critical engagement, discourse and contributions from a broad audience. We can learn so much from the archive and collection but it is important to *make sense* of it for ourselves through constructing and contributing our own responses.

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