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Ideasthetic Imagining—Writing as Dream-membering

Abstract:
This article focuses on dreaming and remembering as they relate to process, postulating creative writing as a form of dream-membering. I take an interest in what is going on in our brains, in creative practice, and have begun an exploratory pilot study that maps brain activity, in "real-time", using Magnetoencephalography (MEG), while participants are engaged in a creative writing workshop (a partnership with Swinburne Neuroimaging). Reflecting upon my practice, across the development of a novel and a collection of short stories, I ponder the ramifications of deep, sensory imagining as it relates to stimulus-*for* and stimulus-*in*, in acts of narrative making – considering my engagement with the past, including pre-conscious memories and mental processes. I consider the neural conditions that are necessary for stimulus-induced activity, in my personal practice. Further, I give thought to the brain's dreamlike capacity to trigger its own neuronal activity within the context of stimulus-induced creative acts. An analysis of processes of dream-membering involves an examination of experiential knowledge, as well as consideration of the relative realness of the narrative world. This leads to a dialogue about the theories of regression (in dreaming) and memory reconsolidation, as twin concepts that more fully explicate iterative processes in creative writing practice. My practice-led research focuses theories from neuropsychoanalysis, specifically the concept of ideasthesia or "sensing concepts" from neuroscience (Nikolić 2016, p. 2), as well as the "unthought known" from psychoanalysis (Bollas 2014, 2017). These theories underpin a process I call ideasthetic imagining. Reflecting upon the impact of my practice on my mind, and my mind's eye on my practice, I extend previous discussion about ideasthetic imagining, deploying the concept of dream-membering – paying particular attention to the way I employ sensory imagining (informed by pre-conscious memories and mental processes).

Biographical Note:
Julia lives and works in Melbourne, Australia, on unceded Wurundjeri land. Julia's novel, *The Earth Does Not Get Fat*, was published in 2018 and longlisted for the Indie Book Awards (debut fiction). Her short story collection: *Bloodrust and Other Stories*, was published in 2022. Julia is a practice-led researcher – an enthusiastic supporter of transdisciplinary, collaborative research practices, with a particular interest in neuropsychoanalytic approaches to writing and creativity. Julia is Chair of the

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Introduction: Ideasthesia and dream-membering

In this article, I springboard from the concept of ideasthesia or "sensing concepts" from neuroscience (Nikolić, 2016, p. 2). I extend previous analysis focusing ideasthetic imagining in acts of narrative making. Ideasthetic imagining is an original term, formulated on the basis of my reflection upon practice across the development of a novel and, more recently, a collection of short stories.

I further develop my ideas about the ramifications of deep, sensory imagining as it relates to stimulus-*for* and stimulus-*in*, in creative writing. My practice-led experience of this relationship is outlined at some length in the article 'Stimulus in creative writing – wrangling the experiential unresolved' (Prendergast, 2022). As I reflect upon ideasthetic imagining as it involves processes of dreaming and remembering, or dream-membering, I consider the way experiential practices and processes involve engagement with the past: including pre-conscious memories and mental processes. In so doing, I reflect upon a conundrum: dreams and memories can be inhibited and thus, on the one hand, prevented from becoming conscious and, on the other, encouraged. This leads to a dialogue about the theories of regression (in dreaming) and memory reconsolidation, as twin concepts that explicate iterative processes in creative practice. The focus of this paper is ideasthetic imagining as a facilitative pathway, generating processes of dream-membering that shape the evolving artefact. I consider my methodology as a pattern of practice that is not consciously determined, and assess the limitations and possibilities of ideasthethic imagining and dream-membering, as a composite process that necessarily involves problem-finding as a pathway towards problem solving.

Everything I have written arises from an unresolved idea or experience, i.e., from a state of conundrum and contradiction at the level of idea – something I am troubled by; something I don't understand or would like to understand more fully. At a primary moment of narrative composition, the writing begins with an imbalance between the idea, in philosophical terms, and aesthesia: my sensate response to conundrum and contradiction. In fact, the philosophical themes are, often, only fully available to me in retrospect. Writing creatively represents a bid to strike a balance between idea and aesthesia, an attempt to move beyond a sense of being affectively overthrown, through a narrativised version of the underlying ideas.

I use the term "ideasthetic imagining" to elucidate this approach to story-work, coining the term dream-membering to describe the component processes. Ideasthetic imagining originates from the term ideasthesia or "sensing concepts" developed by neuroscientist Danko Nikolić (2016, p. 2). The theory arises from the "Ancient Greek words idea (for concept) and aesthesis

(for sensation). Hence … the term ideasthesia [or] *sensing concepts*" (p. 2, emphasis in original). Ideasthesia has been explored from the perspective of a subject's experience of visual art. I examine ideasthesia from a practice-led perspective, investigating the balance between idea and sensation as it applies to creative writing practice, investigating how I plot ideas as sensory data.

The theory of ideasthesia is part of Nikolić's response to the "hard problem" of consciousness, a term first coined by David Chalmers, who practices in philosophy of mind and takes a particular interest in consciousness and philosophical issues about meaning and possibility. Chalmers is interested in the:

> really hard problem of consciousness [and that] is the problem of experience. When we think and perceive, there is a whir of information-processing, but there is also a subjective aspect. As Nagel (1974) has put it, there is *something it is like* to be a conscious organism. This subjective aspect is experience. (Chalmers, 1995, p. 2, emphasis in original)

I am interested in how my experience of *something it is like* informs the way I sense concepts in acts of narrative making. Sensing concepts ideasthetically prompts the author's phenomenological memory: bringing to consciousness that which is known but not necessarily consciously thought. In turn, this facilitates the iterative development of the story-world.

The process of dream-membering, involves the participation of memory and dreams as the core features of stimulus-induced activity in ideasthetic acts of narrative making. The conversation about ideasthetic imagining, and processes of dream-membering, is part of an age-old dialogue about the relationship between sensation, as a form of experiential cognition, and thought. This discussion is premised upon my perception of the relationship between stimulus-*for* and stimulus-*in*, in creative writing. I recognise that my writing process is informed, fundamentally and necessarily, by the subjective aspect of knowledge. Nikolić emphasises that this knowledge is "for the most part … unconscious and hence not easy to describe in words" (Nikolić, 2016, p. 4). Sensation is rooted in associations. It is based upon:

> phenomenal experience, also known as qualia. Sensations are about the way things [feel] and "are like". It is about the redness of a red colour, and the sourness of a lime. Sensations make up our inner mental life and "light it up" so that life does not happen "in the dark". (Nikolić, 2016, p. 5)

As an affect-driven response to an inciting idea, ideasthetic imagining involves "qualia-tative" play. As I develop the story-world, I produce concrete and specific detail of *something it is like,* based on a repository of experiential knowledge.

In 'Addressing the "ancient quarrel": Creative writing as research', Professors Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien suggest that "the insights generated by the sensate domain have their own validity, in knowledge terms, though we may *not yet* be entirely clear about how the two domains intersect" (Webb & Brien, 2011, p. 194, emphasis added). Webb and Brien

springboard from John Dewey's century-old philosophising and extend it. Dewey suggested:

> Sensation and thought themselves seem to stand out more rigidly opposed to each other in their own natures than ever. Why both are necessary, and how two such opposed forces co-operate *in bringing about the unified result of knowledge*, becomes more and more of a mystery. (Dewey 1972, pp. 4–5, emphasis added)

In processes of ideasthetic imagining, sensation and thought become enmeshed. As a methodological approach to creative writing practice, sensing concepts is a process of thinking and feeling, synonymously. The intersection between these activities, in any given moment of narrative making, reflects the broader intersection between stimulus-*for* and stimulus-*in* – as entangled processes that progress acts of narrative making, from a primary moment of narrative composition to a final artefact. My reflection upon the iterative development of my stories leads me to a practice-led understanding of the systems used to engage and manipulate thought – and to reflect upon how these systems overlap with those involved in sensory perception. I understand sensation and thought as tightly intertwined, and reflect upon arts practice as a means of bringing to the surface experiential knowledge that did not otherwise seem known, let alone "fetchable".

Process and practice: Salience and dream-membering as stimulus-*in*

In writing, I work in a dream-like way from the original stimuli – from a state of conundrum and contradiction at the level of idea: something I am troubled by; something that presents a problem of logic or a riddle of emotion and logic; something I feel compelled to understand more fully. The act of producing narrative is a sensate response to conundrum and contradiction, a process of rumination and (perhaps) an antidote to ongoing rumination. Stimulus-*for* (conundrum and contradiction) provokes deep sensory imagining as an affect-driven response. This may result in stimulus-*in* – immersive dreaming and remembering, as the core component processes of ideasthetic imagining, and a means of progressing the story-work.

As I write, I draw upon a repository of thought and feeling – readily-consciously-accessible memory-stores, but also concealed memories and feelings, generated by my engagement with conundrum and contradiction at a primary moment of narrative composition. That is to say: stimulus-*for* as "triggered" neuronal activity facilitates stimulus-*in*, as ideasthetic imagining brings past feeling to present thinking. In this way, conundrum and contradiction, at the level of idea, provides a springboard for acts of invention. This is an example of how, as Webb and Brien (2011, p. 194) suggest, writers "examine and 'imaginatively transfigure the real'."

My deep interest in the theory of ideasthesia began in 2018, when neuroscientist Danko Nikolić wrote to me about one of my stories. During our original correspondence, Nikolić asked me the following provocative question:

> [Could] you possibly explain to me how you think [your story] relates to the theory of ideasthesia in art … For example, the theory proposes the "rule" that the strongest aesthesia must be coupled with the strongest idea. Do you see that in your story? At

> which point? These are things that I am tremendously curious about. (Nikolić 2017, personal email correspondence)

The question of the relationship between aesthesia and idea raises the thorny but fascinating issue of how one determines the "strength" of either. In everyday terms, one could imagine a bright-white light that seems to be dominant in the senses, but an amber border that engages our attention to a far greater extent. Which would be considered "stronger"? As I deliberate upon these kinds of questions within the context of story-work, I deepen my understanding of debates in psychology and neuroscience about terms such as salience. The visual neuroscientists tend to want to associate salience with stimulus features, the cognitive neuroscientists to cost/reward functions, and the emotion scientists to affective strength. Needless to say, I am firmly in the camp of the emotion scientists – I recognise that affect lies at the heart of my experience of stimulus-*for* and stimulus-*in*, in acts of narrative making. Having said that, my affect-driven response to conundrum and contradiction (stimulus-*for*,) is a necessary, but non-sufficient, condition for what-I-write, how-I-write, why-I-write.

It is the emotional salience of the inciting idea, my emotional floundering in the context of conundrum and contradiction, that leads to stimulus-*in*, to dream-membering – to the sensory "storying" of an idea as an act of problem solving. But I wonder … are cost/reward functions also relevant? To complete the creative artefact is to bring the story-world to a gratifying shape, by which I mean a narrative architecture that satisfies my understanding of the relationship between form and theme. This is an act of conveyance – it frees me from rumination and, in this way, represents a cost and reward "transaction". It's also true that elements of the narrative world become salient through various processes of narrative-making, most especially associative play – the reverberations between the various elements of the story scaffolding (rhythm, voice, detail, etc.). The lure of writing is the lure towards deep listening – an act of making that is attentive to the symbiotic and contrapuntal relationship between form and content.

As Janet Frame has noted:

> The whole of writing is expressing an emergent pattern or shape … and the satisfaction is when the shape is concluded … this for me is the real joy of writing. …As one is writing a pattern grows and everything seems to fall into place. Very exciting, very exciting just to see it. (Frame qtd in Hodgins, 2001, p. 162)

The iterative progression of a pattern is attributable to my recognition of the salience of stimulus features. Recognising the ways in which neuroscientific approaches to salience intersect, rather than the ways in which they are distinct, draws attention to the brain's capacity to trigger its own neuronal activity – to dream-membering as a state of stimulus-*in:* an immersive and generative act-of-making.

As I labour with the story-work, I become aware of the interconnectedness between disparate elements of the narrative architecture – of interconnectedness as a pattern that ghosts and

bolsters the story-world. In developing the narrative, I inadvertently bring to consciousness buried memories, day-dreaming and night-dreaming worlds that are associatively connected to the themes I am grappling with. This is a process of problem-finding: I write myself into a mess in a bid to *make-sense-of*. This calls attention to the-work-my-mind-is-doing-when-I-am-not-cognisant-of-the-work-my-mind-is-doing. As I dream and remember associatively, I recognise that concrete and specific narrative detail is ideasthetically imagined story material – dream-membered, informed by latent experiential knowledge. This leads me to an analysis of similar processes, within the context of neuropsychoanalysis.

Dream-membering: Writing and neuropsychoanalysis

In recent years, my practice-led research has focused on Nikolić's question about the relationship between aesthesia and idea. Regarding the question of balance, I agree with Nikolić that, in my stories, the aesthesia is more pronounced than the "idea": "the aesthesia dominates strongly" (Nikolić 2019, personal email correspondence). My reflection upon practice, across the evolution of a novel and a collection of stories, leads me to believe that the dominance of aesthesia is primarily about process. That is to say, the dominance of aesthesia is primarily about the kind of writer I am (or am *not*). The weight of aesthesia is attributable to the work that takes place at a primary moment of narrative composition –writing as a triggered response to what I call the incompleteness of human experience: writing in response to conundrum and contradiction at the level of idea. The weight of aesthesia is also attributable to the development of the idea, through sustained processes of ideasthetic imagining.

The feeling I have, writing in response to incompleteness, is aligned with what Proust refers to as "the uncurable imperfection in the very presence of the present" (Proust in Modjeska, 2002, p. 25, emphasis in original), as well as Drusilla Modjeska's reference to writing as a form of temporising. My assessment of writing as a form of dream-membering represents my continued quest to engage with Nikolić's question in the spirit in which it was asked – to come to the question of the relationship between aesthesia and idea with the aim of revealing its complexity, rather than with the expectation that there is any clear answer.

In writing, I often find myself in places I'd prefer not to be but cannot avoid. I feel that writing is a process of discovering my relationship with the themes that inform the story material *as* I write the story. The process of writing represents a quest for understanding: problem-finding as a pre-requisite to problem-solving, a process that involves the strange and the familiar as a shifting kaleidoscope. This is consistent with Freud's thesis in 'The uncanny' – the mystifying process Freud outlines where "the word heimlich … develops in the direction of ambivalence until if final coincides with its opposite, unheimlich" (Freud, 1919, p. 421).

In this way, I consider the process of writing stories as a dream-like process – not in the sense of any kind of direct wish fulfilment, but in the Freudian sense of dreams as a reflection of the way our mind makes sense of lived experience through symbolic play. In writing, I am dream-membering a story-world, which is a composite representation of an idea (incomplete, riddled with conundrum and contradiction). As I make sense of the idea, through narrative problem-

solving, I reflect upon the relationship between the ideas that underpin the narrative, on the one hand, and concrete and specific narrative detail (as symbols of the relationship between idea and aesthesia), on the other. I understand story-work as a form of meta-cognitive activity that is tied to lived experience, and includes symbols of experience that I understand experientially, metaphorically and symbolically.

Early writing, at a primary moment of narrative composition, facilitates paths to unconscious processes including dreaming and remembering. In turn, the dreams and memories inform and progress the more conscious processes deployed when constructing literature. This involves processes of cathecting. In psychoanalytic terms, to cathect is to concentrate psychic energy on (some particular person, thing, or idea). I engage with the psychoanalytic definition of the term, cathect, as necessarily encompassing psychic energy in the realm of the-work-my-mind-is-doing-when-I-am-not-cognisant-of-the-work-my-mind-is-doing.

While I logically distinguish between imagining and doing – by which I mean, I am aware of the difference between the narrative world as an imagined space, on the one hand, and lived experience, on the other – I'm not sure the brain necessarily follows suit. I recognise conundrum and contradiction as a trigger for writing, at a primary moment of narrative composition, and a trigger for the arousal of related memories and dream states which, in turn, inform the shape of the developing creative artefact. What leaves me gasping is the subsequent tumble-turn that *feels like* the mind turning back on itself – the evolving narrative world seems to become entangled with memory-stores and to incite related dream states.

What on earth do I mean, here?

Story-work is as an act of problem-solving that triggers dream-membering. As the dream-membering informs the development of the narrative world, there is a bringing to consciousness of concealed memories that were not necessarily resolved as conscious memory, and a triggering of dream-states. In short, memories and dreams are re-rendered in processes of ideasthetic imagining, so that they feel as if they are externally-generated, that is to say *real*. In this way, I engage with acts-of-narrative-making as involving the entanglement of the real and the imagined, and the imagined-real.

The imperishable past and the relative realness of invented experience

In the psychoanalytic definition, the transitive verb cathect is followed by a direct object that is, wildly, known but not necessarily consciously thought. However, the activity of cathecting, in ideasthetic acts of narrative making, is capable of bringing that which is known but not consciously thought, to consciousness, as a fresh and vivid sensory experience. This explains my abiding obsession with psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas' concept of the "unthought known" (2014, 2017) [1]. In the chapter, 'Remembering, repeating and working-through (Further recommendations on the technique of psycho-analysis II)', Freud describes the customary response when a patient remembers something that they had forgotten: "When the patient talks about these forgotten things he [sic] seldom fails to add: 'As a matter of fact I've

always *known* it; only I've never *thought* of it"' (Freud, 1958, p. 148, emphasis added). In the chapter 'Nonverbal experience and the "unthought known"', Wallin (2007, p. 115) suggests that: "perhaps Christopher Bollas who coined the evocative phrase 'the unthought known' was reading [this] passage from Freud".

Neuroscientists might refer to one's recognition of the unthought known, colloquially, as a "nudge", which creates a context for the emergence of implicit knowledge. They might explain how implicit processes are also very difficult to interrogate and pull apart into their constituents: e.g., in everyday terms, I may be able to tell you about the major facial features of a familiar person, and invent a plausible narrative of how I piece these details together to recognise them, but I would also know that's not how the process of recognition *feels* to me.

When I consider the affective properties of implicit knowledge, within the context of creative processes, I return again and again to a desire to better understand the way pre-conscious memories and mental processes become uninhibited in acts of narrative making. Reflecting upon processes of ideasthetic imagining is an opportunity to examine the brain's processing of *felt presences* – Gordon Weaver asks, "in how small a space can [we] create the *felt presences* that animate successful stories?" (Shapard & Thomas, 2013, p. 228, emphasis added). Ideasthetic imagining is the creative processing and conveyance of felt presences through the evolution of a narrative story-world. Reflecting upon the brain's dreamlike capacity to trigger its own neuronal activity, within the context of stimulus-induced creative acts, I become increasingly attentive to the experience of immersion, as stimulus-*in.* Consequently, I am drawn to the concept of regression.

Freud (2010, p. 545) suggests: "[we] call it 'regression' when in a dream an idea is turned back into the sensory image from which it was originally derived". Freud elaborates:

> The only way in which we can describe what happens in hallucinatory dreams is by saying that the excitation moves in a *backward* direction. Instead of being transmitted towards the *motor* end of the apparatus it moves towards the *sensory* end and finally reaches the perceptual system. (Freud, 2010, p. 544, emphasis in original)

I am interested in the concept of regression for the way it illuminates the relationship between thought and sensory vividness – for exploring immersive acts of creative writing as a form of embodied cognition. Freud's description of the direction of excitation in hallucinatory dreams is in keeping with my experience of the direction of emotional and mental energy in ideasthetic imagining in acts of narrative making. In order to clarify what I mean, here, I draw upon Freud's (2010, p. 545, 549) claim that regression:

> makes possible the cathexis of the system … in the reverse direction, starting from thoughts, to the pitch of complete sensory vividness [observing that] regression plays a no less important part in the theory of the formation of neurotic symptoms than it does in that of dreams.

The sense in which images are generated interoceptively but experienced as if they are

generated exteroceptively, underpins my interest in the process of regression as it informs the relationship between idea and aesthesis, in acts of narrative making. The bringing to consciousness of experiences that were not necessarily resolved as conscious memory – so that they are experienced with all the vividness of fresh, lived experience – is at the heart of what I describe as a tumble-turn. The concept of regression is a means for understanding my dream-like engagement with the imagined narrative world. In this way, Freud's concept of regression, advances the discussion about stimulus in creative writing, showing how stimulus-*in* is dependent upon stimulus-*for.*

My engagement with the-work-my-mind-is-doing-when-I-am-not-cognisant-of-the-work-my-mind-is-doing, on the one hand, and consciously determined acts of narrative making, on the other, is informed by what neuroscientists describe as the cycling between various resting state networks. Neuroscientists suggest that these networks have been quite well-characterised and related to mental activities such as self-reflection/introspection, attentional control, episodic memory retrieval, executive/cognitive functions, emotion processing and many others. There is less understanding, at present, about how the dynamic switching between these different networks (at rest) is driven; about how that differs between individuals; and about whether an individual's dynamic switching pattern is stable over time.

Philosopher, neuroscientist and psychiatrist Georg Northoff tackles questions of "why and how … our brain construct[s] subjective phenomena like self, consciousness, and emotions" (The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research, 2012). Crucially, Northoff suggests that: "If there is more to the brain's resting state activity than mere noise, it must somehow affect stimulus-induced activity *with the latter being dependent upon the former*" (Northoff, 2012, p. 7, emphasis added). My working understanding of the dependence of *in* on *for*, and of ideasthetic imagining as a form of emotional processing, underpins my interest in the concept of regression – including my understanding of the relationship between the experiential past and the experiential present – as well as my engagement with the playoff between necessary and sufficient neural conditions, in stimulus-induced acts of narrative making. This leads me to employ the term dream-membering as a reflection of my engagement with the relative "realness" of the narrative world.

Experientially, my engagement with memory stores (readily consciously accessible, as well as latent, and often reprised seemingly involuntarily through immersive practice), reflects my engagement with experiential knowledge. Latent memories, and associative dreamwork, arise as a result of stimulus-*in,* through immersive and interrogative engagement with the *something it is like* of idea. The relevance of "dream-membering data" is revealed iteratively, as the coming to expression of what had seemed expressionless, unravelled through sustained practice and via the resolution of the narrative artefact.

The realness of invented memories and the invented story-world

A writing friend wrote to me, recently, with a link to an article in the *New York Times*. Responding to my work focusing ideasthetic imagining, he said: "[I] saw this and thought it

might be of interest to you. Seems to cover some of the same terrain (in nonfiction form)" (2021, personal email correspondence). The article was a review of Veronica O'Keane's: *A Sense of Self: Memory, the Brain, and Who We Are.* O'Keane investigates how we make memories and how memory makes us. I subsequently read O'Keane's book, and then re-read it to see if it was extraordinary as my COVID-brain surmised.

In the foreword to the text, O'Keane (2021, p. vii, emphasis in original) addresses a discrepancy in the translation of Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu,* "initially translated in 1954 as *Remembrance of Things Past"* and later, in 1992 "to the more accurate *In Search of Lost Time",* suggesting that:

> The original translation's "rememberance of" suggests a passive recall of memories from a hidden and fixed repository, while the later translation's "in search of" suggests an active pursuit of a past that is not lost. Neuroscience [O'Keane suggests] has almost caught up with Proust in the interval between the translations.

O'Keane's analysis of memory is consistent with my experience of ideasthetic imagining and dream-membering as generative, iterative processes of narrative making. On numerous occasions throughout the book, O'Keane refers to one of her patients, Edith, who suffered from postpartum psychosis. When Edith was in recovery, after a relapse, O'Keane asked her "if she knew the psychotic ideas were not real" (2021, p. 8). Edith replied: "Yes … *but the memories are real*" (p. 8, emphasis added).

O'Keane notes that, for the patient, "the time interval between the event and the recall had disappeared, and the memory was a present lived experience hitting her with an emotional punch all over again" (2021, p. 9). This is consistent with Freud's (2010, p. 576) proposition, in the chapter 'The Psychology of Dream Processes' in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

> The unconscious path of thoughts … immediately becomes traversable once more, when sufficient excitation has accumulated … As soon as the memory of it is touched, it springs into life again and shows itself cathected with excitation which sends a motor discharge in the attack.

This allows me to more fully engage with O'Keane's working premise (2021, p. 5), outlined as follows:

> The first principle that we need to establish is that what are called symptoms are real sensory experiences. Hearing a sound, a human voice, is a subjective experience, whether the voice originates in the outside world or is generated in the brain by pathological neuronal firing.

The sensory realness of "false memories", in psychosis, hysteria and obsessional neurosis, illuminates my experience of what I refer to as the tumble-turn – a constituent process of dream-membering that informs the development of the narrative world: bringing to consciousness experiences that were not necessarily resolved as conscious memory. That is to say, O'Keane's

analysis helps me to better understand the discrepancy between consciousness and sensory emotional experience, the relationship between concealed and imagined experience, and the importance of emotion in acts of remembering and narrative making.

In the book, *Unlocking the Emotional Brain: Eliminating Symptoms at Their Roots Using Memory Reconsolidation*, (2022), Ecker, Ticic and Hulley take a very specific interest in emotional memory. Ecker et al., (2022, p. 13, emphasis in original) note that:

> the new brain science of *memory reconsolidation* centers on the surprising discovery of the brain's ability to delete a specific, unwanted emotional learning, including core non-conscious beliefs and schemas, at the level of physical, neural synapses that encode it in emotional memory.

Further, Ecker et al. (p. 13, emphasis added) note that: "[deletion] of the emotional learning underlying a particular symptom eliminates that symptom down to its emotional roots [meaning that] … psychotherapists can use skills of *empathic attunement* to guide the process that induces this potent form of change".

Before I bring the discussion of empathic attunement to creative writing, I draw attention to Ecker et al.'s (2022, p. 19) succinct appraisal of the current thinking around memory reconsolidation:

> Reconsolidation was described as "permitting reorganization of the existing memory as a function of new information in the retrieval environment" by researchers Przybyslawski et al. … Similarly, Nader et al. … stated, "Reconsolidation may reflect the dynamic nature of the process by which new information is added to existing stores," and Nader … affirmed "the hypothesis that reactivation of a consolidated memory can return it to a labile, sensitive state – in which it can be modified, strengthened, changed or even erased!"

While psychotherapists take an interest in managing damaging and destructive memories, my interest in processes of reconsolidation is my experience of the relationship between memories (including unthought known memories) and conscious acts of narrative making. In particular, I'm intrigued by how memories can be re-invigorated through my engagement with the invented narrative world. Re-invigoration is the result of empathic attunement –ideasthetic engagement with conundrum and contradiction at the level of idea which, in turn, generates processes of dream-membering that shape the evolving artefact. This pattern of practice involves problem-finding, in the first instance, as a precursor to problem-solving. I write "sideways" in a way that, initially, fails to make logical sense. Ideasthetic imagining is a form of empathic attunement that opens the multi-faceted complexity of the inciting conundrum as a means of shaping the narrative story-world. Ideasthetic imagining is therefore a creative act of empathic attunement that necessarily involves problem-finding, as an opening of the inciting idea or experience for broader contemplation. This creative exploration of conundrum and incompleteness, at the level of idea, is at the heart of the creative writing and neuroscience exploratory pilot study, a project I am currently undertaking in partnership with Swinburne

University Neuroimaging, which maps brain activity using Magnetoencephalography (MEG). During the pilot project, participants' brains are mapped in "real time" while undertaking my creative writing (ideasthetic imagining) workshop. The aim of the study is to offer new insights into processes of meta-cognition in creative practice, with potential applications in the health sphere, particularly in conditions where imaginative and empathic pathways are (temporarily or fundamentally) disabled: e.g., in autism spectrum disorders as well as anxiety and depression.

My reflection upon ideasthetic imagining as an abiding pattern of practice leads me to the compelling discussion in Antonia Pont's (2021) *A Philosophy of Practising: With Deleuze's Difference and Repetition.* As a point of entry, let us consider Pont's (2021, p. 123) reflection upon practising:

> Within practising of many kinds, a certain relaxation of ends-oriented behaviour can – indeed must – occur, with the result that recollections from the past may 'rise up' or 'float through' the body … these are absolutely familiar but strange, and in the case of relaxed mental/physical states, appear arbitrary or random (Bergson might say 'capricious').

My experience of stimulus-*in* and, that is, with writing as a form of reverent practice, is consistent with Pont's (2021, p. 123, 152) description of the-absolutely-familiar-but-strange uprising of past collections, as well as with "practising, and continuing to try, and to try differently and elsewise, within the 'container' of a structured behaviour". Stimulus-*in*, within acts of narrative making, moves beyond stimulus-*for*, as an affect-driven response to the riddled imbalance between idea and sensation. Stimulus-*in* represents an active quest to make something meaningful from incompleteness, through diligent artistic practice.

Pont (2021, p. 135, emphasis added) suggests that:

> Perhaps our difficulty in accessing the pure past (what Bergson refers to as involuntary memory), the ground in which our living present moves, can account for a certain atmosphere of longing or lostness – *the question of nostalgia and its timbre* – that can mark any life, and which perhaps should be better known rather than disavowed.

Stimulus-*in* comes from practising – from sustained engagement with conundrum and contradiction as a creative act of problem-finding – from acts-of-making that represent a quest to better understand nostalgia-and-its-timbre *as felt presences*. Sustained practice is required to bring the narrative artefact to completion. In this way, my experience of stimulus-*in* is consistent with Pont's poetic rumination – as a longing for that which might be better known, as an un-riddling of our engagement with the pure past via a future that exists in alterity.

In the chapter: 'Habit's Time: Between Routine and Compulsion', Pont (2021, p. 54) unpacks practice as it relates to memory and writing, suggesting that: "[writing] … is at once useful for recording information, for extending externally the capacity for memory, but also, at the same time, is the likely cause of the diminishing of memory itself". I take an avid interest in Pont's

(p. 58) "constructive and generative view of habit". The reciprocal way in which memory informs creative practice, including associated "dreamwork", as well as the potential impacts of practice upon memory, is at the heart of my interest in dream-membering. This reciprocity also underpins my interest in reconsolidation, as it relates to creative practice. In turn, this leads me to think about "the emotional brain" and the impetus towards practice as a means of making-sense-of experience. The quest for meaning through creative practice is necessary for sustaining stimulus-*in* – immersive dream-membering in acts of narrative making involves a state of mind (and senses) which is no longer about the past but about a timeless future. The activity of dream-membering (as iterative, component activities of practising), offers the opportunity for a creative re-rendering and, in turn, renewed understanding.

In this respect, my thinking is also orbiting around Pont's (Deleuzian) orientation – I am taken with Pont's proposal that some forms of practice allow us to move beyond "passive synthesis [as] a mode of time in which the past and the future are *dimensions of the present*" to a "third synthesis [in which] the past and the present [are] *dimensions of the future*" (Pont, 2021, p. 117, emphasis in original). Pont (p. 118, emphasis in original) engages deeply and rigorously with Bergson's "account of matter (or reality) … as retroactively derived" (p. 118). In particular, Pont draws attention to Bergson's claim that: it is "*that on which memory operates*: a multiplicity [noting that Bergson] uses the word 'vibrations'" (p. 118). *Matter* and *vibrations* are, indeed, the operational forces of stimulus-*in*. It is on this point that I return to the concept of reconsolidation, noting, as a prefacing point for discussion, Pont's (p. 121) suggestion that: "[spontaneous] recollection falls outside of our field of access unless we integrate it via habit's repeated movements into a 'stable mechanism' which enables willed access". The concept of reconsolidation deepens discussion around issues of salience, as well as cost and reward, within the context of the preoccupations of the emotional brain.

Memory reconsolidation: The emotional brain as the force that propels dream-membering

The narrative world is a world in which the author is fully emotionally invested. This facilitates the iterative emergence of unthought known memories which, in turn, informs the evolution of the narrative story-world. The generative nature of this process is a creative practice example of the "first step" in processes of reconsolidation. The "steps" involved in memory reconsolidation are outlined by Ecker et al. (2022, p. 22), in a widely cited computer analogy that aims to explain how reconsolidation "allows a particular emotional learning to be updated (revised or erased)". Ecker et al. (p. 22, emphasis in original) outline the analogous scenario in this way:

> Reactivation of a memory is likened to opening a document on a computer, which allows the contents of the document to be edited or deleted before the document is resaved and closed. In this analogy, opening the document corresponds to reactivating the target memory. However [this] … analogy is somewhat misleading. Whereas the single step of opening a computer document allows it to be modified, the single step of reactivating a target memory is not sufficient to render it labile and modifiable. Reactivating a memory is only the first of two steps needed to put the memory into a

> condition of being ready to be replaced by new learning. The needed second step is *a perception or experience that mismatches the target memory,* in the form of either a salient novelty or an outright contradiction. Only after those two steps will the memory be updated by a learning experience that occurs next.

This summary illuminates my understanding of the relationship between stimulus-*for* and stimulus-*in* – in particular the process by which *for* becomes *in*. Is it the case that what I refer to as the tumble-turn, in acts of narrative making, represents a mis-match? In asking this question, I am reminded, again, of O'Keane (2021, p. 111) who draws attention to Tulving's influential work, which focuses "how the past and future exist in the consciously experienced present". O'Keane (p. 111, emphasis in original) notes that Professor of Psychology, Daniel Shacter, who worked with Tulving and built upon Tulving's work, "made big inroads into understanding the experience of time in his neuroimaging experiments. He showed that the *same* brain circuits are employed when thinking about the past and when planning for the future".

I have previously discussed the merging of past feeling with present feeling and thinking, the sense in which past stimulus is re-ignited in ideasthetic acts of narrative making (Prendergast 2022, p. 9), noting that:

> The "intersection" between temporal states, in acts of ideasthetic imagining, is consistent with Freud's (2013) speculation in 'Creative writers and day-dreaming' and, in particular, his (2013, p. 7) suggestion that the "[mental] work [of day-dreaming] is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present ... From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience". Once again, we are in the realm of the unthought known: "where *nothing* is past or forgotten", where past feeling informs present feeling and thinking (Freud, 2010, p. 576, emphasis added).

Freud (2010, p. 576) further suggests: "[Unconscious] wishes always remain active. They represent paths which can always be traversed, whenever a quantity of excitation makes use of them … Indeed it is a prominent feature of unconscious processes that they are indestructible."

Within the context of the current discussion, focusing reconsolidation, it's worth reflecting once again on Freud's analysis of the imperishable past as it relates the concept of overdetermination, in Freudian dream analysis – the manner in which each narrative effect is determined by multiple causes. While Freud developed the theory of overdetermination more fully in his later work on memory and dreams, the origin of the theory is apparent in *Studies in hysteria* where Breuer and Freud (1955) note the way in which the brain stratifies and thematically organises memories:

> mnemic traces (*Erinnerungsspur*) are unconscious, whereas the memories of these traces (*Errinnerungen*) are conscious, and, based on hierarchical organization ... the psychical material of hysteric cases is organized by collections of memories or "themes." (Breuer and Freud, 1955, pp. 288–290)

In practice, when considered together, the concepts of the imperishable past and

overdetermination inform my evolving understanding of the generative evolution of narrative detail – a pattern of practice that is underpinned by psychodynamic processes where past and actual stimulus-rest interactions facilitate deep, sensory engagement with narrative material.

The example at the heart of O'Keane's book, together with Ecker et al.'s (2022) observations about event emotionality and memory, progresses my understanding further still. O'Keane suggests she comforted Edith (2021, p. 8), reassuring her: "that the psychosis was an illness … that this had caused parts of her brain to fire off, creating subjective experiences that seemed to come from the outside but that had really been generated within her brain". To this end, O'Keane (2021, p. 9, emphasis added) proposes that:

> Edith's Proust-like ability to communicate her memory as reconstructed sensory experience – visual and emotional and seemingly time-independent – initiated a process in me of unlearning learned constructs … one of the first, of many, lessons that I learned from Edith was that the theoretical classifications of psychology and the clinical classifications of psychiatry, were *blinding me to subjective experience*.

It is O'Keane's focus on subjective experience, and Eker et al.'s observations about the force of emotion, that aligns closely with my experience of ideasthetic imagining in acts of narrative making. The ability of deeply imagined experience to generate processes of dream-membering – the bringing to consciousness of latent memories, as well as the triggering of day (and night) dreams that are associatively connected to the story-world – leads me to conjecture that, at least sometimes, the brain is wrangling with the experiential story-world in a similar way to lived experience.

Conclusion: The emotional brain and subjective experience – dualism and dream-membering

As I undertake story-work, and reflect upon it, I engage with the mystery of how our brains are able to distinguish between the real and the imagined. As a creative writer, I find that one of the most fascinating aspects of our perception of "real-time" experience versus invented "story-world" experience, is the idea that our experience of "real" events is far less a "readout" of our sensory systems than was previously thought. I am taken with, and unnerved by, the possibility that much of our sensory experience is, in effect, created by the brain to fill in the extensive gaps in what our sensory system can provide, and the suggestion that the brain fills the gaps by a mix of "clever" biological adaptations and the use of the implicit knowledge of past experiences, as well as creative invention.

On this subject, Eker et al. (2022, p. 31) observe that: "[new] experiences that are imaginal can be effective for creating new neural circuits and new responses, because the emotional centers in the subcortex hardly distinguish between perceptions arising externally versus internally". This prompts me to wrestle with the concept of dualism – does the mind exist separately from the brain? If I am a not a dualist, and I understand that the world I experience and the world I create are different, then I reason that the brain must also be able to distinguish. But *how* and *to what extent*?

This question arises from my experience of dreaming scenarios that are associatively connected to the problems I am trying to solve in the narrative world, together with the experience of remembering (unthought known) experiences that seem inconsequential, before I realise they are fundamental to core narrative themes. As a result, I've become interested in *which parts* of the brain distinguish between "real" experience and deeply imagined experienced, and *which parts* of the brain process imagined information in pretty much the same way they process externally-sensed information. How the brain as a whole, or at least our conscious brain, knows the difference between the real and the imagined remains a mystery.

This leads me to Professor Mark Solms' observations about the dreaming mind. Solms is best known for pioneering work in the amalgamation of modern neuroscience and psychoanalytic theories. Solms (2015) suggests:

> [It] is now possible to actually *see* where this neural activity is distributed in the dreaming brain. Modern neuroradiological methods produce pictures of the pattern of metabolic activity in the living brain while it is actually performing a particular function, and in the case of dreaming these images clearly show how the brain's energic "cathexis" (as Freud called it) is concentrated within … the (frontal and limbic) parts of the brain concerned with *arousal, emotion, memory, and motivation*, on the one hand, and the parts (at the back of the brain) concerned with *abstract thinking and visual perception, on the other*. (Solms, 2015, p. 137, emphasis added)

This quest to discover how the brain wrestles with "real" experience and deeply imagined experienced, is at the heart of the exploratory ideasthetic imagining study, which maps brain activity using Magnetoencephalography (MEG) in "real-time". Solms observations lead me back to O'Keane and, in particular, to the discussion about dualism. I align with O'Keane (2021, p. 25, emphasis in original) who suggests that:

> Dualism for me, as a psychiatrist, is the enemy, whether that dualism is body-brain, brain-mind, body-soul, reason-emotion. The divisions between these made up domains collapse when you realize that the world is conveyed to you *only* through your senses and that we make sense of it all through the pervasive connectivity of brain circuitry [a phrase O'Keane borrows from the physicist neuroscientist Danielle Bassett].

Perhaps most pertinently, for the current inquiry, O'Keane (2021, p. 66) considers how emotion, what she calls "the sixth sense, is woven into sensation and biographical memory", suggesting that this involves "an exploration of interoceptive sensation". As a fiction writer and a practice-led researcher, I'm particularly interested in O'Keane's (p. 228) observation that: "Current experience and memory are integrated in the complicated networks of the prefrontal cortex, the storyteller". In this way, to my mind, O'Keane brings Freud's ideas about the imperishable past, Eker et al.'s ideas about reconsolidation, and Solms ideas about the way the brain processes emotion, together. In so doing, she assists me in making logical sense of my experience of ideasthetic imagining, in acts of narrative making.

O'Keane (2021, p. 66) suggests that an analysis of emotion, as the sixth sense, involves "an exploration of interoceptive sensation, body feelings and their interpretation in the hidden emotional cortex, the insula – 'the rag and bone shop of the heart'" (which, as O'Keane notes, is Yeats's memorable phrase). This is consistent with Pont's (2021, p. 157) reflection that "[sensing] … is how the body thinks". Further, O'Keane (2021, p. 25) suggests that "sight, sound, touch, taste and smell … are being fed continually into memory networks". When considered together, these observations illustrate how internally-generated, ideasthetically imagined, story material is capable of re-invigorating unthought known memories, and generating dreams that are thematically connected to the narrative world. In creative practice terms, story-work is an act of translation: re-rendering experience in the form of concrete and specific narrative detail.

This leads me to engage more deeply with the work of Eker et al. (2022, p. 31, emphasis added), who notes that:

> The personal, dynamic unconscious (the Freudian unconscious) consists largely of implicit memory of emotional learnings formed and stored by the subcortical limbic system and the right cortical hemisphere. *Implicit emotional learnings generate responses independently of conscious awareness*, which is based in other cortical regions.

In turn, this brings me back to O'Keane, who poses the following questions in relation to her patient, Edith (2021, p. 10): "How does a visual image trigger a lived memory? How do we re-experience and feel through a memory? What is the difference between a memory that is experienced with emotion and one that is not felt but 'thought', as it were?".

These questions align with those I've asked myself, in response to Nikolić's query about the relationship between aesthesia and idea in my writing. When Nikolić suggested that the strongest aesthesia must be coupled with the strongest idea, and proposed that the aesthesia dominates strongly in my stories, I asked myself: How is it that, through creative play, I can bewitch my own mind so that, in a similar way to processes of regression in dreaming, the felt presences of the story-world trigger the surfacing of unthought known memories that *feel real*, generate further dream-membering, and are capable of modifying, strengthening, changing or even erasing, existing memories.

I can logically recognise that the story-world is *not real,* and yet *feel* the story-world as if it were a memory of lived experience. The question of how it is possible that the stories we write and read can enter our affect cycle as if they were lived experience, and how memories are altered by creative practice, has prompted me to examine processes of regression and memory reconsolidation. This leads to my conviction that "felt memory" is at the heart of processes of ideasthetic imagining. In non-closure, I return to my impetus for writing, at a primary moment of narrative composition, and beyond – to dream-membering as an act of narrative making that is borne from my engagement with the incompleteness of human experience. At a primary moment of narrative composition, conundrum and contradiction trigger processes of feeling-

thinking. In turn, this generates dream-membering – the bringing to consciousness of overdetermined, associatively linked, thematic collections of felt-memories and dreamwork, that inform and progress the development of the story-world. This pattern of practice results in writing that is, it seems, premised upon the im/possibility of narrative closure.

Notes

[1] I outline these ideas at some length in Prendergast J. (2019). Narrative and the unthought known: The immaterial intelligence of form. *TEXT*, 23(1), April, not paginated; Prendergast, J. (2021). Ideasthetic Imagining – Patterns and Deviations in Affective Immersion. *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 18(1), 47–65; Prendergast, J. (2022). Stimulus in creative writing – wrangling the experiential unresolved. *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, June, 105–116.

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