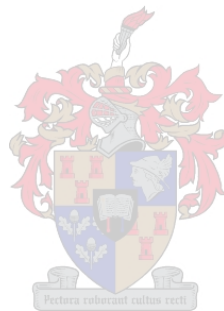


*Illusive Objects: An Investigation into the Embodiment of Memory through Contemporary Jewellery*

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by  
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*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Visual Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University*

Supervisor: Joani Groenewald

April 2022

## **Declaration**

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Lara Daryl Landsberg

April 2022

## **Summary**

This dissertation encompasses an investigation into the multifaceted and open-ended nature of memory. I interrogate my childhood memories, situated in the context of my grandparents' home, through re-interacting with the objects from within their home. I use their objects in my jewellery praxis, as a means of externalising my childhood memories but I also distort and fragment their objects as a means of commenting on the fragmented, fragile nature of memory. In this regard, my Ouma's diagnosis of dementia is a pivotal aspect throughout this study. The fragmented and fragile nature of memory demonstrates its unstable and inconsistent nature. As such, my theoretical investigation and my practical body of work inform one another and unpack the various elements that influence and manipulate memory. In this regard, these elements prompt the reconstruction, imagining, fictionalisation, and selection of the past rather than a consistent representation of the past.

## **Opsomming**

In hierdie studie word die veelvlakkige en onbepaalde aard van geheue ondersoek. Daar word verwys na die herinneringe wat ek uit my kinderjare koester – spesifiek dít wat ek rondom my grootouers se huis onthou. As deel van die proses om hierdie kosbare herinneringe van my kinderjare te eksternaliseer, herskep ek voorwerpe uit hulle huis in my juwelierspraktyk. Ek omvorm en fragmenteer hierdie gevonde voorwerpe uit my ouma se huis in my kreatiewe proses om sodoende kommentaar te lewer op die gefragmenteerde, verbeelde en brose aard van geheue. My ouma se diagnose met demensie was 'n belangrike katalisator vir hierdie studie. Die gefragmenteerde en brose aard van die geheue, soos ervaar word deur my ouma as demensie-lyer, demonstreer die onstabiele en verraderlike aard daarvan. My studie integreer teoretiese navorsing en kunspaktyk op verskeie vlakke. Daar is 'n wisselwerking tussen my praktiese werk en my teoretiese ondersoek wat gestalte vind in die verskillende elemente wat geheue beïnvloed en manipuleer. Die elemente wat ek verken, fokus eerder op die rekonstruktiewe, verbeeldingryke, fiktiewe en selektiewe aard van geheue, as op 'n akkurate uitbeelding van die verlede.

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## Foreword

On the 2nd of August 2014, my Oupa<sup>1</sup>, a father figure and pivotal being during my upbringing, passes away. Four years later, on the 28th of July 2018, my Ouma<sup>2</sup>, an individual who continues to greatly influence my life, was diagnosed with vascular dementia<sup>3</sup>. Following these events, I find myself in a state of reminiscent nostalgia; awakening, and perhaps, also confronting a variety of memories of my childhood and time spent in my grandparents' home.

Previously, this home was the hub of our family life; a safe, loving, and comfortable abode for the Landsberg generations to come together in reunion. As years followed the reunions lessened but their home remained, and still remains an important part of my upbringing. Despite the lessened liveliness, their home maintained its happy and joyful energy through my grandparent's presence. Overtime, especially during the months leading up to the 2nd of August, the light filled atmosphere of their home became a place of sombre dullness. I would hold my Oupa's hand, as he smiled deeply and gently, mouthing the words: "Oupa's Little Princess". Not even two weeks later, Pieter Landsberg passed away, leaving his home as a capsule of memories.

Presently, the act of walking through their home arouses newly developed emotions and interpretations, influenced by the events that have occurred to date. I find myself caught up in a mixture of emotions in response to the space. Its contents and its inhabitant(s), which used to be of natural familiarity, now serve merely as vessels of remembrance. I fill the shadowed emptiness of the space with thoughts and memories of experiences once enjoyed there. However, with this comes a great sense of unfamiliarity and disconnection from a place that I considered to be my second home.

Certain objects within their home, which previously merely intrigued me as a child, suddenly gain a heightened sense of preciousness. Interacting with these objects again, in this previously familiar space, brings back memories of my childhood experiences. The preciousness with which I perceive these objects is due to the emotions and memories that I have ascribed to them over time. They are no longer mere objects; instead, they are symbols of my grandparents' stories. They are points of intersection, transporting me to past experiences within my grandparents' home.

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<sup>1</sup> The Afrikaans term for grandfather.

<sup>2</sup> The Afrikaans term for grandmother.

<sup>3</sup> Dementia is a syndrome caused by disease of the brain, usually of a progressive nature, in which there is disturbance of memory. Vascular dementia is diagnosed when the brain's supply of oxygenated blood is repeatedly disrupted by strokes or other blood vessel pathology. This leads to significant accumulated damage to brain tissue and function. My Ouma has shown signs of early onset dementia due to "significant memory loss particularly for things that have just happened, becoming lost in familiar places, having difficulty in making decisions, showing mood changes, depression, or anxiety, and showing a loss of interest in hobbies and activities". (Dias, et. al. 2006:44).

When I listen to some of my Ouma's recollections of her past and moments spent with my Oupa, varying between vividness and distortion, the fragility of the mind and subsequently the fragility of memory, becomes increasingly evident. The progression of my Ouma's dementia resulted in her memory fading significantly, as though a part of her identity had become unfamiliar to those who knew her. This, at times, rendered her home as a more familiar space than the inhabitant within. As such, I developed a specific interest in the inner workings of memory, the fragility thereof and its deceptive ability to distort the past.

By extension, I am also interested in the link between emotion and memory. I am specifically curious about the way in which my emotional associations, responses and interpretations influence the way that I remember the past. Moreover, I am interested in the ability of certain objects in my grandparents' home to prompt such emotional responses in the present. In this regard, my own emotional reactions, prompted by the objects in my grandparents' home coupled with my Ouma's unpredictable reactions to her environment, inevitably led me to question the consistency of memory. My curiosity into the inner workings of memory has also led to an increasing awareness of an object's ability to act like a mirror and/or vessel of memories. I realise that an object's affective properties not only prompt recollections of the past, but can also generate emotional affect and interpretative meaning, which may not necessarily be consistent.

These concerns prompt me to investigate the fragility, instability and emotive properties of memory, as embodied by objects in the material world. This investigation extends into my jewellery praxis, where I formulate connections between memory, identity and the material world. Jewellery pieces are often used as objects of memorabilia, or passed down as heirlooms, and in this regard, I view jewellery pieces as material objects that could serve as personalised reflections of identity. These elements which inform our interactions with jewellery, also embody an aspect of an individual's identity by conveying just enough information to successfully, but silently, communicate notions of a person's identity. This makes jewellery an interesting medium through which I can investigate concerns regarding memory and identity<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Please refer to sections 0.4 and 3.3 for elaborated discussions that support these notions.

## Introduction

### 0.1 Background and Context

A net can be understood as a metaphor for our memory. It is a light, permeable web that collects and holds stories and images and at the same time filters them out. A net is bound together yet is still open; it is simultaneously fluttering and stable and represents elements of showing and hiding, holding on and letting go. It forms a container without creating a real boundary between inside and outside. The making process of a net, the knotting, is also related to our memory; we tie a knot to remember and by repetition of a special pattern, a network is created (Fink 2018:41).

The elements that embody a net uncannily coincide with the elements that embody memory, specifically its fleeting and unpredictable nature. The metaphorical elements of the net encapsulate the elements that comprise this study. Through investigating my own childhood memories and comparing them to those of my grandmother's, I challenge the dualistic and contrasting boundaries of inside and outside, remembering and forgetting, holding on and letting go, showing and hiding, imagined and real. I am curious as to how the network of memory is created through the so-called knots (as Fink calls it) that we tie; and the repetitions that reinforces those memories. In this regard, this thesis serves as a theoretical investigation into the inner workings of memory; discussing the various, multifaceted elements that influence the functionality, consistency and materiality<sup>5</sup> of memory. Throughout this study, I place a specific emphasis on the role of objects as vessels that can contain and provoke memory. In this regard, I specifically study the objects in my grandparents' home. The analysis of, and interaction with certain objects from their home probes my memories of experiences in their home, some objects more so than others. As such, the objects from their home, in their original state, all appear "metonymically as representative objects" (Fink 2018:25). They communicate as placeholders for my personal memories of my grandparents' home and the moments shared with them<sup>6</sup>. These objects then serve as placeholders for what is now no longer there. The objects that I choose to interrogate are those which prompt specific memories which elicit emotional and interpretative responses within me. I investigate my responses in relation to my Ouma's responses

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<sup>5</sup> In this regard, I refer to the way in which the material world has the capacity to prompt and communicate memory, be it through personal associations or through cultural nuances.

<sup>6</sup> Due to the subjective and personal nature of this study it is important to note that I am a Caucasian female born in post-apartheid South Africa. My personal experiences and idiosyncrasies are informed by this context and will inescapably have bearing on the way that I interact with and understand my environment.

to this specific selection of objects<sup>7</sup>. My investigation into these responses informs my research into the multifaceted and fragile nature of memory.

By physically analysing and interacting with the objects in question and interpreting the responses that arise from doing so, I insert a practical element into my theoretical research. I extend this practical element by using these objects within my jewellery praxis where I transform these objects into contemporary jewellery pieces<sup>8</sup>. In this process of making, I emphasise the ability of these objects to act as references to my grandparents, highlighting how they act as vessels of memories. Transforming these objects into jewellery pieces distorts their original state, provoking a new conversation regarding the flexible, adaptable, and transformable nature of objects.

In this regard, my theoretical investigation and practical exploration equally inform one another. My thesis serves as the theoretical component that describes in words, the insights which I gain through my practical interactions with the objects from my grandparents' home. As such, the art objects<sup>9</sup> and jewellery pieces that I create, in turn, act as the visual translations of my theoretical engagements. This study then illustrates, on both a practical as well as theoretical level, how I grapple with the complexities of memory through the externalisation of my own childhood memories and experiences. I rely on the mnemonic<sup>10</sup> properties of the objects from their home to prompt my own memory as well as my grandmother's.

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<sup>7</sup> I have selected specific objects from my grandparents' home and certain materials to combine with those objects for their personal or cultural significance respectively. The use of specific objects and materials refers to an integration and disintegration with memory which comments on the allusivity of memory, and its nature being neither certain nor concrete. I will reveal each object and will elaborate on their specific relevance systematically, as my investigation unfolds. However, it is important to note that my discussion about my creative process, the objects and their transformation into jewellery pieces and my formal exhibition, is not of a linear nature. In this regard, the inconsistent and non-linear way in which I discuss my creative processes, jewellery praxis and how I display my work mirrors my investigation into the inconsistencies within memory and the interconnectedness of things within memory.

<sup>8</sup> I begin my creative process by consciously acknowledging the handling of objects and their relation to the body. I then deconstruct the memories, narratives and emotions associated with my grandparents' objects, which prompts me to transform their objects into contemporary jewellery pieces to prolong those associated elements. In this regard, please refer to section 0.4 for an elaborated discussion on Contemporary Jewellery. It is important to note that whilst I refer to the objects that I make as jewellery pieces, due to their conceptual nature some of these jewellery pieces may not be wearable in a traditional sense and may be perceived to assume a more sculptural function.

<sup>9</sup> These art objects entail my transformed grandparents' objects which are not wearable and therefore those that assume the sculptural function, as noted in the previous footnote. Although both my jewellery pieces and art objects are made from my grandparents' objects, the art objects act as simpler demonstrations of my grandparents' objects being functionally re-established. As such, the art objects act as examples for how I removed the function from my grandparents' objects, which allows the de-stabilisation of function to be emphasised in the jewellery pieces that accompany the art objects. Please refer to my art objects named *The Tea Set of Memory* as visual examples of the art objects to which I refer to here.

<sup>10</sup> The mnemonic object aids remembering in the human memory by associating original information with something more accessible or meaningful which, in turn, provides better retention of the information. By placing a familiar object in

By extension, I do not only investigate the mnemonic function of objects, but I am also intrigued by the relationship between memory and identity. In this regard, I investigate memory, objects and identity respectively, and draw connections between these entities<sup>11</sup>. British historians, James Fentress and Chris Wickham discuss the relationship between identity and memory, in their article, *Social Memory*. They suggest that our subjectivity and experience inform our memory and (as such) our identity, when they state that “a study of the way that we remember is a study of the way that we are” (1992:129). For this reason, I engage with my memories, my grandparents’ objects and the personal experiences I had in my grandparents’ home, to investigate how these objects and experiences inform my own perceptions of myself.

Furthermore, I question the stability of identity specifically in relation to memory, and I align the deterioration of memory with the deterioration of a stable perception of one’s identity. My Ouma’s diagnosis demonstrates the vulnerability of memory as her dementia increasingly affects her way of remembering, leading to a rupture in her own perceptions of herself. This illustrates the delicate relationship between memory and identity on a personal level. In this study, a strong emphasis is on my own personal experiences and my relationship with my grandparents, as I use the memories of each to reference memory on a socio-political level<sup>12</sup>. In this regard, it should be noted that the loss of memory in relation to the loss of identity becomes increasingly complex, as the loss of memory (or the collective amnesia so to speak), can lead to the distortion of the way that some identities are remembered within the collective memory of a country, such as South Africa<sup>13</sup>. As such, I use my personal investigation into the innerworkings of memory, to gently challenge the grand narratives<sup>14</sup>

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an unfamiliar context, you can intentionally trigger the recall of a memory when that out-of-place object is seen again. (Hunt 1995:105). The investigation into mnemonic objects and the process of giving objects mnemonic properties is concerned with the relationship between the personal, subjective relation to memory and its translation or interpretation in the public sphere (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003:59). These questions about the ‘translation’ of private into public memory arguably touches on what some have called ‘prosthetic memory’. It is a term usually associated with postmodernist theory, with the impact of technology on memory which might enable the ‘implantation’ of memories of unexperienced events. (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003:59).

<sup>11</sup> From a postmodern perspective, it is impossible to view these entities (memory, identity and mnemonic objects) in isolation because the boundaries between them are fluid. Therefore, crossover and intersection are inevitable.

<sup>12</sup> Such a research methodology is described as autoethnography. Please refer to section 0.3 for an elaborated discussion on this style of research.

<sup>13</sup> I recognize that within a South African context, memory is also often associated with trauma, and the deliberate loss of cultural/collective/historical memory may also be related to acts of oppression. Section 2.4 will discuss this idea further and Chapter Three will specifically focus on the political nature of memory within a South African cultural context.

<sup>14</sup> French philosopher, Jean-Francois Lyotard brought this term into prominence to criticise the ideas within Western culture, dating back to the Enlightenment period. From a philosophical point of view, postmodernism is associated with the dethroning of Enlightenment ideas of the independent subject, truth, and the external world (Heartney 2001:7). These ideas encompassed a belief in transcendent and universal truth in attempt to “construct comprehensive explanations of historical experience” (Wolin 2020 [Online]). These totalising grand narratives which encouraged the belief of “singular



that were fostered during the traumatic years of the Apartheid era<sup>15</sup>, by demonstrating the fragility of memory. It is thus important to question memory, and the way that we remember, as remembering is not necessary as neutral as it appears to be. Hodgkin and Radstone appropriately state that memory, like subjectivity, is understood in different ways at different times (2003:2). This suggests that the way that we engage with memory in the present should allow us to reevaluate the way that we recall the past.

I acknowledge that in a South African context, I may have different associations with the objects in question than other South Africans, and even though these objects may evoke nostalgic or romanticised associations within me, they may have traumatic and/or provocative associations for others. I rely on these differences so that my jewellery pieces can elicit conversation around the fractured nature of memory on multiple levels: personal, cultural, and social. In the context of this study, these objects represent trauma in two ways. Firstly, they represent the loss of my Oupa and my Ouma's deteriorating mental health, and secondly, they represent trauma in a larger South African context due to their associations with a specific sense of privilege and a particular history that evokes trauma for many South Africans. Consequently, even though my grandparents' objects prompt nostalgic and romanticised associations with the past, they also suggest a particular sense of trauma. In this regard, the transformation of these objects through my jewellery praxis, challenges my own romanticised view of the past through deliberately disrupting and breaking the objects at hand in order to make jewellery pieces from them.

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and universal understandings of historical meaning, experience, or knowledge", were precisely what Lyotard critiqued (1979:xxiv-xxv).

<sup>15</sup>Apartheid was the segregation and categorisation of racial groups in South Africa, that lead to the oppression of many. It was legally instated and practised from 1948, when the National Party came into power, to 1994 when segregation was formally abolished. The truth and reconciliation commission accurately describes Apartheid as "evil, inhumane, and degrading, [as the] warp and weft of all oppressed people's experience; defining their privilege and their disadvantage, their poverty and their wealth, their public and private lives, and their very identity" (TRC Report, Volume 1:33 cited in Bubenzer, Gobodo-Madikizela & Oelofsen 2019:2). Apartheid "pervaded every aspect of South African life" and it "cannot be denied that it destroyed the fabric of a nation and continues to define our society"; it may even be "apt to say that [the destructiveness of this act] continues to tear at the very fragile peace that has been built up over the last two decades" (Wyngaard 2019:x).



## 0.2 Research Question(s) and Aims of Study

Research Question(s):

How can the personal re-engagement with the objects in my grandparents' home, through my creative jewellery praxis, stimulate critical conversation regarding the fragility of memory within a larger South African context? And can such re-engagements lead to an understanding of objects (jewellery objects included), as cultural signifiers and mnemonic devices, that can communicate more than their utilitarian purpose?

In this regard, the following areas of focus and aims are set out for this study:

- Firstly, I investigate the hermeneutics of memory; specifically, how memory is informed by both the past and present, in terms of how each is interpreted. I investigate the multifaceted and entangled nature of memory by exploring the responses elicited by certain objects from my grandparents' home.
- Secondly, I investigate the elements that contribute to the fragmented, fragile, and unstable nature of memory. These elements unravel a discussion about memory as a subjective construct, influenced and manipulated by imagined, forgotten and fictionalised elements.
- Thirdly, I relate my Ouma's fragmented and fractured memory to the wider public by placing it within a South African context to reference, acknowledge and investigate the complexities and politics of fragmented memory within the collective, cultural memory of South Africa. I extend this investigation further into the integrated relationship between identity and memory, to comment on how one places and situates the personal within the public.
- Lastly, I explore affect theory and nostalgia as elements of the personal and as the emotive elements of memory, in terms of how one defines and makes sense of their identity in relation to what constitutes their memory. These elements unravel a discussion about the transformation of my grandparents' objects into jewellery pieces and how they elicit these emotive elements of memory.

## 0.3 Research Methodology

Due to the subjective nature of this study, the research methodology that I rely on can be best described as qualitative in nature. This type of research is concerned with understanding people's

experiences, attitudes, behaviours, and interactions. In this regard, I rely on empirical research<sup>16</sup> that attempts to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people have given to them (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2). This type of research is applicable to my area of study, due to the analysis and interpretation of elements that formulate my personal narrative.

The study of my personal narrative lends my research to be approached autoethnographically. This approach is the most applicable methodology for placing my personal narrative within the public and cultural narrative. It allows me to unpack and expose my personal background toward understanding *from where* and *how* my study originated. It prompts my awareness and acknowledgment that the experiences and memories I write about stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture, and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. Unravelling my personal background gives insight into the perceptual views expressed, and interpretations made throughout my study. These views and interpretations, in turn, influence the practical process of creating my series of jewellery pieces.

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) to understand cultural experience (*ethno*). As a methodology, autoethnography is both a process (in the sense that it allows me to use my personal experiences to unfold and comment on cultural occurrences) and a product (in the sense that the experiences that inform my position in the world are products of culture). Moreover, it acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and recognizes the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process and the researcher's influence on research. (Ellis 2004:n.pag. & Holman Jones 2005:763).

When one writes autoethnographically it is important not to purely rely on their methodological tools and research literature to analyse experience, but they should also be sensitive to the ways that others may experience similar epiphanies<sup>17</sup>. One who writes autoethnographically relies on their personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and in doing so, make characteristics of a culture familiar to insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this might require comparing personal experience against existing research. (Ronai 1995 [Online]).

This thesis serves as a mutually informative theoretical study in conjunction with a practical component. The theoretical research I conduct is translated into practical research through the series

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<sup>16</sup> Empirical Research is concerned with/based on observation and experience rather than logic and factual theory (Penn State University Libraries [Online]).

<sup>17</sup> While epiphanies are self-claimed phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal ways in which a person could negotiate intense situations and effects that linger—recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished (Bochner 1984:595).

of contemporary jewellery pieces created and vice versa; allowing the two aspects to be mutually informative. This type of research is known as practice-based research. Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken to gain new knowledge, by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes (Candy 2006:1).

It is emphasised that the contemporary jewellery pieces and objects that I produce are an integral contribution to the understanding of this study. Their meaning encapsulates the significance of the research conducted on this topic alongside the embodiment of my personal narrative. I align these research methodologies with one another to connect my personal narrative to the theoretical research conducted.

#### **0.4 Practical Research**

From my disposition as a citizen and artist within South Africa, the contemporary jewellery pieces that I create comment on the dense and rich history of South Africa and the collective memory of its past. Within the scope of contemporary jewellery design, I create jewellery pieces that visually challenge the grand narratives of the past by emphasising the fragmented, fragile, and inconsistent nature of memory. My jewellery pieces prompt a larger conversation regarding the (in)consistency of collective memory. Within such a historical context, the objects from my grandparents' home can be interpreted with a sense of privilege, which I recognise and disrupt by transforming the objects into jewellery pieces. Through my jewellery praxis, I relate the personal to the public with regards to memory. I illustrate my personal memory, while simultaneously illustrating the fragmented and fragile nature of public memory by using fragmented elements of, or wholly transformed objects from my grandparents' home. The act of fragmenting and transforming these objects, visually portrays the inconsistency of memory. They become objects with a remanence of the object it once was, but they are also distorted and somewhat strange. Likewise, my Ouma's fragmented memory is also a form of disruption<sup>18</sup>. It points to a broken system, a false sense of security and control. In the same token I am also turning them into jewels, to be worn, to be cherished and to be close to the body. Desperately grappling to try and make them lasting and precious, speaking to the nostalgic aspects of memory<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Given my Ouma's diagnosis, she may not recognise the objects within the jewellery pieces, nor even recognise that they come from her own home. In this regard, I am incomparably intrigued about her interacting with and viewing my work. Given her fragmented, distorted and fragile memory, I am interested to see how she will respond to the jewellery pieces that I have made from her and my Oupa's objects.

<sup>19</sup> The nostalgic lens through which I view my past, inevitably idealises the past, and prompts me to remember in a certain, idealised way, which leads me to heighten these objects with a sense of nostalgia. Please refer to section 4.3 for an elaborated discussion about these ideas.

However, simultaneously, they communicate a rupture and tension as the idealised memory pushes toward the sentimentalised and imagined. They become remnants of the past, yet the reality of my Ouma's dementia and fragmented memory pulls apart this idea of a consistent recollection of the past, which ironically accelerates the urge to preserve and embellish<sup>20</sup>. The removal of these objects from the context of my grandparents' home and their placement against the contextual backdrop of contemporary jewellery inevitably prompts new associations and interpretations of them to be developed.

In this regard, I relate to William West's sentiments in his article *Artificial Memory* when he suggests that the object (memorial/mnemonic) passes from the safe space in the mind of its wearer/possessor into the public eye, where it is subject to interpretation by a crowd of onlookers who do not know or understand its history or affective significance. Like a conventional memorial artifact, the object preserves an awareness of self. (2003:70).

The function of jewellery is multifarious and complex. Its function can be defined as the meaning it adds to the individual that wears it. As such, the function of jewellery is its significance within the private and the public realm and therefore, jewellery communicates on different levels: social, cultural and individual. Jewellery can foster sentimental or memorial qualities or serve as carriers of emotional meaning. The emotional meaning may embody the remembrance of people and places which are significant to the maker but may be invisible to the wearer (if not the same person as the maker) and the viewer<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, the wearer and the viewer can also give their own meaning to the jewellery piece; attributing stories, memories and their personality to it, charging it with meaning. (den Besten 2012:11,17,24). In this regard, Art historian and curator, Damian Skinner notes that:

Contemporary jewellery is a self-reflexive practice, concerned with reflecting on the conditions [and context] in which it exists, and it is shaped by a distinct awareness of such. Contemporary jewellers work in a critical and conscious relationship with the history of the practice and to the wider field of jewellery and adornment (2013:11).

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<sup>20</sup> I acknowledge the sentimentality and preciousness that I bestow onto these objects, but for the sake of commenting on the distortion of memory. Through *how* and *with what* I embellish the referent to the past creates the associations of what will be remembered, and inevitably the way that I will continue to remember it. In this process, I investigate the various ways through which memory can be distorted by drawing a comparison between my Ouma's deteriorating memory and my own idealised memories; creating an ironic parallel between the two, the one prompted by the other.

<sup>21</sup> In this case, this type of jewellery would be considered Author Jewellery, where the maker is the author of the piece. This type of jewellery is loaded with meaning that is not commonplace and it demands understanding, involvement, and commitment (den Besten 2012:61).

Contemporary jewellery has an interdisciplinary involvement with a diverse range of subjects, techniques, and materials, and it can be used as a vehicle by which theoretical and subjective concepts can be explored as an artistic statement. In a contemporary jewellery context, materials and techniques are identified as tools that can “address political and social concerns regarding the affordability and accessibility of jewellery which is a radical departure from its previous engagement with monetary and symbolic value”. (Jessop 2013:23,24). Jewellers and art critics, Peter Dormer and Ralph Turner, define contemporary jewellery as a “shrewd monitor, reflecting the ups and downs not only of money and fashion, but also of political, social and cultural change” (1994:178). This suggests a structural shift from the ornamental, decorative interests of conventional, traditional jewellery to the investigative concerns explored through contemporary jewellery.

In a postmodernist<sup>22</sup> sense, jewellers came to establish a sense of freedom, in terms of form, material and function, disrupting any traditionalist ideas of jewellery and challenged the idea of restriction and limitation in terms of jewellery’s appearance, functionality or purpose (den Besten, 2012:7). In this regard, the contemporary jeweller can move around freely between art and craft; he/she is no longer restricted to comply with specific expectations of what jewellery should look like or how it should be worn (den Besten 2012:76). As such, contemporary jewellery became a form of wearable art; transforming conventional jewellery and prompting the viewer and wearer to look at the piece as an object, and more so, to look at it critically. Contemporary jewellery can be regarded as “a critical form of art that is self-reflexive in nature, because it can be viewed as a medium that can question the general assumptions of the craft that it originated from” (Groenewald 2015:16). In this regard, contemporary jewellery expressed the ideas of radical change; critically challenging and changing traditional social, political and cultural structures (den Besten 2012:7).

As such, contemporary jewellery embodies the mindset of postmodernity; dissolving the boundaries between individuals, questioning traditional practices, and it is used as a platform of responsive communication to current issues, and an expression of conceptual ideas. I view the contemporary jewellery pieces that I create, not only as a practical externalisation of this theoretical study but as part of the postmodern trend.

In her article, *Reading Jewellery*, Liesbeth den Besten highlights the contextual placement of jewellery as a prevalent way of establishing meaning. She claims that “jewellery is quite different from fine art by being mobile, wearable and therefore semantically changing according to the context and conditions under which it is viewed” (2006 [Online]). In this regard, contemporary jeweller and

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<sup>22</sup> Please refer to section 0.6.1 for an elaborate discussion about the ideas of postmodernism.

researcher, Joani Groenewald outlines the communicative and interpretative ability of jewellery, within personal and public contexts when she states that:

Jewellery has the potential to communicate in two ways: one, through its symbolic and close connection with the wearer; and two, through its public display, thus inviting conversation and multiple/other perspectives. Jewellery can thus be a prompt to invite conversation or provoke a memory (J Groenewald, personal communication, Stellenbosch, 2020).

I relate to the sentiments of den Besten and Groenewald because my personal narrative is visually communicated through the contemporary jewellery pieces that I create. Contemporary jeweller and curator, Jack Cunningham explores similar notions and emphasises the use of material and form to create figurative narratives in the form of jewellery pieces. He states that:

The engagement of the materials, forms and techniques evoke layers of meaning that are revealed by the imaginative power of the viewer; thus, allowing personal meaning and associations to be attached to the displayed object and investing the jewellery object with the symbolic and emotive capabilities of storytelling (2009:56).

This suggests that the viewer identifies with certain aspects within, or associated with the jewellery object, such as the identification of, or familiarity with the materials used. Such sensibilities are informed by prior experience, the imagination or prior knowledge. Relatively, the use of household and heirloom<sup>23</sup> materials in my jewellery pieces may prompt recognition, a sense of familiarity, association or understanding within the viewer. In this regard, jeweller, David Watkins, claims that the meaning embedded in the handmade, and the social importance of the jewellery object allows it to become a “testing ground for questions, provocations, emotions and allegory” (2002:92).

The power of jewellery to explore issues of identity and personal narrative is second to none; often we select a piece of jewellery to wear, we make a very conscious statement about ourselves and the society to which we belong (Game 1997:15). In this regard, the body is the focal platform for the communication of contemporary jewellery. This suggests that the wearability of jewellery and its

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<sup>23</sup> Through my jewellery praxis, I play on the idea of the heirloom objects and what properties constitute objects of inheritance. Contemporary jewellery is a fitting medium to explore such ideas because jewellery itself is usually something that is inherited and thus considered to be an heirloom object. I simultaneously intersect the past and the present by transforming my grandparents' objects into contemporary jewellery pieces and art objects. By doing so, I maintain the history embedded in my grandparents' objects, while simultaneously introducing their objects into a new context. This comments on, but also challenges, the conventional 'passing down' of jewellery and objects across time and generations.

intimate placement on, and interaction with the body gives personal meaning to the jewellery piece. Thus, by placing jewellery on the body the mnemonic and symbolic function of the object is highlighted. Consequently, the jewellery piece serves as an extension of the body and an encapsulated reflection of the wearer. This suggests that the jewellery piece can be seen as an extension of the wearers' identity through the specific meaning and association attached to the materials that are used. In this sense, the jewellery piece communicates the personal on behalf of the wearer, within a public context.

This suggests that the wearability of jewellery invites a duality of privacy and publicity. Meanings and interpretations of the jewellery object reveal both the character of the wearer and the ways in which the viewer interprets such meaning. Social and cultural significance is considered by the individual when viewing an object. This personalised significance is communicated through the body's reactive response to an object, whether emotional or physical. The object's symbolic value is illustrative of the collective constructs that shape the social collective. (Jessop 2013:27).

As such, jewellery's accessibility to, and connection with the human body through personal adornment and bodily response allows for an intimate connection between the maker and the wearer/viewer, both physically and through interpretation. This assessment of jewellery design as a discipline that is fundamentally engaged with the body, reinforces the relationship between the object and those who make, wear, and view it. Simultaneously, it defines a platform of artistic contemplation that aims to question, challenge, and provoke. It is this relationship between the jewellery object and the body, established in a narrative of wearability that distinguishes jewellery from the arts. (Jessop 2013:28). Similarly, curator, Rock Hushka notes that "jewellery becomes an object that mediates and bridges an artist's intent to the wearer, who then carries the artist's statement into the world" (2010:46). The body can therefore be interpreted as the activator, and vehicle of the jewellery object and the wearer as the mobile form of display (Jessop 2013:27).

The series of jewellery pieces that I create become a fragmented externalisation of my personal narrative. It is a visual binary of my past and present, and a visual narrative of my identity relative to my memory. The jewellery pieces encapsulate a transgressing of time, which comments on how time influences the retrieval and loss of moments, memories, objects, and people. Therefore, the objects and materials that constitute my jewellery pieces simultaneously illustrate fragmentation and wholeness<sup>24</sup>. I aim to expand the dimensions of contemporary jewellery, exploring its suitability as a conceptual medium to visualise the abstract idea of memory. I use the process of jewellery design

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<sup>24</sup> I communicate this via the varied combination of materials that embody the jewellery pieces, via a duplication and/or distortion of elements or via differentiating what the front and the back of the jewellery pieces look like.



and production as a reflective tool to visually represent this idea. The purpose of this study is not only a re-investigated approach to memory, and mnemonic objects, but an attempt to academically enrich the concept of contemporary jewellery and its limited awareness in a South African context. My study comprises of elements that may be relatable to the wider public; therefore, I invite the public into the personal realm through my jewellery praxis and create a premise that others can compare their personal experiences and memories to.

This discussion makes it evident that contemporary jewellery forms part of the postmodern trend and style of thought. Within this premise, I create my own art, a combined representation of postmodernist and contemporary styled jewellery. The postmodern trend challenges authenticity, consistency, and conventional norms (Bauman 1992:vii). These are the exact terms which I theoretically engage with, and practically externalise in this study.

## 0.5 Chapter Outline and Literature Review

The structure of my thesis, with regards to its comprising chapters, aligns with my investigative aims for this study. Each chapter addresses and explores key theoretical investigations toward acknowledging and unravelling the complexities and politics of memory. The theoretical component of this thesis informs my practical processes; therefore, these chapters provide a theoretical foundation for my practical work. As such, I weave discussions of my practical explorations into the entirety of my theoretical investigations. This demonstrates how I have interpreted and applied these theoretical concerns on a practical level and creates a continuous conversation between these two elements of research.

French Philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, Professor of Cultural Theory, Susannah Radstone and Professor of Cultural History, Katherine Hodgkin are seminal theorists throughout my study. Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) aids me in contextualizing the phenomenology<sup>25</sup> of memory, including the hermeneutical<sup>26</sup> and imaginative qualities thereof. Radstone and Hodgkin's *Regimes of Memory* (2003) (and the authors throughout this volume) contextualises the politics of memory within a South African socio-political context and address recurring themes that specifically touch on "memory's relation to affect and representation, to conservation and transformation, to the individual and the social, and to history and experience" (2003:18).

Chapter One investigates the hermeneutics of memory. I interlace my own propositions and suggestions with the academic texts of, but not limited to, author of *Memory and Narrative* (1998),

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<sup>25</sup> Please refer to section 0.6.3 for an elaborate discussion about the relation of phenomenology to memory.

<sup>26</sup> Please refer to Chapter One for a detailed discussion about the relationship between hermeneutics and memory.



James Olney, Harvard Psychology Professor, Daniel Schacter, author of *Memory (The New Critical Idiom)* (2009), Anne Whitehead, author of *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (1998), Sarah Nuttall, author of *Rewriting the self: History, Memory, Narrative* (1993), Mark Freeman and Dutch cultural theorist, Mieke Bal. These sources aid in the interrogation and illustration of hermeneutics in relation to memory, in terms of how memories are reconstructed in alignment with how they are interpreted when recalled. My interest in hermeneutics as a methodological discipline, used to unpack and understand meaningful material, progressed the more I interacted with the space of my grandparents' home, and the objects in it. Hermeneutics applies when a new interpretation is developed by interacting with the jewellery piece. The elements that embody the jewellery piece are the objects from my past, that which I had injected with significant meaning. However, transforming them into wearable jewellery pieces may distort these original associations, subjecting the original objects to re-interpretation. As such suggesting the distortion, fragility, and unstable nature of memory.

In Chapter Two, I focus on this fragmented and unstable nature of memory; through investigating the topics of imagined memory, forgotten memory and the possibility of fictionalised memory. This chapter explores the malleable aspect of memory in terms of it being a subjectively constructed concept. Intrigued by the neuroscience behind dementia as a neurological disorder, I highlight certain scientific studies that substantiate my argument around the fragmented, forgotten and imagined aspects of memory. I consult the academic texts of, but not limited to Professor of Postmodernist Culture, Linda Hutcheon, and authors of *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as a Creative Process* (2012), Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering. These sources aid in the investigation of the reconstruction of memory and how this contributes to its fragile and inconsistent nature.

Chapter Three investigates the politics and complexities of memory within a South African context. I relate the personal to the public and cultural by acknowledging the collective and fragmented memory of South Africa. Moreover, this chapter investigates identity construction relative to its influence upon memory. I consult the academic texts of, but not limited to French Philosopher, Maurice Halbwachs and Sociology Professor, Barbara Misztal. These sources aid in interrogating the elements of the South African collective public memory and how personal memory is informed and shaped by these elements.

Chapter Four investigates the emotive elements of memory by discussing affect theory and nostalgia relative to their influence upon memory. I consult the academic texts of, but not limited to writer of *The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory*, Jill Bennett, Cultural Memory Professor, Annette Kuhn and Literary critic, Susan Stewart. I weave in discussions about contemporary jewellers who have investigated similar notions through their work, which include German contemporary jewellery artist, Bettina

Speckner and Netherlands based contemporary jeweller, Gésine Hackenberg. These sources aid in further contextualisation of the personalised aspects of identity. Particularly the varied personal affects and individualised nostalgic lenses, through which the past is viewed, and how this informs individualised identity constructions and how these constructions inform and shape memory.

## **0.6 Theoretical Framework**

I position my own views on memory studies within the discursive framework of postmodernism. This perspective informs the way that I discuss and think about the nature of memory in relation to my own jewellery praxis and the research that I conduct. Additionally, I draw from specific theories that reiterate or extend certain ideas that are put forward by a postmodernist discourse, such as New Materialism and Phenomenology.

This theoretical framework will initially elaborate on postmodernism as the foundation for my own views on memory studies, before elaborating on the relevance of New Materialism and Phenomenology within such a context.

### **0.6.1 Postmodernism**

Postmodernism challenges the modernist perception of memory, specifically because it challenges the modernist notion of memory as a consistent, authentic reference to the past. A postmodernist investigation into memory exposes memory's inconsistencies, prompting me to question how I can rely on memory to retain impactful experiences when it is also known to constantly evolve in relation to insights gained in the present.

The ambiguous relationship between the past and the present is precisely what is of importance in the investigation of memory within a postmodern framework. The discourse of memory can be disrupted when placed in a postmodern context, specifically because of the constructed and possible fictional nature of [it]. The nature of postmodernism questions these moments of disruption (the involvement of the present in the reality of the past), and the product of these moments (the recollected memories of the past). (le Roux 2013:10). According to cultural historian, Kerwin Lee Klein, memory is the mode of discourse that is typical of the postmodern condition and the moments that provoke memory are those that disrupt the grand narratives of memory (2000:138). This suggests that the active involvement of the present in the past, is the postmodernist way of recollecting. This perspective challenges the modernist views on recollection, that fostered and produced grand narratives. In this regard, this postmodernist way of recollecting suggests that memory is multifaceted in terms of the multiplicity of meanings ascribed to it (past and present meanings), which acknowledges memory's fragmented nature. This multiplicity then challenges and disrupts the limited nature of modernist

grand narratives which view the entirety of memory as a “singular and universal understanding of historical meaning, experience or knowledge”, as suggested by Lyotard (1979:xxiv).

By extension, Lyotard defines postmodernism as that which “calls the credibility of the unified and universalist grand narratives of Western culture into question; where modern ideas of discourses such as identity, memory, and history are dissected and challenged” (cited in Hart 2000:8). Lyotard did not believe in the existence of one grand narrative but rather in a multitude of small narratives (Hutcheon 2006:119). This challenges the modernist grand narratives which are highly selective and portray a very specific account of the past, which exclude as much as they include. For this reason, memory, as seen from a postmodernist perspective (as fragmented and unstable) is a much more authentic way of accessing the past, as it allows for a multitude of recollections (often conflicting recollections) to inform our understanding of the past.

Art critic and historian, Hal Foster emphasises that “[h]ow we conceive postmodernism is critical to how we represent both present and past – which aspects are stressed, which are repressed” (cited in Kolin 1998:38). It suggests a re-evaluation of, and a dialogue with, the past in the light of the present. As such, reality, as we experience it, is an obscure interplay between present and past where meaning is fluid and unstable. (Hutcheon 1988:19). Thus, discussing the discourse of memory within a postmodern framework enables me to question the stability and value of memory. In relation, postmodernism treats “memory, like other [grand narratives], with much caution in terms of one ultimate ‘truth’ and tends to reject the claims of *real* representations of the past” (le Roux 2013:11)<sup>27</sup>.

In this regard, Hodgkin and Radstone comment on contemporary memory studies from the postmodern perspective:

A focus on *regimes* of memory runs counter to the main tendencies within contemporary memory studies, where, under the impact of postmodernism, the major focus has been on memory’s capacity to destabilise the authority of the ‘grand narratives’ with which history has become associated. While history has become negatively associated with the ‘public’ and with ‘objectivity’, memory has become positively associated with the embedded, with the local, the personal and the subjective. For historians, memory studies have been utilised to retrieve that

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<sup>27</sup> In a postmodern sense, authenticity and accuracy are like truth, all concepts being fluid and inconsistent and open to influence and change, over time. Thus, original associations, interpretations and perceptions do not remain consistent, but rather fluctuate as new knowledge is constantly gained; influencing and informing what is remembered in memory. Hutcheon states that “it is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past”; in other words, binary opposites (1988:106).

which runs against, disrupts, or disturbs dominant ways of understanding the past (2003:10).

In this regard, within the framework of postmodernism, this theoretical study, and the contemporary jewellery pieces that I create as externalisations of my memories, serve as platforms to challenge and question the constructed representations of my past and the degree to which I believe my memories to be consistent. Therefore, this study and my jewellery praxis aims to represent my own perception of my past through utilising [my] visual *interpretation* of the past yet disrupting it through presenting it partly as a work of fiction (Onega & Landa 1996:31).

This discussion emphasises the instability of memory, its lack of consistency and the varied influential factors upon recollection, questioning the authenticity of remembrance and one's recollections. The postmodernist perspective informs and influences the way I view the world, by my reality being dependant on how my current interpretative and perceptual development is represented, and in which context I recollect my memories. Postmodernity's dependency on representation and context aligns with the notions of contemporary jewellery, in terms of its meaning changing according to the representational materials used and the context under which it exists, is worn and is viewed. Therefore, the postmodernist perspective informs the way I engage in my jewellery praxis and how I view the contemporary jewellery pieces that I create.

### **0.6.2 New Materialism**

Physics historian, Elizabeth Garber defines New Materialism as a theoretical integration of materiality as it affects people, systems, and things, with our understanding of nature, society, and subjectivity. She believes that new materialist theory lays a foundation for the understanding of not only the materiality of objects and things, but also of beings and even discursive practices and social structures, as physical matter. (2019:8,9). In this regard, objects in the material world act like mirrors, reflecting the identity, feelings, persona, culture, history and family relations of an individual (Groenewald 2021 [Online]). Garber explores the concept of new materialism and its relationship with objects in recognition that "objects, as materials, have agency and affect us"; acknowledging that the interactions with objects from a new materialist perspective, "suggests that matter matters to how life is lived" (2019:7). Authors of *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (2010), Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, support this notion as they comment on the embedded recognition of the importance of objects and materials in our lives:

As human beings we inhabit an ineluctably material world. We live our everyday lives immersed in matter. We are ourselves composed of matter. We experience its restlessness and intransigence even as we reconfigure and consume it. Objects and works of art are types of matter. Experiencing objects

involves more than words can cover because objects are tactile and kinaesthetic, making the experiences synthetic and not just analytic (2010:1). Canadian fine artist, Sandra Flood, supports this idea in her article, within *Craft Perception and Practice*. She states that “objects are not passive in their impact; they come into our lives, changing our habits, provoking emotions, trailing social messages” (2002:99). Relatively, Garber notes that “objects, materials, and the processes surrounding them have roles in the decisions and choices we make in our lives” (2019:9). This suggests that artists and materials embody a co-constitutive relationship. In the process of creating meaning through art practice, the artist and material inform one another, each being co-dependent upon one another to create meaning within the artwork. Flood suggests that “objects are socially interpreted and valued in different situations...they can be interpreted in a variety of ways relative to the situation and context they are in and how they physically look” (2002:100). In this regard, objects are visual examples of how we relate to the world and engage in social interactions. Flood’s suggestion also aligns with contemporary jewellery’s meaning being dependant on the context in which it exists, as well as postmodernism’s concern with representation and context.

Garber notes that creative makers are “particularly sensitive to materiality” as they engage materials in order to “create new configurations of matter” (2019:11). I agree with this notion when prior to creating with them, I already have an emotional connection with the objects from my grandparents’ home, such as the clay sculpting tools reminding me of pottery lessons shared together with my Ouma. Once I have created jewellery pieces with, and from them, I gain a newly associated emotional connection with them while simultaneously having created a new configuration of matter.

I relate the new materialist idea of humans having an informing relationship with their objects to the post-humanist idea of humans having an informing, interdependent and co-constitutive relationship with their environment. Objects carry specific meanings and assumptions with them, which exceed what they are usually associated with. These meanings and assumptions communicate specific messages which shape oneself and others within one’s environment. The posthumanism perspective prompts one to re-evaluate how they position themselves within their immediate environment in relation to the objects that one chooses to surround themselves with. (Groenewald 2021 [Online]).

In their article, *Posthumanism*, Diane Keeling and Marguerite Lehman define posthumanism as a philosophical perspective of how change is enacted in the world (2018:1). Moreover, they suggest that post-humanist philosophy constitutes the human as:

- (a) physically, chemically, and biologically enmeshed in and dependent on the environment;
- (b) moved into action through interactions that generate affects, habits, and reason; and
- (c) possessing no attribute that is uniquely human but is instead made up of a larger evolving ecosystem (2018:1).

This suggests that the human is understood as being entangled with its environment. I relate this to how my grandparents' home is an environment that informed my upbringing and thus informs my understanding of my identity. I extend this to interlink the ideas of new materialism with the ideas of posthumanism, by suggesting that my grandparents' objects are equally as informative to my understanding of self as the environment of their home is.

Posthumanism and new materialism each suggest that external interactions affect humans. In posthumanism, affect is generated through the interdependent, interactive relationship between the human and their environment and in new materialism, affect is generated through the human's interaction with objects and materials. Meaning is given to and placed upon one's environment and one's objects, and in turn, the environment and objects gives and places meaning to and upon the individual. In this regard, objects are not only a means of understanding one's environment but can also be seen as a means of understanding the individual. As such, environments and objects can be seen as being equivalently informative to one another.

The interaction that I have with the space of my grandparents' home and their objects serves my memory and self-understanding, whereas my memory also serves the space and objects by giving them mnemonic meaning. This suggests a dual, co-constitutive relationship between me and my grandparents' home and their objects. In this sense, my interaction with the environment of my grandparents' home and their objects is placed within a post-humanist and new materialist informing context.

New materialism and posthumanism "emphasises the interaction between not only people and objects, but between objects themselves" (Barad 2007:137 & Hekman 2010:110). These theories involve objects, materials, language, and social aspects of our lives not in a predefined sense, but as 'intra-actions' (Barad 2007:139). This suggests that "attention [then] shifts to the in-between; outside of the effects and affects that things and processes have on our lives, we might also consider how they interact with each other" (Garber 2019:10).

From a post-humanist perspective, just like a human's surroundings and environment, matter has transformative capacities when involved with the body, suggesting that bodies and [objects] are produced together, intertwined (similar to how a human and their environment is intertwined) because [objects] and how they act on bodies are co-constitutive of our embodied subjectivity. This suggests the power of "forming the individual through working and interacting with materials". (Hickey-Moody & Page 2016:3,4). I relate this to the construction of my identity through my memories, and because my memories are externalised into the form of contemporary jewellery pieces, their placement on the body emphasises their embodied subjectivity. This was outlined previously when I discussed the fundamental role of the body as the activator and vehicle for the meaning of



contemporary jewellery pieces. The placement of jewellery upon the body activates the mnemonic and symbolic function of, and association with, the object.

In this regard, the correspondence between the subject and object is what contributes to an individual's identity (Ingold 2013:105). As we activate objects and matter with an affective sensory response, so do they activate us in the exact same way. Affect becomes the common correspondence between the subject and object (Garber 2019:16). Similarly, Suzanne Ramljak suggests, in her article, *Intimate Matters: Objects and Subjectivity*, that objects and materials have an "ability to foster intimate experiences" that can engage us in "deep explorations of materials and processes as well as self, others, human experiences, and social issues" (2004:186,188).

My practical body of work is an accumulation of various objects from my grandparents' home, which each embody specific narratives, memories and associations. When placing these objects alongside one another, in their new form as jewellery pieces, a larger narrative and conversation is elicited because the embodied narratives, memories and associations have shifted and possibly juxtapose one another. In this regard, my jewellery pieces can be considered as relics because they incorporate objects from the past. These objects embody the history of an earlier time and by interacting with them, I engage with this history to make assumptions about the past (Groenewald 2021 [Online]). The transformation of the objects into jewellery pieces disables their usual function but their newly imbued function is to carry and communicate messages of the past, in the present.

There is embedded history not only in the objects incorporated in my jewellery pieces but also in the other materials incorporated with them and within my jewellery praxis itself. Each aspect of my creative process encompasses and suggests a rich and dense history, which I consider and acknowledge throughout. My practical body of work ties all of these aspects together to not single out one history over another, but to merge the network of informing histories and their narratives into one.

New Materialism, as an extension of postmodernist thought<sup>28</sup>, emphasises the inconsistency of interpretation; by analysing our interaction with the materials and objects that surround us, and how those interactions fluctuate. Therefore, we can gain an understanding of how we continuously shift

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<sup>28</sup> Postmodernism is also tied to posthumanism. The term *posthumanism* emerged in humanities-oriented disciplines in the late 20th century, along with other "post" movements. As such, posthumanism shares features with, and is at times indistinct from postmodernism. Posthumanism shares postmodernist critiques about the historical and theoretical inconsistency of the category *human*. In short, postmodernism refers to critiques of objective reality, cultural progress, universal truths and explanations of knowledge, as identified with modernism, and posthumanism refers to critiques of human exceptionalism, freedom of choice, individual autonomy, and explanations of social change, as identified with humanism. (Lehman & Keeling 2018:2).

our situating of the personal within the public. Moreover, understanding why we surround ourselves with such materials and objects gives us insight into how the past leads to the present. This suggests that these materials inanimately communicate our personal narrative. New Materialism informs my view on, and interaction within the object world, as I am continuously aware of how and why certain materials and objects can affect me. Consequently, the memories I have of my grandparents' home, gain emphasised emotive depth when interacting with their objects. In turn, I engage with the objects on a furthered affective level. As such, the materials and objects within my jewellery pieces become a direct link to the memories of my grandparents' home. They encapsulate those narratives and, in turn, exceed the boundaries of their associated functionality. In this regard, I understand these materials and objects for more than their utilitarian value. This informs my jewellery praxis and influences the role of my jewellery pieces within the context of memory studies.

### **0.6.3 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a discipline within philosophy that is concerned with structures of consciousness, as experienced from the first-person point of view. In this regard, it is the study of phenomena referring to the way that we experience things in the world through our direct interactions and experiences. As such, phenomenology refers to the insights and meanings that we gain through our lived experience and interactions in the world. (Smith 2013 [Online]).

My approach to this study is informed by a phenomenological understanding of the world, which centres around my own experiences and interactions with the physical world, where the body is seen as the primary interpreter of its surroundings (Toadvine 2016 [Online]). In this sense, the body is a central platform for reflection; by receiving, processing and internalising experiences. I suggest that an experience of a resonating nature is internalised, and the meaning taken from it is embedded in the body's sensory reactor system. Thus, prompting recognition when currently having an experience of a similar nature. In this regard, the body can be considered as a vessel of accumulated experiences, stored in the form of memories (Bennett 2003:48) as it leaves no reference, other than our memories and our bodily reactions to these recollections as the suggestion of an occurrence having happened. Therefore, I suggest memory itself to be as evolving, developmental, and fluctuating as the body.

Ricoeur elaborates on corporeal memory, as an extension on the emphasis of one's own body as an integral factor to what is remembered and how it is remembered. He states that memory is "modulated in accordance with all the variations of feelings of familiarity or of strangeness" (2004:40). He discusses the significance of physical places as influential to memory; the physicality of these places produces a sense of assurance that the experience did occur through acts of inhabitation. The 'things' remembered are "intrinsically associated with places" and places serve as reminders of events and



experiences that have a prominent impact on our past (2004:41). The body is reserved as the primordial place and referential point for all that has occurred around it and for all places that have been inhabited by it. Our memory of, and interaction with, a space is what transforms it from a geographical location to a landscape. The continuous impregnation of impacting moments, within the space, fills it with meaning, content, and history. The interaction, or lack thereof, with a space over a spanned timeframe runs the possibility of enhancing or depleting the memorable associations with it. I relate to these ideas through the space of my grandparents' home being an integral and familiar place of my entire upbringing; however, as time progressed, I spent less of my time there, leaving me with only the objects from inside their home to serve as associative references to my childhood days.

Ricoeur suggests that individuals have nothing better than memory to signify that something has occurred *before* we declare that we remember it. Experiences are believed to be made tangible in memory through mnemonic objects, which prompt the individual to remember *a thing* upon the recollection of a happening (and vice versa). However, this notion prompts me to question what exactly it is that is being remembered, as it may be: a physical object (as recalled being in the initial experience), the memory of the experience *or* the memory of our last recollected memory of the experience. (2004:21). In this regard, French philosopher, Henri Bergson suggests that the 'thing' remembered is "plainly identified with a singular, unrepeatable event" (cited in Ricoeur 2004:23). Similarly, German Philosopher, Edmund Husserl addresses the distinction between "retention or primary/immediate memory and reproduction/recollection or secondary memory" when he speaks of the formation of memory as "a temporal experience that has an object-orientated side in memory", suggesting that "what we perceive remains present to us for a time, but not without undergoing modification" (cited in Ricoeur 2004:23). The questions naturally posed in relation to the modification of memory, are whether it is through *association* or *comparison* that we formulate what we currently remember about initial experiences. While in the process of recollection, one's mind is reproducing the original content of the experience in relation to current influential associations and developed interpretative knowledge. Something that is remembered will forever gain new context and content as remembering in the present means using the newness of the present and applying it to the past, which suggests that what is remembered is only ever a retention of retention. (cited in Ricoeur 2004:23).

I investigate to what extent the objects from my past, can assist in revealing or expressing concerns that I have regarding the relationship between my own identity construction and my memories. This frames the way I engage with the material world as much as my interactions with the material world inform the way I perceive myself. I acknowledge the continuously active process between how the world shapes us as much as we shape the world; meanings shape us as much as we shape meaning

and memory shapes us as much as we shape memory; creating a parallel between the two, the one continuously shaping and informing the other.

I suggest that *experience* from a phenomenological perspective aligns with *thought* from a postmodernist and post-humanist perspective. The postmodern and post-human individual rejects consistency: aligning their knowledge (thoughts) with the construction of experiences had, when experiencing from a phenomenological perspective. The meaning given to the experiences of the past and the present fluctuates and becomes fluid. Meaning is drawn from the representation and appearance of things and there is a continuous shift in knowledge of meaning informed by, and relevant to the differentiating contexts of our experiences. This informs the way that I perceive my experiences and the memories thereof. The continuous shift and development in my knowledge influences how and what I recollect, speaking to the inconsistent nature of memory. As such, this informs what recollections I have when interacting with the objects from my grandparents' home. This prompts me to question whether I am giving meaning to these objects in alignment with their original context or whether I am using my subjective interpretation, and constructed knowledge, to develop their meaning. This grappling informs my jewellery praxis and the jewellery pieces I make with, and from, these objects.

## Chapter One:

### Memory: A Hermeneutical Investigation

#### 1.1 Introduction

Colombian journalist and novelist, Gabriel Garcia Marquez states that, “life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it”, emphasising the importance of memory studies and its impact on the humanities and the social sciences, as memory informs everyday experience. (1967:67).

This chapter will serve as a contextualization of memory studies as the foundational aspect of this study. In this respect, this chapter will substantiate my investigation into how memory operates on a hermeneutical level and informs everyday life. I will specifically elaborate on memory as not only something that is concerned with the past but is also informed by the present. I investigate how memory operates on a personal and social level, and in turn how these aspects of memory inform my own understanding of the past and how I place the personal within the public.

In a study that is concerned with exploring the complexities of memory (within a personal as well as cultural South African context), I find it necessary to investigate memory studies from a hermeneutical perspective. In this regard, a hermeneutical investigation into memory suggests the exploration of the theory and methodologies that impact the way that we make sense of/or interpret the world. Within a postmodernist context, hermeneutics places stress on the possibility of an interpretive experience to produce new meaning and shifts away from concerns about truth (George 2020 [Online]). Suggesting that a reengagement and exploration of memory, that is informed by personal experience, can lead to new knowledge and insight that will assist in shaping a better understanding of memory.

Re-interacting with the objects from my grandparents’ home elicits interpretative responses within me, prompting a re-interpretation of my original associations with those objects and the memories of my grandparents’ home. Bal states that “memory is active, and it is situated in the present” (1999:viii), emphasizing that memory is not only concerned with the past but also informed by the present. In this regard, my re-interpretations of the associations and memories elicited by my grandparents’ objects are constructed in alignment with the present. By extension, these re-interpretations are carried out when I transform the objects into jewellery pieces, as their original associations differentiate when placing them within a contemporary jewellery context. Thus, I understand my creative process to be a continuous hermeneutical investigation. The interpretations of my jewellery pieces and the meanings of the original objects that embody them, will continuously be in flux, in alignment with the context in which they are being viewed.

## 1.2 Memory: An Overview

The following section engages in an introductory discussion about memory, for the purpose of providing a contextual grounding for the following discussion about hermeneutics and memory. This overview also serves as the point of departure for this study, providing a substantiated understanding of memory that can be applied to the theoretical material in this thesis.

Olney describes the function of memory in its most basic sense: being that to “recall that which once happened” (1998:60). These happenings are translated into memories and understood as a variation of past experiences that have come to us [presently] through our various senses. The relationship between the past and the present is of notable significance when discussing the hermeneutics of memory because memory is as much about how the present is interpreted as it is about the past being interpreted. In this regard, Schacter describes the influence that the present has on the way that we recall the past when he states that:

We extract key elements from our experiences and store them. We recreate and reconstruct our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them. Sometimes, in the process of reconstructing we add on feelings, beliefs, or even knowledge we obtained after the experience. In other words, we bias our memories of the past by attributing emotion or knowledge to them, that we acquired after the event (cited in Bohleber 2007:335).

Schacter explains how we manipulate, embellish, and reconstruct our recollection of the past with knowledge or emotions that we have gained in the interim. Author of *History as an Art of Memory* (1993), Patrick H. Hutton, suggests that memory is constituted of two moments: *repetition* and *recollection*. He states that repetition “involves the *presence of the past*” and recollection “involves *present representations of the past*” (1993:150). I relate Hutton’s thoughts to Schacter’s thoughts in terms of reconstructions being equivalent to representations. In either instance, within the present, we develop a different version of the experience that we are reflecting upon, through present interpretation.

Author of *History, Memory, Identity* (1998), Allan Megill similarly states that “memory is an image of the past constructed by a subjectivity in the present” and because of this association with the nature of subjectivity, memory itself “may also be irrational and inconsistent” (1998:56). The way I understand my past is continuously informed and influenced by subjectivities within the present. These subjectivities become increasingly evident the more I engage within the space of my grandparents’ home and the objects from within. I idealise how I recollect my past within that space and how I interact with those objects in alignment with my present consciousness. This suggests that

my memory is altered and distorted by the inclusion of present subjectivities. As such, my interpretations of my memories are altered, which makes it increasingly evident that memory by nature is unstable, fragmented and easily manipulated.

Similarly, Professor in Psychoanalytical Studies, Werner Bohleber suggests that “memories could not be understood in isolation from their context of emergence”, which prompts the idea that the present is significant in understanding the past and vice versa (2007:334). Thus, memory serves as a channel of communication between the past and the present toward understanding past experiences and their relevance within the present. Neurologist and Professor of Psychology, Antonio Damasio, suggests that “the present is never here and is continuously becoming past, and by the time we take stock of it, we are in another present” (cited in Olney 1998:339). This suggests that we only ever process, interpret, and understand the world through memory. However, this gives memory the power to alter the way the world is understood, interpreted, and perceived.

I propose that we as human beings, have a need to investigate our individual pasts by interpreting past experiences to make sense of the present. Olney suggests that “the mind through memory...can recall experiences of the past, but it can also, in the present, recall itself to itself; [it] can be understood by its own thought, and this too, whereby the mind is present to itself, is accomplished through memory” (1998:17). This multifaceted idea of memory suggests that the mind, through memory, is constantly linking the present with similarities of the past while simultaneously linking its present thought to the present moment. Similarly, Groenewald terms the interlinking of the present and the past as the “ambiguity of memory”, suggesting that “memory cannot exist without recollection in the present, but the present can only be interpreted through memory” (2015:24). This emphasises the continuously interdependent and influential relationship between the past and the present. Current consciousness is constantly informed by the interlinkage and similarity of past and present experiences. Therefore, the mind uses memory to make sense of the past as well as the present which emphasises that “memory is always as much about the present as it is about the past” (Nuttall 1998:74). This suggests that memories are as much shaped by the present as the present is shaped by memories.

This knowledge informs how I recollect the memories of my experiences within my grandparents’ home. I experience the parallel and mutual relationship between the present and the past when I presently interact with the space of their home. It becomes particularly relevant and apparent when I see and *feel* the emptiness of the rooms. However, in my mind’s eye, I visualise and inject those spaces with the experiences I once had there. I draw a comparison between the emptiness of the space versus the vividness of my memories that I project into the space. I relate this comparison to the idea of presence and absence.





Figure 1. Lara Landsberg, 2021. Grandparents' Home. Digital photograph.

I retrieved a wooden board from my Ouma's pottery studio, which is situated in the garage of my grandparents' home, that has rough outlines of her ceramic sculpting tools drawn onto it. My Ouma drew these outlines and hammered nails into the board at the top of each outlined shape. She would then hang her tools on the nails, matched to their drawn outline. I use this board as a part of my display when I formally exhibit my jewellery pieces. I hang only a few of the jewellery pieces that I have made from her pottery tools on the nails, attempting not to cover any of the outlines with my jewellery pieces. The placement of singular jewellery pieces alongside the unembodied tool outlines

communicates traces of what used to be there. This notion engages the idea of the unseen and seen, the absent and the present, imagination and reality. The singular jewellery piece that is placed on the wooden board acts as a fragment of memory amongst the mass of missing and lost fragments, which are represented by the unembodied tool outlines.



Figure 2. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Wooden Board with Tool Outlines. Digital photograph.

I extend my exploration into the idea of presence and absence, by means of how I display my other jewellery pieces when formally exhibiting them. I also retrieved ornate wooden boxes from my grandparents' home, and I display singular jewellery pieces inside each box to emphasise the empty space that surrounds the jewellery piece (see Figures 42 and 43). This empty space communicates the absence of something that was once there. Some boxes were for storing bespoke cutlery, which I removed and replaced with my jewellery pieces. Therefore, in each box, the jewellery piece does not slot into place because the box was not originally made to store it. In this regard, by placing my jewellery in this empty cavity, I play on the idea of absent memory and the reconstruction of memory. The missing cutlery communicates the absence of what was once there (memory) and the

(mis)placement of my jewellery pieces in the box communicates how fragments of memory are forced together to create an illusionary narrative (the reconstruction of memory)<sup>29</sup>.



Figure 3. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Wooden Ornate Box. Digital photograph.

Through the display of the rest of my jewellery pieces, I play with the idea of vividness and distortion. I handmade plinths which I lay singular pieces of jewellery upon (see Figures 38, 39 and 40). These plinths incorporate a wooden circular board that is traditionally used at a potter's wheel. These boards are individually selected from my Ouma's pottery studio. For many years, my Ouma used to teach pottery classes to various age groups. This resulted in the boards to be worked to their full potential, which created significant texture on their surface. For this reason, and the fact that the boards are also objects from my grandparents' home, I choose to display the delicacy of my jewellery pieces against the rawness and roughness of the boards.

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<sup>29</sup> Please refer to Chapter Two for an elaborated discussion about these ideas.





Figure 4. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Ouma's Pottery Studio. Digital photograph.



Figure 5. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Wooden circular boards for pottery wheel. Digital photograph.

This play between absence and presence, vividness and distortion lead me to draw a comparison between the space of my grandparents' home and my grandparents. I deduce the emptiness of the space of their home as being equivalent to my Oupa no longer being alive or residing inside that space, as well as being equivalent to the complete deterioration and loss of my Ouma's memory. Moreover, I compare the vividness of my memories that I currently project into the space, with the relationship I had with my Oupa and the relationship I have with my Ouma.

Since my Oupa's passing, my present recollections of the relationship I shared with him are fully dependant on and shaped by my memories shared with him. However, as time progresses, I notice a significant fading of the vividness of these recollections, emphasising the ambiguity of memory. The lack of vividness results in a lack of dependency on my memories to embody and shape the relationship I shared with my Oupa. This results in a shift of my dependency. I depend on the present, in terms of how I currently interpret the space of their home and the objects from inside their home. Therefore, I now rather depend on these interpretations and the present moment to shape my memories of the relationship I shared with him instead of depending on my memories to shape my present recollections.

I draw a contrasting comparison between the vividness of the memories I have with my Ouma and her deteriorating memory. When I interact with my Ouma in the present, I somewhat fill the gaps within her lost memory by inserting elements of clarity extracted from the memories I have of our relationship. By doing so, I am interlinking the past and the present to maintain the existence of the relationship I shared with my Ouma before her diagnosis. I am using the past (my memories of our relationship) to shape the contents of the present (my current interactions with her), which emphasises the continuously interlinking relationship between the past and the present.

This idea of past-present similarities can extend to suggest that "our memories are highly selective and that the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the present and the person remembering, than about actual past events" (Neumann 2008:333). In this regard, Freeman draws on the word 'recollection', segmenting it into parts of differential understanding; in doing so, he indicates that:

While the *re* refers to the past, *collection* refers to a present act of gathering what might have been dispersed or lost. Framed another way, the word *recollection* holds within it, reference to the two distinct ways we often speak about history: as the trail of past presents that have culminated in the now, or as the act of writing; the act of gathering them together, selectively, and imaginatively, into a following story (1993:47).

I relate the act of ‘gathering’ what might have been lost to the ‘gathering’ and insertion of my memories into the present interactions that I have with my Ouma, to make up for her lost memories, as previously discussed. By doing so, I create a present narrative that serves as a referent to, and reminder of the memories that we shared. Moreover, I relate Freeman’s notion of ‘history’ being a culmination of ‘past presents’ to the act of engaging with my Ouma. Her loss and deterioration of memory results in her repeating herself. She is unaware that she says and asks the same thing continuously, which makes the act of engaging with her feel like a repetition of ‘past presents’ constantly reoccurring.

The interlinking relationship between the past and the present and their respective relationship with memory suggests that memories cannot be understood as discrete or separate things to our continuous lives. They are conscious and active from the past to the present, interlaced as a language that describes our personal narrative (Freeman 1993:89). In this regard, Bal distinguishes between two types of memory: habitual and narrative memory. Habitual memories are the memories used as reference for human behaviour and are defined as those “learnt in childhood, enforced by discipline, and carried along later in life” (1999:viii). Contrastingly, narrative memories are “affective in nature and embedded in emotion, which is what makes them memorable” (Groenewald 2015:24). Habitual memories transform into narrative memories when an emotional response to the continuous, everyday nature of habitual routine occurs. As such, a narrative memory arises when the memory of the habitual routine is associated with an emotional meaning. Therefore, this once mundane memory now gains significance, which informs how we think about the past and in turn, how we act and behave in the present.

I apply these types of memory to the memories shared with my grandparents, the experiences I had in their home and my interactions with their objects. During my childhood, interacting with my grandparents and building experiences within their home, was like second nature. Those habitual memories transformed into narrative memories as I grew older. When I reflect on those moments now, it makes me realise the integral role my grandparents had on my upbringing and how those memories shared with them inform the narrative of my life.

The objects from their home communicate a binary relationship of longing and gratitude. Presently interacting with these objects intensifies my gratitude for their existence and their role in my life, yet it also elicits an urge of longing within me. I long to share more moments with my Oupa. I long for my Ouma to have a life where she does not have to endure being alone; alone without the companionship of my Oupa and alone in the sense of losing her memories shared with my Oupa. For this reason, the space of their home, the objects from inside their home and the interactions that I have with my Ouma, become completely embedded in emotion. This transforms my present interactions

with my Ouma, the engagements in the space of my grandparents' home and interactions with their objects; into highly emotive, memorable experiences.

Currently, I realise that during my childhood the interactions shared with my grandparents, the experiences I had in their home and the interactions with their objects, may not have had such an emotional and memorable impact on me in their initial moments of occurrence. However, these past interactions currently impact me and gain immense significance and emotional depth because they no longer exist. The progression of time from my childhood years to present day meant that there was a lessening of time spent inside the space of my grandparents' home and interacting with their objects. This progression of time also led to the passing of my Oupa and the development of my Ouma's diagnosis. As such, I nostalgically reminisce upon the time I had in their home and with them. It is as though I naively never expected those cherished times to end. Regardless of me growing up and establishing my own life journey, it seems that I expected my return to their home to be the return to exactly how everything once was. In this regard, the objects from their home are all that are tangibly left to me as representations of these past interactions with both of my grandparents, within the space of their home. Therefore, these objects automatically become emotionally embedded and memorable because they reference my grandparents, the space of their home, the experiences I had inside their home and the memories thereof.

Memory, given its recollective dimension, is prone to change and movement, and thus it is never a static phenomenon. The reshaping of the past, when it enters memory, emphasises the interlinking relationship between the past and the present. This mutually informative relationship influences how the past and the present is interpreted. In this regard, the following section will elaborate on the hermeneutics of memory as an investigation into the influence of these interpretations upon everyday experience.

### 1.3 The Hermeneutics of Memory

Hermeneutics allows for an efficient interpretation of everyday experience. Interpretation is how one makes sense of and grasps an understanding of what constitutes everyday experience (Mantzavinos 2016:120). It aids in the understanding of memory's impressionable nature and, therefore, provides an understanding of those interpreted impressions. Thus, it creates an accessible way to break down and make sense of the complexities of memory, allowing for an understanding of its inner workings. (Leichter 2011:218). I propose that to make sense of *how* and *why* we interpret certain things and *what* things we place significance on, allows for control over *who* we are. As such, I believe that to reflect upon memories and thereafter, interpret the meanings attached to them, allows for self-understanding.



Ricoeur's research into hermeneutics revealed an understanding of the actual *act* of interpretation being a means of making sense of everyday human life. Ricoeur identified that since human reality is continuously influenced by time and history; discourses created, and the meanings thereof, are also continuously changing, when it outlives the speakers and situations in which it was originally produced. (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016 [Online]). Ricoeur believes that through "critical reflection and an appeal to the imagination", the human being can discover their need for interpretation toward understanding what precedes them as formative of their current reality and possibly their future disposition (2004:24).

Similarly, Hodgkin and Radstone state that the way in which one remembers is in "relation to the history of [one's own] subjectivity" (2003:6). This prompts me to question whether all happenings preceding the memory thereof, are formative of my current reality and thus, whether my previous interpretations and experiences have shaped my current understanding of my past. As such, I question to what extent my present reality is influenced by past experiences and vice versa. Thus, questioning to what extent my memories are influenced by my own interpretations and idealisations. However, I suggest that my fluctuating interpretations are equivalent to the unpredictable nature of memory.

I view the accumulation of lived experiences, physical objects, and memories that I have, as a reflection of my own identity. These elements gain a narrative through the emphasis that I give them and the meaning that I attach to them. By emphasising them, they gain significance and association. These tangible and intangible elements tell a story on my behalf, as they create a depiction of my identity. However, my identity in the form of lived experiences, objects and memories, is subject to a multiplicity of interpretations by others because every individual develops their own associations according to their own identities, and the narratives that they formulate accordingly. This illustrates the practice of hermeneutics as everyone makes sense of the world in their own way, in relation to their level of understanding of their own identity and narrative thus far.

Within my creative practice, I use objects from my grandparents' home that symbolise and refer to my experiences inside their home and memories shared with my grandparents. My current interaction with these objects elicits a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity within me, which creates an interesting tension. Some of the objects I have seen and interacted with before (which provides a personal and familiar connection with them), whereas other objects are unfamiliar to me. This tension between the familiar and unfamiliar resonates with how I feel when I currently engage with the space of my grandparents' home and the interactions that I have with my Ouma. I remember the space for what it was, a familiar setting where I spent most of my childhood, however, currently, its emptiness and sombreness renders it unfamiliar to me. Similarly, interactions and conversations with my Ouma are at the same degree of familiarity and unfamiliarity. Her appearance is familiar to me, yet her

missing memory sometimes renders her to be an unfamiliar being within the body of my Ouma. I demonstrate this tension within my jewellery practice by distorting the familiar objects to become unfamiliar.

In this piece, as seen in Figure 6, and in other pieces, I incorporate my Ouma's wooden clay sculpting tools to acknowledge and interpret the objects that symbolise my Ouma. My Ouma was an extremely talented potter, however, since her diagnosis of dementia, she cannot fully remember how to make pottery and the impact of my Oupa's passing resulted in her abandonment of the craft. I view these tools, the many ceramic pots, bowls, and sculptures created by my Ouma, as vessels of remembrance of her identity and memory. As such, they act as mementos which acknowledge her existence prior to her diagnosis. They simultaneously memorialise her identity due to the current deterioration and loss of her memory. Her abandonment of her art practice, and her deteriorating memory emphasises the nostalgic preciousness of these objects. By using her clay sculpting tools in their actual form, I create jewellery that incorporates a very literal aspect of my Ouma, and I allow their bold shapes to create emphasis within the jewellery piece. I do not physically change or distort the existing shape of the tools, however their transformation into wearable jewellery pieces inevitably fragments them. I add other materials onto these tools which I equate with the process of reconstructing existing memories and therefore the construction of new memory.

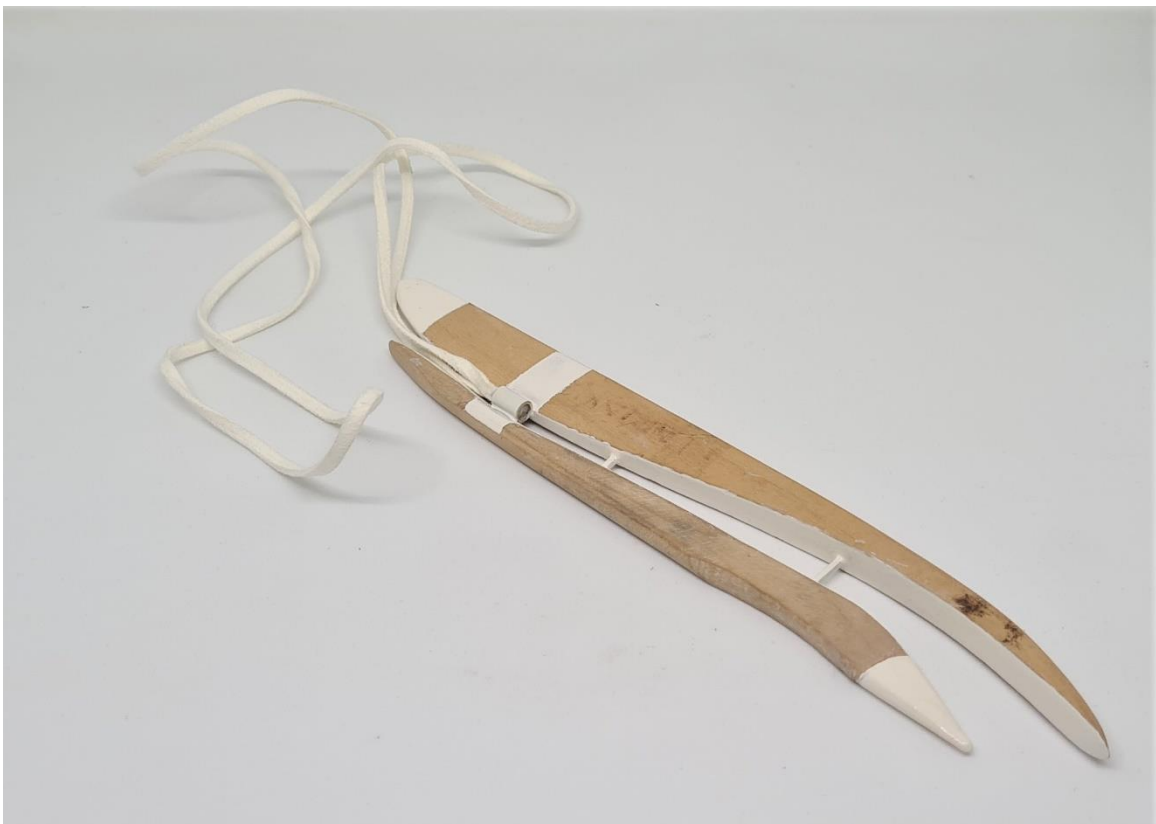


Figure 6. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Pendant. Sterling silver, enamel paint, found wooden clay sculpting tools, felt thread. Digital photograph.

Figure 7, *A Deep Dive* refers to my Oupa and his experiences as a deep-sea diver. Ironically, his passion for diving was later to his own detriment. An accumulation of nitrogen air bubbles got trapped in his circulatory system, resulting in a slow deterioration of his organ health which eventually led to his passing. These pieces reference the memories I have of my Oupa sharing his diving stories with me while simultaneously commemorating his legacy. These pieces demonstrate a ‘push and pull’ between sadness and nostalgia, referencing the reality of the situation (my Oupa’s passing) versus the idealised version of how I interpret the memories shared with him. I try to somewhat extend his existence by placing significance on this idealised version of my memory. For these pieces, I was inspired by his antique diving equipment and his handwritten letters to me which reflect my interpretation of the objects that symbolise my Oupa.



Figure 7. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooches. *A Deep Dive*. Sterling silver, embroidery thread, enamel, copper, found wooden clay sculpting tools, Perspex. Digital photograph.

I relate the Platonic<sup>30</sup> *eikōn*, which refers to the object-orientated side of memory and symbolises the present representation of an absent ‘thing’ with the objects from my grandparents’ home. I have embellished these objects with sentimentality, transforming them into mnemonic objects. I classify my present interaction with these objects, and the meaning taken from that interaction, as the objects’ *present* representation. This suggests that the initial experience with the object and original meaning attached to it has become distorted and replaced with the present subjective meaning.

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<sup>30</sup> Plato’s earlier works (*Theaetetus* 369 BCE) proposed that knowledge is simply nothing other than perception. Like our interpretations developing and being subject to change, so are our perceptions. Each are continuously developing and being influentially altered by present reality. (Ricoeur 2004:15).

The Aristotelian<sup>31</sup> idea of memory contrasts the Platonic *eikōn*, as it suggests memory to be the representation of a thing formerly perceived, acquired or learned. This perspective is highly relevant to the discussion on hermeneutics thus far. I apply this notion toward understanding my present experiences by using my perceptions and learnings developed through past experiences, to do so. However, I do suggest that using these past subjectivities to make sense of, and interpret, present experience opens a platform for imaginative influence. This may also create expectations of *what* to feel and *how* to feel about these present experiences. The Aristotelian perspective prompts me to question what the *thing* is that is being remembered. When I apply this perspective to my personal recollections, I am challenged. When an emotion or affection is prompted by a remembrance, I am not sure as to whether I am remembering the experience itself, the original affection associated with the experience *or* the last time I actively remembered the experience<sup>32</sup>. This prompts me to question *how* memories come about; whether it be through *affection* or through the *actual physical form* that produced the affection.

One may be challenged when the affection prompted by an object is experienced without the presence of the object itself. In this regard, association makes it possible for one to distort or adapt their perception of the object in question. This suggests that it is possible for an unrelated object to elicit the same effect as the object that it is associated with. I relate this to the act of smelling my Oupa's clothes. Although these items have been washed, his unique scent is still captured within and is heightened by their storage. Regardless of them currently being folded up items of clothing, the act of smelling them prompts a childhood memory of me laying my head on his chest while we used to watch television. The combination of his calm breathing and his familiar scent would comfort me and lead me to fall asleep. Smell is the association I use to connect the current perception of the physical form (his clothing) with my affectively charged memory (the comforting act of falling asleep safely on his chest). In this instance, his clothes are the physical form which resemble the physical form of his being.

In this regard, the Platonic and Aristotelian perspectives lay the philosophical grounding for memory studies. The *history* of the study of ancient philosophy enables contemporary perspectives and

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<sup>31</sup> The Aristotelian perspective believes that memory is directly characterised as affection (*pathos*). The affective side of memory is defined as the simple presence or affection of memories to the mind. This secures its character as an image or representation of something absent. (Leichter 2011:214). Aristotle believed memory to be of the past, by noting a contrast between the current development of affection (or perception) presently felt and experienced, and the imposing of previously developed conjectures (Ricoeur 2004:15). The affective dimension of memory gives rise to hermeneutic concerns: to establish that something happened, we need to interpret the source/experience which causes us to be affected by the past (Leichter 2011:217).

<sup>32</sup> This relates to Ricoeur's discussion about the *thing* remembered during recollected, found in section 0.6.3.



modern scholarships to be put into context. I find it necessary to consult these ancient philosopher's theories on memory studies as their theories formed the foundations for further development in the field. This prompts contemporary scholars like me, to adequately contextualise our current perspectives so that we can achieve a wholistic and profound argument of our current philosophical ideas. (Daniels 2021 [Online]).

It is evident that both the past and the present has bearing on the hermeneutics of memory. There exists a relationship between the past and the present with regards to recollection that is informed by present interpretations and perceptions. However, when we experience in the present, the past subjectivities are used to make sense of present experiences. Regardless of which way the relationship between the past and the present is viewed, each respectively and interlinkingly influence the interpretation of both the present and the past.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

The problem of understanding memory seems to hinge on the conjunction between (external) stimulation and (internal) resemblance (Ricoeur 2004:17). This chapter discussed how external stimulation can register as internal resemblance. By initially discussing the generalities of memory, this chapter provided an essential understanding of memory which informs the overall objective of this study. This discussion formulated the grounding for investigating the hermeneutics of memory which not only extends the understanding of memory but also informs my jewellery praxis with regards to how I interpret memory as informed by my interactions with the objects from my grandparents' home.

These objects elicit interpretative responses within me, however, their transformation into contemporary jewellery pieces initiates a larger conversation, within the public sphere (the social aspect of memory), subjecting them to further interpretative responses. These responses would be reflective of the public's associations with, and interpretations of the objects, which may also prompt their memories. Therefore, this chapter theoretically informs my personal understanding of memory and hermeneutics, whereas my jewellery praxis practically externalises the personal and places it within the public sphere. This placement informs the overall objective of this study, as I prompt interpretation within the wider public.

The fluctuating nature of interpretation, however, makes it an unstable source of understanding memory. As such, proving the instability of memory itself. I believe that neither memory, nor the interpretation thereof, can be accounted for as validation of past experiences. The following chapter investigates and discusses the comprising elements that contribute to the instability of memory, which renders it an open-ended platform subject to influence and manipulation.

## Chapter Two:

### Memory: A Construct

#### 2.1 Introduction

The past is re-worked, re-told, remembered, forgotten, mis-remembered, and subject to revision through the very fact of memory. Memories are motile, and they relate to their causation in distorted and contorted ways, and they themselves change over time (Leslie 2003:183).

Memory's impressionable nature renders it as a platform that can easily be influenced and manipulated by external factors, in turn, subjecting memory to be attributed with a variety of open-ended meanings. As investigated in Chapter One, the very act of recollection is informed by present subjectivities. As such, memory is in a constant state of flux; reconstructed, revised and in alignment with the present moment in which it is activated.

This chapter investigates the elements that contribute to the unstable and inconsistent nature of memory, which add to the complexity of memory, as investigated throughout this study. In this regard, this chapter discusses the fragmentation of memory, imagined and forgotten elements of memory and the possibility of fictionalised memory.

These elements inform my jewellery praxis and are portrayed through my contemporary jewellery pieces. The transformation of the objects from my grandparents' home into jewellery pieces, fragments their original context, association, and function. This fragmentation activates the imagination to align the objects with their current context and function. Therefore, developing new interpretations of, and associations with those objects<sup>33</sup>. The original context, associations and functions are forgotten. This subjects the objects and the memories attributed to them, to reconstruction and, in turn, possible fictionalisation.

#### 2.2 Fragmented Memory

Chapter One discussed the term 'recollection' when referring to the activation of memory in the present moment. However, with reference to the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, the prefix

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<sup>33</sup> There lies a correlation between the influential ability of the imagination upon memory and the fluctuating nature of interpretation. I believe that the fluctuation of interpretation is because of the interjection of imagined attributes. This suggests that the hermeneutics of memory is tightly knit with the workings of the imagination. Thus, implying that memory is constantly reconstructed and reinterpreted, leading to the possibility of the entirety of memory being based off imagined attributes.

're' opens memory up to a multiplicity of associations. For example: re-present, re-peat, re-evaluate, re-interpret, re-member, re-flect, re-cycle. The prefix 're' not only signifies the past but also the movement from the past to the present. However, as the present equally informs the past, a simultaneous movement from the present to the past is created. Annette Kuhn acknowledges this movement by explaining that memory involves "working backwards – searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions [and] patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence" (cited in Jacobs 2007:52).

The *re-introduction* of the past in the present prompts the *re-construction* of the past within the present. This re-introduction does not necessarily identically duplicate the past, but rather prompts an evaluation and interpretation of the past. It also leads to developmental changes that are reconstructed for it to be adequately introduced into the present. As such, memory does not represent the past, but rather reconstructs reality. In this regard, Maurice Halbwachs, suggests that "remembering is based on small, scattered and indistinct bits of the past", rendering it "an activity of reconstruction in the present, rather than the resurrection of the past" (cited in Whitehead 2009:126).

Ricoeur states that "[t]he first feature [that characterises] the domain of memories are their multiplicity and their various degrees of distinctness", which points to the plurality of memory and adds to its fragmentary nature (2004:22). As such, I propose that the past is instantly shattered as soon as it is established as being *the past*. This suggests that memory is broken down into separate, "smaller elements that are short enough to be recalled and then arranged into a rigid and logical order" (Whitehead 2009:41). As such, the recollection in the present moment shifts and displaces the selectively remembered fragments of the past into a new order. In this regard, the recollected fragments of the past are "reassembled arbitrarily to create [a] new meaning" of the present moment (Groenewald 2015:32). As such, the present is ascribed a meaning in alignment with how the fragments of the past are ordered or reassembled. However, this suggests that the fragments of the past can only be understood in alignment with present subjectivities. Sociology Professor, Jeffery Olick suggests that "the past is remade in the present for present purposes" (1999:340). This implies that memory is altered, adapted, and manipulated for the purpose of serving the needs and interests of the present. As such, memory is no longer a "recovery or repetition of physical traces, but a construction of the past under conditions determined by the present" (Whitehead 2009:49). Similarly, German Philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche explains that "[one] can explain the past only by what is most powerful in the present" (cited in Hutcheon 1988:99).

The progression of time between the past event and the present memory of that past event, inevitably influences the stability of its remembrance. The lapse between the past and the present suggests that "time carries us away from all of our earlier states of being [and] memory recalls those earlier states"

(Olney 1998:241). Consequently, the reconstruction of our past experiences and ‘earlier states of being’, through how they are presently recollected, suggests a lack of consistency. However, it is precisely the inconsistency of memory which “allows for renewal and redemption” (Sturken cited in Klein 2000:138). This emphasises the idea of memory being modified when reconstructed and reinterpreted within the present.

I practically demonstrate this process of reconstruction by working with embroidery thread, as a consistent medium within my jewellery praxis. The embroidery thread has been passed down the generations on my Ouma’s side, therefore the personal connection to it emphasises the sentimental quality of my jewellery pieces. The use of embroidery thread allows me to connect various embellished materials, that are representative of my memories, to one another. This creates a visual narrative of my accumulated memories. As such, through the process of embroidering these materials to one another, it is as though I am mending the fragments of my memories and stitching together a newly formed memory. The interactive motion of weaving the thread into, through and out of the materials represents and mimics the process of accessing my memories. However, the stitching path that it follows through the holes that I drill through the materials, disrupts the original object. This metaphorically represents how my memory distorts and is disrupted by the demands of the present and my present subjectivities.

Another aspect of my creative process entails me to physically break some of the porcelain objects from my grandparents’ home. I equate this act of shattering and breaking the porcelain to the reconstruction, reshaping and reassembling of the fragments of the past, within the present. The physical shards of porcelain inconsistently placed together in the jewellery pieces, represents the arbitrary placement of the fragments of the past together, to create meaning within the present. I relate the material qualities of porcelain: a duality of sturdiness and breakability, to my Ouma’s diagnosis of dementia. The sturdiness of the porcelain represents her ability to remember, but the potential breakability of the porcelain represents the fragility of her memory. This emphasises the battle she endures through the memories that she has left being distorted and fragmented.

I suggest that the act of gathering and piecing together the fragments of the past for the purpose of the present is to create our own unique language. In turn, this allows us to make sense of our own unique narrative. Freeman suggests that “remembering is implicitly seen as a kind of writing, which rather than being a representation of the past, *refigures* it in and through consciousness” (1993:88). This suggests that memory is considered memory by its refiguration and structural nature, which creates a seemingly coherent narrative of past events.

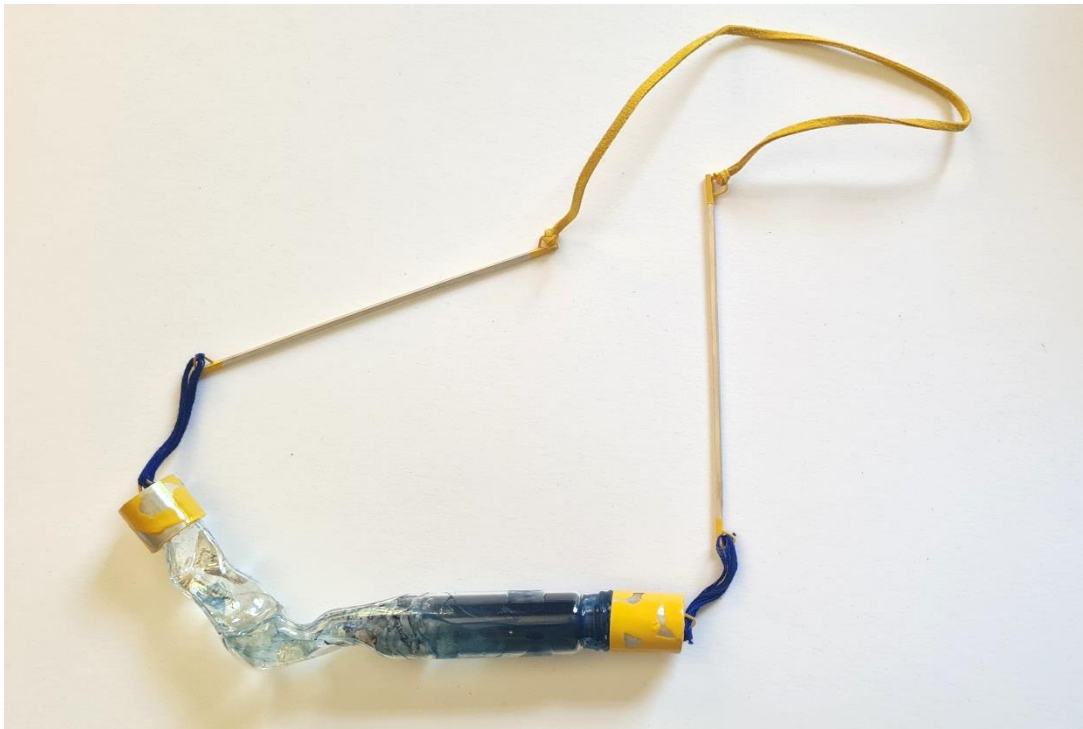


Figure 8. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Neckpiece. Glass, crushed found porcelain beads, embroidery thread, sterling silver, enamel paint, felt thread. Digital photograph.



Figure 9. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooch. Perspex, embroidery thread, sterling silver, enamel paint. Digital photograph.

Giovanni Vico, a Professor of Rhetoric, expresses an explanation of this refiguration of memory as follows:

The past is reshaped as it enters memory; it is subject to continual reshaping while it is held in memory, and it is reshaped as it is recalled from memory. It is then instantaneously reformulated as words in the form of a full narrative (cited in Olney 1998:92).



Figure 10. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Earrings. Perspex, embroidery thread, copper, enamel, found porcelain shards, enamel paint. Digital photograph.

To view the entirety of memory as a narrative regards it as a “form of storytelling that goes on continually in the mind and often changes and made anew with the telling” (Eakin 1985:6). By extension, there could be a coupling of narrative and identity construction: the narrative as a reflection of and source of information for identity, however identity is also continually changing and made anew with how it is perceived in memory. I suggest that memory is inseparable from narrative, and that memory makes use of narrative to exist and to be understood, not only in physical or audible form, but also inside of the mind.





Figure 11. Lara Landsberg. Brooch. Perspex, copper, enamel, found porcelain bead shards, sterling silver, enamel paint. Digital photograph.

In this regard, Cameroonian Philosopher, Achille Mbembe states that a “montage of fragments thus creates the illusion of totality and continuity” and through the process of assembling fragments of the past in order, there is an attempt to formulate a story comprised of coherent links between the past and the present (2002:21). However, the imposing unity and continuity upon fragmented, scattered memories of the past, turns the entirety of memory into a fictionalisation. This suggests that the fragments of past are pieced together within the present, under the illusion of constructing a coherent, stable memory and identity (Groenewald 2015:32). As such, humans reconstruct their experiences and memories to fit accordingly within their constructed narrative. When applying this same notion to my Ouma’s memories, I acknowledge that her diagnosis of dementia infiltrates her memory, narrative and identity. Due to majority of her memory being deteriorated and most of her memories being forgotten and lost, there is a constant reconstruction of the memories she has left. This renders her narrative and identity as formative of her memories, to be particularly fragmented. Therefore, the more her memory deteriorates, the faster she loses access to her full subjectivities.

I have become increasingly aware of this reconstructed and illusionary coherent narrative, when listening to my Ouma’s stories of her experiences. The multiplicity of memories associated with single experiences emphasises the reconstruction of her memories to fit within her narrative. As such, the fluctuation between the vividness and distortedness of her memories formulates a severely broken

and gapped narrative. Every December holiday, my Ouma will remove objects, photo albums and personal memorabilia from my Oupa's old study inside our family holiday home.



Figure 12. Lara Landsberg. 2020. Oupa's study in Landsberg Holiday Home. Digital photograph.

She will spend most of the day paging through the photo albums and reading the notes that she made on the back of each photograph. This helps her to jog her memory of the date, the people in the photographs, and the occasion captured<sup>34</sup>. She delicately embraces the selected objects, as though it was her first time interacting with them. Then, she will tell me the story behind their obtainment and what they respectively meant to her and my Oupa.

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<sup>34</sup> When I consider her neurological disorder, I find this to be very interesting. It is as though she knew, when writing on the back of these photographs, that she may forget the significance of the moment that is captured when she looks at them in the future.





Figure 13. Lara Landsberg. 2020. Ouma looking at photo albums. Digital photograph.

Due to my interest in the fluctuation of memory and its instability, I will sometimes ask her about the same object, a few days later. She responds to my query with altered meanings of, and associations with, the object. This proves to me that memory and its narrative are continuously constructed within the present, rendering each an unstable and inconsistent platform.

This section demonstrated that the fluctuating, inconsistent nature of memory coupled with the fragmented act of recollection proves the instability of memory. Moreover, our memory narratives are informed by partial information from the present and the past, pieced together to create a coherent, specific, and chronologically ordered timeline from past to present. Regardless of the supposed structure suggested by the narrative of memory, the degree to which the present reconstructs the past makes the unstable nature of memory increasingly evident (le Roux 2013:35). However, I suggest that our memory is constructed into an illusionary continuity to counter the discomfort of not knowing the past that formulates our narrative and identity. In this regard, memories are better described as constant reconstructions of the past that are subconsciously informed by present subjectivities: both individual and cultural<sup>35</sup> (Groenewald 2015:33). These subjectivities not only inform memory, but also how the personal is placed within the public and cultural realm.

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<sup>35</sup> Please refer to section 3.2 for an elaborated discussion about the influence of cultural subjectivities upon memory.



Figure 14. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Ouma's detailed descriptions on the back of photographs. Digital photograph.

The unstable, fragmented nature of memory increases its vulnerability, subjecting it to manipulation through the imagination. The inconsistency of memory allows for the gaps between its partiality to be fulfilled with imagined content. The following section will elaborate on the relationship between the imagination and memory and how it contributes to the instability and inconsistency of memory.

### 2.3 Imagined Memory

Memory and imagination share a relationship by virtue of a common quality: absence. Memory *returns* us to the absence of that which has been, while the imagination *takes* us into the absent realm of the possible. Memory and imagination are equally influenced by this enigma, for it implies the introduction of something that is no longer there into the present, through the unreliable platforms of memory and imagination themselves. The returning to what has been, extends memory further than the imagination, as it is intimately tied to our bodies, specific places, and specific rituals. Whereas the imagination does not have any referential basis from which it can gain substance. As such, this suggests that memory is not equivalent to imagination, because while both represent an absence, only memory refers to the past. (Leichter 2011:223).

The problematic relationship between imagination and memory, lies within the elements of distortion, exaggeration, and falsification that the imagination may inflict upon memory. Memory and imagination work together toward the creation of a credible representation of the past. This representation allows us to perceive what is not there, making the absent present. However, this representation is merely the reconstruction of the past, using memory to fulfil the absence of what

once was, and using the imagination to fulfil the possibility of what is not there. (Keightley & Pickering 2012:5).

I find it necessary to acknowledge the relationship between memory and the imagination, due to the aspect of this study that is concerned with the instability of memory. I regard the imagination as an aspect of the individual subjectivities that inform the reconstructions of memory within the present, which makes the past somewhat coherently accessible. As such, this section discusses the extent to which the imagination distorts memories, while simultaneously filling in the gaps between the fragments of memories. Therefore, creating fictionalised memories, in compensation of those that are forgotten. Consequently, I investigate how the imagination contributes to the unstable and inconsistent nature of memory.

The discussion thus far, has made it evident that memory is comprised of fragmented pieces of the past that are re-introduced into, and reconstructed for the purpose of understanding the present. Therefore, it is necessary to consider memory as mobile and transformative and not merely repetitive. However, only through the productive tension that arises between memory and imagination, can memory's qualities of mobility and transformation be recognised. This productive tension prompts the imagination to reactivate memory and prompts memory to stimulate the imagination. As such, these interactions have a cross-temporal resonance. Memory is then necessary to think about the future and the imagination is necessary to think about the past. This cross-temporal resonance aids our understanding of the relationship between the past, present, and future. It allows us to comprehend the past and the future, to enable action within the present. The imagination reconstructs memory in such a way that the past and the present begins to merge. Each seem to have a systematic and coherent continuity with one another, while simultaneously informing one another. (Keightley & Pickering 2012:7).

In this regard, Keightley and Pickering describe this cross-temporal relationship between the past, present, and future as the mnemonic imagination. They state that:

It is through the mnemonic imagination that our engagements with the past move through a series of interactive dualities: the constitution of selfhood and the commission of social action; the interplay between experience and expectation, memory and possibility and the relations between lived first-hand experience and mediated or inherited second-hand experience. The mnemonic imagination is central to the way the past attains or regains significance for the present and future and makes remembering a creative process (2012:7,8,13).

In relation, History and Judaic Studies Professor, Alon Confino, suggests that the study of memory entails “an exploration of how people imagine the past, not how it actually happened” (2008:80). This emphasises that memory is not only a fragmented reconstruction of the past within the present, but an imagined one too. As such, what we perceive to remember is a manipulated and partial version of the past that is represented in the form of a new memory. This suggests that the fragments of memory are constructed into a wholistic, unbroken narrative by use of imagination (le Roux 2013:36). The imagination fills the gaps of missing information within memory and weaves the scattered fragments together to create a coherent narrative. However, the construction of new memory through the imagination suggests a fictionalisation of events, and therefore a fictionalised narrative (le Roux 2013:36). Although what we imagine may not be established from a verifiable and referential basis, our narratives are constructed through how we imagine our available memories fitting together in retrospect. As such, our memories are not deemed imaginary, but they are acted upon imaginatively. (Keightley & Pickering 2012:5). Thus, emphasising that the imagination is an equally as unstable platform as memory.

According to research conducted within the field of neuroscience, there is “experimental evidence that memory and imagination may share neural circuitry” (Dudai cited in Miller 2007:312). This suggests that the same neurological system used to remember the past, is used to construct possible futures. In this regard, individuals who suffer from neurological disorders, such as dementia, may struggle to envision their future equally as much as they struggle to remember their past.

The nature of memory is neurologically dependant on the functioning of the hippocampus<sup>36</sup>. The hippocampus combines fragments of remembered scenes to create coherent memories and vivid constructions of the past or possible futures. In this regard, Cognitive Neuroscientist, Eleanor Maguire, explains that, when people with neurological disorders are asked to imagine and describe ordinary experiences, they see only fragmented collections of images rather than coherent scenes within the mind’s eye (cited in Miller 2007:312).

The relationship between memory and imagination, and the imagination’s distortive influence upon memory becomes evident when expressed and externalised into a physical form. Within my jewellery

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<sup>36</sup> The hippocampus is a major component within the human brain which consolidates information from short-term memory to long-term memory. Its main function is to encode new memories, creating an initial memory trace that is eventually filed away to the cortex for long-term storage (Miller 2007:312). Memory, however, is believed to be non-site-specific, suggesting that it cannot be limited to the area of the brain in which it functions. Neural networks channel bits and pieces called ‘engrams’ to different places in the brain and store them there in different ways. The process of remembering, therefore, does not involve the ‘reappearance’ or ‘reproduction’ of an experience in its original form, but [rather] the cobbling together of a ‘new’ memory. (Olick 1999:340).

praxis I stimulate my imagination, which simultaneously reactivates my memory. The transformation of my grandparents' objects into jewellery pieces, illustrates the role of the imagination in the construction of new memories. My re-interaction with these objects and the reinterpretation of the memories associated with them, prompts me to realise how the imagination can alter memory to create the illusion of a coherent and whole memory. However, it is a construction of a new memory. I apply this notion of construction to the influence of my imagination within my creative process and upon the contemporary jewellery pieces and objects that I create.

I transform mango skins into wearable items to represent one of my fondest childhood memories. Most of the summer months during my childhood would consist of spending an enjoyable afternoon with my Ouma while my brother and I ate mangos in the swimming pool. My Ouma would prompt us to eat the fruit down to the seed, leaving just the fibrous capsule behind. Thereafter, she would state that we need to 'brush the mango's hair and draw a little face and smile on it'. Whenever I am eating a mango now, I notice myself brushing my fingers over a mango's fibrous seed in a nostalgic sense of happiness. As such, some of my jewellery pieces incorporate mango skins, as a representation of my childhood memories shared with my Ouma.



Figure 15. Lara Landsberg. 2020. Earrings. *Bittersweet Slices*. Mango skins, sterling silver, resin. Digital photograph.

Figures 15 and 16 refer to a series namely, *Bittersweet Slices* where I explored and distorted the quality of mango skin. I have set mango skin in resin, as a means of preserving the natural colouring, but also as a means of preserving and solidifying the fond remembrance I have associated with mangoes. This remembrance communicates a sombre kind of happiness, elicited from the association that I have with the mangoes. This suggests a longing for those sweet fond moments, but this simultaneously elicits a bitter sense of loss. I combine a variety of different materials with the mango skin to represent the linkage of the fragments (slices) of the past (and the scattered, distorted



information thereof) within the imagination, which constructs a new memory. The linkage of the fragments within the imagination and its construction of a new memory elicits a sense of potential, to recover from the bitter sense of loss. This emphasises the role and process of the imagination that is central to creating, what I perceive as a vivid, coherent memory. Moreover, these pieces communicate of fracturing and re-joining. The sterling silver joins act like embellishments which embrace and highlight the fractured and imagined aspects of memory. Instead of suggesting that consistency is an ideal, these pieces embrace the inconsistencies, which suggests that the exposure of such fractures can also reveal alternative narratives.



Figure 16. Lara Landsberg. 2020. Pendant. *Bittersweet Slices*. Mango skins, sterling silver, resin. Digital photograph.

Figure 17, *Mango & Memory: Deterioration* is a contemporary object that is representative of the deterioration of memory, which relates to my Ouma's diagnosis of dementia. I embroidered fresh and old mango skins onto a piece of heirloom lace and allowed a natural oxidisation process to occur upon the fresher skins. I selectively placed the greener, fresher skins to merge into the older, oxidised yellow skins, which visually represents the deterioration of memory. The mango skins represent the fragments of my Ouma's memories. The rough embroidering symbolises memory's attempt at fitting together the fragments of memory, as close together and systematically as possible. However, my Ouma's memories, in the form of the mango skins, do not have a snug fit next to one another because of the deterioration of her memory. This lack of fitting the fragments together creates gaps between

the mango skins (her memories). These gaps become larger and vaster as her dementia progresses, diminishing the count of her memories and their clarity.



Figure 17. Lara Landsberg. 2020. Object. *Mango & Memory: Deterioration*. Mango skins, heirloom lace, wooden embroidery clamp, embroidery thread. Digital photograph.

The discussion thus far has made the integral role of the imagination within the reconstruction of memory, increasingly evident. This process of reconstruction is comprised of weaving together scattered fragments of the past and imaginatively fulfilling the gaps in between the fragments. This emphasises the unstable and fabricated nature of memory. Therefore, suggesting that memory is somewhat dependent on the imagination to make sense of the leftover, scattered ‘scraps’ of the past (le Roux 2013:37).

South African Poet, Ingrid de Kok, suggests that the imagination “operates most powerfully within the spaces of absence, loss, and figuration” (1998:62); implying that the imagination may also have an integral role in the process of forgetting. These spaces of absence and loss, caused by forgetting, are filled with new memories that have been constructed through the imagination. The following section will discuss the process of forgetting and how its impact contributes to the instability of memory.

## 2.4 Forgotten Memory

Memory is not only concerned with remembering, but also with forgetting and as such, with loss<sup>37</sup>. The lapse between past, present, and future places memory in a vulnerable position. Although memory tries to escape this element of loss and preserve its originality, the progression of time jeopardises memory by influencing the remembrance of their origin (the original experience). As such, the progression of time creates the gaps and spaces within memory, which subjects memory to re-evaluation and therefore, reinterpretation. This prompts the beholder to question their memories, leading to the stimulation of the imagination and resulting in the reconstruction of the fragments of the past. Ironically, this reconstruction is simultaneously memory's attempt to close these gaps and spaces to maintain coherency. The reconstruction creates the illusion that the originality of memory has been maintained throughout the progression of time. (Fink 2018:41). This illusion brings comfort to the unpleasant thought of being completely unhinged from our memories; ignoring the possibility that all that may remain is reconstructed, imagined and partial remnants of the past.

I apply these ideas to the space of my grandparents' home and the objects from inside their home. I attempt to escape the potential circumstance of loss, by forcing my memories into that space and those objects. I do so in an attempt to preserve and maintain the original connections made with my past experiences of interacting with my grandparents. However, this preservation and maintenance allows the space of their home and their objects to point only to that which has been which does not allow the return of the original connections. As such, their home and their objects embody the absence of that which once was, heightening the sense of loss and bygone time.

The active process of loss and attempted recovery, by reconstructing and filling the gaps within memory, suggests that both remembering and forgetting construct memories (Jacobs 2007:52). Forgetting is necessary for the process of remembering, as it allows everything to be perceived as if it were new. In this regard, forgetting is about the discovery of something new. However, forgetting cannot operate in isolation from memory. The goal for the construction of memory is for the known

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<sup>37</sup> Within a South African political context, there may exist a deliberate nature of forgetting, where only one account of the past is recorded. For South Africa, a large part of our recorded history is predominantly Caucasian based and excludes narratives from other cultural or racial groups. Such an account of history is still being challenged and addressed in postcolonial South Africa. This relates to the TRC allowing only the most dramatic and traumatic cases of Apartheid violence to be heard. The millions of South Africans who were not permitted an appearance at the TRC public hearings became the "individuals [that] constitute[d] the country's 'public ear': they heard testimonies that spoke of, and to their own experiences but their voices remained silent, their stories unspoken and undocumented" (Bubenzer, Gobodo-Madikizela & Oelofsen 2019:1). Therefore, the trauma continued within the innumerable unvoiced humiliations. The TRC overlooked the fact that these everyday humiliations could have collectively caused the greatest harm; resulting in "the vast majority of South Africa never gaining closure over the injustices they experienced" (Wyngaard 2019: xiii).



(memory) to merge with the unknown (the forgotten that allows for new discovery), toward a seemingly coherent and whole memory. (Gadamer 1999:20).

Author of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1999), Milan Kundera, suggests that memory is not inviolable, as it is an active process of selections and erasures which equally defines it as that which it is not and as that which it is. Therefore, these selections and erasures earmark memory, like identity and history, as a construction. (1999:137). In this regard, forgetting is an inescapable element in remembering, where what is recollected consists of certain elements that are highlighted and others that are ignored. Thus, remembering and forgetting are not opposites, they rather condition one another to formulate and inform memory (Leichter 2011:227).

This suggests that the processes of forgetting and remembering entail a dynamic interplay between the past and the present, as each process is informed by both the past and the present. The erasure of some memories through forgetting, and the deliberate selection of others, implies that some memories are reactivated within the present, and are possibly relived. As such, these memories tell us more about the present than the past, because the deliberate selection of them implies that they are memories that are most applicable and significant for making sense of the present moment (Neumann 2008:333). This implies that memory itself is a distortion because it is invariably and inevitably selective, which further emphasises the instability of memory and multiplicity of remembrances associated with past events, which are selected for present purposes (Schudson cited in Schacter 1997:348). Thus, suggesting that the past is continuously adapted, manipulated, and constructed to fit within the criteria of the present. This complex interplay between the past and present, and the overlap caused by inserting the past within the present, develops an unstable narrative. As such, the flexibility of the past for present purposes emphasises the fluctuating nature of memory and therefore, its instability. (le Roux 2013:37).

When considering my Ouma's diagnosis of dementia, it is easy to visually recognise signs of weakening synapses, which indicate memory loss and forgetfulness. In the nervous system, a synapse is classified as a structure that permits a neuron (or nerve cell) to pass an electrical or chemical signal to another neuron or to target the effector cell (gland or muscle cell) (Dias, et. al. 2006:42). The strength of the synapses is dependent on the frequency of electrical activity between the neurons (Lisman & Fallon 1999:339). I witness my Ouma's memory deteriorating as though her synapses are slowly shutting down, resulting in the permanent loss of some experiences held within her mind. I first acknowledged this deterioration when I noticed that some of our conversations would consist of constant repetitions. With reference to the previous discussion about her ritualised practice of paging through old photo albums and reflecting upon objects from her past; I acknowledge how dementia affects her short-term memory, which causes her to repeat herself. Simultaneously her dementia

ironically activates her long-term memory which allows her to remember and share detailed aspects of her past. However, I cannot ignore that this activation of long-term memory is prompted by the recognition of, and interaction with, sentimentalised objects and memorabilia. I therefore become aware of how an object can be transformed into a mnemonic device.

In relation, Dutch artist, Jetske Visser demonstrates the impact of dementia on memory in her short film, *Forgotten Memory*. She documents her creation of a series of paper-thin teapots and teacups<sup>38</sup> and thereafter, their demise. Her work allows the viewer to experience the everyday world from the perspective of an individual suffering from dementia. Visser used the simple objects of teapots and teacups to represent the lack of recognition within the everyday world, and the lack of reference to everyday objects for an individual suffering from dementia. Therefore, the use of everyday objects assists the viewer in seeing just how differently someone with dementia experiences and sees the world. The forms of the objects maintain their symmetry and balance to acknowledge how people who do not suffer from dementia, see these ordinary, everyday objects. However, this balance and symmetry is slightly thrown off by the paper-thin texture and visuality of the objects, which comments on the fragility of memory for those who suffer from dementia. Thus, the fragility of these objects speaks to the uncertainty and precariousness of the lives of those suffering from dementia. The concept of fragility was taken further when liquid was poured over the paper-thin objects, causing them to slowly dissolve, symbolising the disintegration of memory in recognition of, and reference to, the everyday world for those suffering from dementia. (Martens & Visser 2017 [Online]).

This work explores and distorts the boundaries of an object's functionality. Visser disables the usual purpose of a teacup and teapot, being that to hold liquid within, and therefore alienates these pieces by having them do the opposite of what is expected. The thin and fragile properties of the material used gives the re-created objects a sense of hollowness. This communicates the breakdown of knowledge within the mind, and memory of those suffering from dementia. The fundamental shape of the object remains, like the body of the individual suffering from dementia. However, the functionality, purpose and solidity of the object is distorted, like the prior knowledge once had by the individual suffering from dementia.

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<sup>38</sup> Visser creates a plaster mould from an existing teacup/teapot within which she pours liquid to create a bubbly and uneven texture that will transfer onto the surface of the moulded cup. She then coats the inside of the mould with a fine wax. Once it is dry, she halves the plaster mould and releases the wax object in the form of a teacup/teapot. (Martens & Visser 2017 [Online]).



Figure 18. Jetske Visser. 2017. *Forgotten Memory*. Collection of moulded wax objects. Digital photograph.

It has become increasingly evident in the discussion thus far that the past is not directly transmitted into the present in pristine form. Instead, it comes in fragments that are reconstructed for the purpose of sense-making within the present. (Keightley & Pickering 2012:7). What is forgotten is recuperated within the imagination. Therefore, partial information comprising of imagined, forgotten, and remembered elements are weaved together to create a linear connection between past and present. This formulates our perceived narrative. This conditioned narrative informs memory and our knowledge of the past. The unstable platforms upon which this narrative and memory is constructed, imply that present knowledge of the past may be fictionalised. As such, the following section discusses the possibility of fictionalised memory and its contribution to the instability of memory.

## 2.5 Fictionalised Memory

Hutcheon suggests that both history and fiction are discourses by which we make sense of the past. However, she insists that even though “[t]here are no universal claims to truth [in memory]; it does not mean that no truth exists”, which emphasises that even though memory is considered unstable, it “does not deny that the past ‘reality’ existed; it only conditions our mode of knowledge of that past”. (1988:89,119,307). Contrastingly, Olney suggests that it is necessary to acknowledge that there does not exist a direct connection between the real and the remembered, suggesting that no one can say with assurance that any given memory is accurate (1998:371). This connection is complicated by the blurred distinction between memory and the imagination. Memory is bound to the imagination; therefore, it is inevitable that reinterpretation and reconstruction of the fragments of the past will

occur when the past is actively reflected upon within the present. Thus, even though the past was once a reality, the reinterpretation and reconstruction of it removes its potential to be reliable.

The reinterpretation and reconstruction of the past influences how we formulate our narratives of memory. In this regard, our reinterpretations and reconstructions are reflective of our own personal language because it is how we make sense of and understand our memory (Nuttall 1998:84). However, the multiplicity of open-ended meanings given to the past through its reinterpretation and reconstruction, may result in every recollection being accompanied by several versions of a single past. This results in varying versions of the past that are therefore unstable. The instability of these varying versions of the past informs our memory, which inevitably subjects our memory to instability. (le Roux 2013:43,44).

The continuous reinterpretation and reconstruction of our memory, within the present, shapes our reality and thus, fictionalises it. However, it is only through reinterpretation and reconstruction (our personal language) that we can simultaneously make sense of the past and our memories. This lack of stability in the continuous cycle of reinterpretation and reconstruction coincides with the postmodernist perspective that rejects stagnancy (le Roux 2013:44). It also informs how the past and the present is understood, in terms of which aspects are stressed upon (continuously reinterpreted and reconstructed) and which are repressed (Foster cited in Kolin 1998:38). Therefore, the entirety of memory partakes in falsification because it only develops and transforms by reinterpreting and reconstructing the last reinterpreted and reconstructed memory (Saunders 2008:323). As such, this emphasises the instability of memory by suggesting that memory is no longer relying on an actual event of the past, but rather on the remembrance of its remembrance. Therefore, implying that the unstable, inconsistent nature of memory is what formulates its fictionalised aspect. However, Freeman argues that even though memories and narratives are “removed from our previous experiences, [they] still deserve to be considered real and potentially important as sources of information about ourselves and our past” (1993:91).

This section has extended the emphasis upon the unstable nature of memory. The possibility of fictionalised aspects within memory increases its unreliability and therefore, contributes to the multifaceted complexity of memory.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

When I reflect upon my past and listen to the varied memory narratives shared by my Ouma of her past, I come to realise the inconsistency of memory. As such, memory has an inability to be a reliable account of past happenings. Memory has proven to be heavily dependent on the present, therefore subjecting it to constant reinterpretation and reconstruction, which formulates a multiplicity of open-

ended meanings. The retelling of memories in narrative form, emphasises the adaptation of the past for the purpose of the present. As such, memory fragments itself while simultaneously reconstructing itself in alignment with present subjectivities, to make sense of the present. These fragments are also partly imagined, to fulfil the space of forgotten memory, or memory that was deliberately erased. The imagination attempts to create coherence from the selected fragments of memory, which in turn, creates a fictionalised narrative under the illusion of being coherent and chronological.

Throughout my thesis and art practice I explore how the elements that contribute to the unstable nature of memory, influence and subvert my reflections upon my own memories. Moreover, I realise how these elements also influence my Ouma's memory and how she constructs the narratives of her past. These elements influence my interaction with, and interpretation of, the objects from my grandparents' home. I constantly reinterpret and reconstruct the memories associated with those objects. As such, I consciously acknowledge the influence that these elements have on my jewellery praxis. My jewellery pieces subject the objects to new associations and interpretations, thus speaking to the open-ended nature of memory and the multiplicity of meanings attributed to memory. My art practice emphasises the unstable, easily adaptable nature of memory and its close-knit relationship with the present. By transforming the objects from my grandparents' home into jewellery pieces, I emphasise the adaptable nature of memory that conforms with the present state of mind.

This chapter contributes to my study through its emphasis on, and elaboration of the elements that contribute to memory's instability and complexity. These elements have proven to influence and problematise the process of remembering, distorting *how* we reflect upon the past and *what* we remember from it. As such, this chapter informed my understanding of the relationship between the past and the present and how, within individual memory, such a relationship can be effortlessly distorted and manipulated. However, these factors have an even greater reach when discussed in the context of cultural, collective memory and history, where selective forgetting takes on a poignant role in revisiting the way that histories, specifically within a South African context, have been recorded.

In this regard, French historian, Pierre Nora suggests that there are as many memories as there are groups [and individuals within]; thus, memory is by nature multiple, yet specific; collective and plural, yet individual (cited in Assmann & Conrad 2010:99). As such, this chapter informs the following chapter where the individual memory is placed within the collective.

## Chapter Three:

### Memory: Collective History and Cultural Identity

“...memory is a process, an activity, a construct; it has social, cultural and personal resonance” (Kuhn 2010:298)

#### 3.1 Introduction

Nuttall notes that “memory theorists have often remarked on the consistency of the range of narratives that people, or cultures, employ to tell their stories. Such narratives weave webs across translations and dislocations, guiding memory, and creating seeming unity in multiplicity” (1998:85). Kuhn reiterates this idea by suggesting that “it is impossible to overstate the significance of narrative in cultural memory – in the sense not just of the (continuously negotiated) contents of shared/collective memory-stories, but also of the activity of recounting or telling memory-stories, in both private and public contexts” (2010:298). However, it has been determined that this “unity” in memory work (via narratives) only exists because of the construction and re-construction of past events that are imagined to fit within the present (le Roux 2013:45).

The preceding chapters discuss the elements of memory that are influential to how our narratives are formulated, via how our memories are reconstructed. These elements are the foundational components of our personal memory. As such, these elements inform how collective accounts of memory and thus the history of memory is constructed within our minds. This collective account of memory is culturally contextualised which contributes to a culturally constructed and informed personal identity.

This chapter discusses the complexities of memory with regards to the political relationship between memory and history as a contextualisation for the placement of the personal within the public, in terms of how the social and cultural aspects of memory are perceived. Thereafter, this chapter discusses the relationship between memory and identity and how collective accounts of memory shape personal identity.

These discussions are placed within a South African context to emphasise the history of the country in relation to my grandparents’ history and their objects. Therefore, this chapter aims to unpack the collective, social, and cultural memory of South Africa. I apply it to the understanding that I have of my grandparents’ past and the way in which I interpret the objects from their home.

This chapter serves as a discussion about the merging of the personal and the public, in terms of memory. It contributes to the greater context of my study by informing my understanding of my own



past and how I situate myself within the public sphere with regards to how I remember. Moreover, it allows me to further understand the manipulated and constructed nature of memory and my identity.

### 3.2 Memory and History

As an artist and researcher, I find it necessary to acknowledge the intertwined relationship between memory and history, and the politics thereof, from my disposition as a white South African female. Cultural Anthropologist, Michael Lambek describes this intertwined relationship when he states that:

Memory is [considered as] history [that is] located in relatively subjective space. Whereas history is [considered as] memory [that is] located in relatively objectified space. History is memory inscribed, codified [and] authorised. Memory is history embodied, imagined, enacted [and] enlivened. Memory provides an agile, existential, indeterminate practice that draws on and supports history even as it offsets the weight of history's powerful claims (2003:211).

According to Lambek, memory and history is traditionally intertwined in a way that rationalises and objectifies history, whereas memory is coupled with the subjective and experiential. Within a modernist setting these dualistic groupings have led to a rather one sided and linear perception of history, and it is these dualistic structures of thought that postmodern and posthuman thought oppose. In this chapter, I challenge the dualistic notions of objective/subjective and question to what extent certain dominant accounts of the past that have been deemed memorable, have dictated what is recorded and absorbed into cultural memory. In this regard, I refer to the way that western ideology has shaped the grand narratives of South African history. I, therefore, see history as a construct of dominant ideology. This suggests that "history is a construction and fragmented interpretation of past events" (le Roux 2013:30). I acknowledge that there are certain connotations and associations with the term history, however, for the purpose of this study the use of the term signifies the past: a history that functions under, and within memory (le Roux 2013:29). As such, I suggest that to provide a more accurate account of the past, history cannot be linear (as put forward by western grand narratives), but instead should consist of a multiplicity of recollections that include diverse accounts of the past. It is evident that there is an inseparable connection between history and memory. This suggests that the same critique of history, such as the denial of a single history and the issues of accessing the truth of the past without alteration and multiplicity, can be applied to memory (le Roux 2013:30).

It is the multiplicity of memory that problematises my own understanding of the past, as recollected within present day South Africa. This section destabilises the seemingly consistent nature of memory and history, and instead positions it as both a fragmented and constructed account of past events. I explore how the fragmented and constructed nature of memory and history can be regarded as



contributory to the instability and unreliability of memory, in terms of history's attempt to provide an unbiased and inclusive account of the past. As such, this section will unpack and discuss the idea of collective memory within a South African context. It elaborates on the social aspects of memory to demonstrate the influential relationship between personal memory and public memory, which acknowledges that memory "does not exist within the individual alone" (le Roux 2013:38).

### **3.2.1 Collective/Public/Social/Cultural Memory:**

Halbwachs defines memory as "a set of social representations and a tool for grasping the symbolic realities and continuities of a particular social group" (cited in Papoulias 2003:116). Memory is realised to no longer be an individual faculty, but rather considered to be a way of framing experience that is generated through a collective group. As such, collective memory can be defined as a communal form of memory in which the past is kept present and internalised over generations (Fink 2018:14).

The different ways in which humans make sense of memory is relative to an individual's personal idiosyncratic development thus far. Therefore, collective memory will inevitably result in a varied multiplicity of recollections. Thus, the private aspect of memory (the sense of uniqueness of individualised memory), is derived from the positioning of every individual into several social groups (i.e., class, gender, kinship etc.). In this sense, what appears as an individual's inner world of memory is in fact nothing other than the uniqueness of how one has layered social memories. (Papoulias 2003:116). Consequently, the particularity of memory is a result of several social vocabularies of experiences that merges within one individual. This suggests that collective memory is largely influenced by the accumulation of other people's memories (social structures, traditions and beliefs) that culminate within the individual (le Roux 2013:40). In this respect, collective memory is the impact that social and cultural structures have on the memory and identity of an individual.

Memories can be seen as selective or partial and used to fulfil individual or group requirements of identity at a particular time and in a particular place (McDowell 2008:42). Our experiences and memories are "influenced by our historical and cultural ethos and our immediate personal circumstances within a community and family" (de Beer 2006:79). As such, memory is not a property of individual minds, but a diverse and shifting collection of material artefacts and social practices (Schudson cited in Klein 2000:130), which suggests that the "ephemeral experiences, objects, and customs we encounter or practice regularly, inform and shape our memories" (Groenewald 2015:26). This suggests that objects demonstrate our social interactions and how we relate to the world (Groenewald 2015:5). In this regard, South African contemporary jeweller, Idane Burger suggests that objects are multifaceted and complex in the meanings that they acquire within a certain society;

they attain symbolic, political, economic and social meanings, while they also encapsulate memory (2013:4). This suggests that objects are deeply integrated into society, and they can relay meaning because meaning has been culturally ascribed to them (Groenewald 2015:5). Within a post-humanist context, the perceptions that we have of our surroundings and the way that we position ourselves within an environment are shaped within a society where various structures of power are at play, and we model our identities accordingly. Visual media and art can either reinforce or challenge these perceptions. (Groenewald 2021 [Online]).

Memory, in its entirety, is as much influenced by personal/private recollections of the past as it is by public/cultural/collective memory. Moreover, personal memory is influenced by public memory, and vice versa. This suggests that our memory, the way that we recollect, what meaning is taken from the experience, and what is remembered about ourselves; is not only alterable, adaptable, and manipulable by ourselves but also by society and through societal means. This suggests a turn from seeing memory as “primarily individual and private” to rather seeing it as “produced *through* intersubjective relations” (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003:91). Therefore, memory can be “regarded as part of culture because it is simultaneously individual and social” (le Roux 2013:22).

In this regard, I believe that the development of memory through intersubjective relations between the individual and the collective, inevitably distorts individual memory to fit within the requirements of collective memory. I compare this distortion to the fragmentation of memory, as discussed in Chapter Two with regards to memory/the past being fragmented and reconstructed to fit within the criteria of the present. Within South Africa (with specific reference to the Apartheid regime) the recording of memory and history has been notoriously traumatic and fragmented, with large chapters of memory selectively forgotten and manipulated to construct a very specific perspective of history. Professor of Human Security, Kenneth Christie reinforces this notion when he states that “South Africa is a country where the notion of ‘fractured’ memory is given new meaning. Memory is not fractured here; rather it is splintered, rent apart; torn into a multitude of pieces” (2000:8). The cultural society of South Africa and its collective memory can be seen as an accumulation of fragmented narratives within which every individual attempts to search for their own identity. When referring to the intertwined relationship between memory and imagination, also discussed in Chapter Two; it is important to consider that because there is social and historical memory, there may be social and historical imagination too. Therefore, when referring to the “sociological imagination or the historical imagination, this involves our capacity to move from one perspective to another, to alternate between individual and collective forms of experience, to bring large-scale, impersonal, and local or intimate aspects of social and historical life into relationship with each other” (Keightley & Pickering 2012:2).

This places the imagination on par with memory with regards to the interpretation and analysis of sociological and historical pasts.

It is important to acknowledge that the influence upon memory via the public sphere becomes a part of our cultural interaction and impacts the way in which we experience the world (Groenewald 2015:37). Furthermore, collective memory “not only reflects the past but also shapes the present reality by providing people with understanding and symbolic frameworks that enable them to make sense of the world; after all, while it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than just a personal act” (Miztal 2003:13).

Halbwachs’ defining ideas on collective memory suggest that:

A society can have a collective memory that is dependent upon the framework within which a group is situated in a society. Thus, there is not only an individual memory, but also a group memory that exists outside of, and lives beyond, the individual. Consequently, an individual’s understanding of the past is strongly linked to this group consciousness (cited in Hutton 1993:314).

This suggests that there exists no form of remembering that is respectively individual, collective or unified in any way. This emphasises that “memory is concerned not only with individual experience, but with practices of remembrance that are defined and shaped by the surrounding culture” (Whitehead 2009:124). Miztal supports this notion when stating that “collective memory is not only what people really remember through their own experience; it also incorporates the constructed past which is constitutive of the collectivity” (2003:13). This suggests that social memory refers to somewhat organised cultural practices which provide a framework for how the individual ought to remember and ought to understand the world. This may lead to individual’s actions being guided via certain collective beliefs and opinions. This suggests that “for the individual, [the] only memories [that] are possible [are those] for which the culture provides external support” (Neumann 2008:339).

Relative to shared narratives and stories of the past; artwork is a communicative tool that can “transcend the boundaries between individual and collective memory in order to secure a memory and an identity by using objects and documents as witnesses of our history because there are memories that can be shared in personal execution among everyone” (Saladini cited in Fink 2018:35). I apply this notion to my study and jewellery praxis as I visually explore my grandparents’ past through analysing, interpreting, and transforming a selection of their objects. I acknowledge that my past will inevitably influence how I interpret their past, demonstrating a shift in social consciousness and an acknowledgement of the different periods of history.

Within a South African context, a portion of their pasts fell within a difficult period of history, namely the Apartheid era. This period of history established certain beliefs and value systems and thus the nature of the ruling political power influenced the content of memories. This created an accumulation of fragmented pasts, in which only certain elements are recorder or deemed memorable by the dominant ideology. This suggests that the certain elements that are remembered are those deemed important by the ruling political party and social collective of that time. Therefore, suggesting that memories that are “not deemed socially meaningful, appropriate, or significant are often not remembered at all” or are conveniently ostracised from historical references (le Roux 2013:41).

Similarly, Psychology Professor, Kurt Danzinger suggests that the mnemonic values of human recollection are culturally grounded assumptions about what is most worth remembering, what ought not be or need not be remembered, how the shards of memory should fit together, [and] what kinds of tasks memory should be expected to serve (2008:20). This suggests that individual memory is shaped into being a social memory by collective groups, which deem what should be remembered and what should be forgotten. These collective groups “affect the ‘depth’ of our memory; they regulate how far back we should remember; which part of the past should be remembered, which events mark the beginning, and which should be forced out of our story” (Misztal 2003:15). Therefore, this suggests that individual memory is incomplete in isolation from the broader cultural setting in which the individuals belong. Memory can therefore be considered as both “discursively and culturally embedded” (Groenewald 2015:37). As such, even though memory is activated within the individual, it is always a product influenced by society or culture. This means that individual memory cannot be removed from its social and cultural context, which results in it being, by nature, simultaneously public and private.

Family relations are like national and political relations when considering the influential and informative impact of collective and social memory. Elder members of a family may have the power to alter and manipulate the memory of the younger generations. This alteration and manipulation suggest which experiences are to be meaningful for the child and therefore, constructs a certain narrative framework within which certain impressions and particular details are structured into a coherent story about the past. As such, it is not the actual content of the past that is communicated between the generations, but rather a series of culturally structured impressions and details through which the child will make sense of the present and the past alike. (Papoulias 2003:121). This emphasises the powerful influence that social memory has upon altering personal memory. The individual is exposed to multiple versions of the past by the collective group. This results in an inextricably intertwined reference of the past, which is constituted by external/others, and internal/personal versions of the past.

Within a South African context, specific to the Apartheid era, it is important to consider the intergenerational effect of traumatic memory on identity formation. Remembrance is highly dependent on *how* individuals, and the groups to which they belong, remember their pasts. How the memory is remembered is therefore responsible for how the memory is transformed into a verbal narrative<sup>39</sup>. Narratives and storytelling are important means by which individuals and communities make sense of their experiences. It provides an awareness into how their identities were shaped by their experiences, while simultaneously illustrating the wider, difficult conversation about the meaning of justice, and the missing parts of the discourse of reconciliation; [toward transformation] in South Africa. (Bubenzer, Gobodo-Madikizela & Oelofsen 2019:2,3). Narratives also have clear links with postmodern thought since narrative creation usually encourages reflexivity and acknowledges that truth and certainty are unstable (Bold 2012:13). I suggest that through these shared intergenerational narratives, a healed nation can arise. The importance lies in *how* these narratives are told and *to whom* they are told because “through writing and telling our stories we will use the power of narratives to deconstruct and reconstruct new identities” (Goduka 1999:1).

The integral role that my Ouma has resembled throughout my upbringing and life so far has resulted in many experiences and therefore, many memories shared together. However, considering the discussion thus far, I acknowledge that this means that we each have our own constructed versions of the past. This prompts me to further acknowledge that we have each interpreted the past in accordance with our respective social and cultural settings. However, my Ouma’s past far precedes my entry into this world, therefore, her social and cultural influences have been established prior to the experiences and memories we shared together. This will inevitably influence her interpretation of her entire past, including the past shared with me. Therefore, with regards to her role in my life, her version of the past shared with me is influential to my personal memory and my already established version of my past. In this regard, I acknowledge that only certain fragments of the past are remembered and the difference between social and cultural settings will inevitably result in differed interpretations and reflections of the past. This creates an interesting tension between how my Ouma perceives her past, versus how I perceive her past, in alignment with our respective social and cultural influences.

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<sup>39</sup> With regards to memories of apartheid, “how victims and perpetrators frame their narratives about violent and painful pasts [is] how these narratives are passed on and play out intergenerationally” (Bubenzer, Gobodo-Madikizela & Oelofsen 2019:1). The narrating of stories and memories from life under apartheid can introduce an alternative, deeper understanding of the painful experiences and suffering that “underpin this country and shape our contemporary dispensation”; creating a “space for a conversation about South Africa’s history [and] what it means to talk to and to hear the other within the context of this history” (Bubenzer, Gobodo-Madikizela & Oelofsen 2019:2,3).

I find it crucial to explore the concept of memory in the public sphere, in acknowledgement of the cultural influences and practices of my Ouma's past. The objects from my grandparents' home reveal a sense of privilege, specific to that period. Within a South African context and with specific reference to the Apartheid era; obtaining a sense of privilege was coupled with a great divide of race and class, which resulted in consequences of which we still experience today. The difference between how my grandparents' objects may have been perceived in relation to that period and how my Ouma recollects her past, comments on the interlinking between private and public memory with regards to collective memory. My Ouma recollects fond memories of that period (personal memory), however, the public sphere, within which those memories occurred, may argue differently (public memory). The cultural and political context that surrounds those memories cannot be ignored. The cultural and political collective memory of that period was charged with negativity which contradicts the privileged experiences and personal memories; that which my Ouma positively reflects upon. I relate the sense of privilege associated with my grandparents' objects with the racial segregation that occurred within the Apartheid era. This racial segregation resulted in each racial group being subjected to "an artificial hierarchy of privileges" (Wyngaard 2019:x). This 'hierarchy of privileges' could then also be applied to *why* and *how* my Ouma reflects upon her past and memories from a privileged perspective. Consequently, there lies a sense of politics within memory, applicable not only to how the individual remembers their own past but also to how a nation shares a collective memory of their country and the cultures within.

As I conduct this study, I acknowledge that I too come from a historical background of the 'privileged' within a South African context. Regardless of not having grown up through the Apartheid era; it is inevitable that my memories and past have been shaped by the perceptions and memories of my Ouma, who experienced the era from a privileged point of view. However, it is possible that the recollection and retelling of her memories may be informed by the development of her knowledge and perception from then to now. This may lessen the sense of privilege as she adapts her memories of that period to the current South African national context. However, I recognise that the fragmentation and deterioration of her memory heavily influences how she perceives her past, regardless of the current context in which she remembers.

Through my art practice, I introduce objects from my grandparents' past, which carry connotations of that period into the present. This inevitably creates a sense of tension, which I grapple with through the interpretation, alteration, and transformation of these objects. In doing so, I acknowledge that the pieces that I create may be indirectly influenced by current South African culture. Therefore, I adapt the past prejudices to align with the present period, re-establishing their meaning and association. However, it is not to say that my alteration and transformation of these objects lessens or removes the



intensity of the past cultural and political associations with them. My objective is to re-introduce the old toward the creation of the new. Within a South African context, I equate this with the transformative actions that were taken toward reconciling the national damage of the Apartheid era, in the attempt to construct a newly established nation. I visualise a similarity between my art practice and the nation of South Africa. I segment, destruct, and break apart the objects from my grandparents' home to piece together an entirely new object, which is unrecognisable from their original context and association. Similarly, I visualise South Africa doing the same; destructing history but using its segments to learn where to establish growth, newness, and fresh regimes. I believe that the mnemonic value of the contemporary jewellery pieces that I create, align with the construction of a subject's memory by societal and cultural means. My theoretical investigation of memory aligns with my jewellery praxis, in terms of the contemporary jewellery pieces that I create, acting as externalisations of memory and reflection of identity. In this regard, the jewellery pieces can be considered as powerful communicative tools that transcend my personal history. Their wearability is made possible through the intimate relationship that I have with the objects that embody the jewellery pieces. As such, the jewellery pieces function as vessels which contain cultural and personal memory. (Groenewald 2015:5).



Figure 19. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooch. Found porcelain bowl, embroidery thread, pressed flowers, lace, sterling silver, magnets. Digital photograph.

It can be assumed that humans need and use memory to create culture and construct identity because “without memory a sense of self, identity, culture and heritage is lost” (McDowell 2008:42). Post-apartheid South Africa “needed to create a new integrated culture and sense of nationhood” (le Roux

2013:20). Therefore, memory was used for reconstruction purposes to rebuild the South African nation. As such, the reconstruction of South Africa through cultural recognition and an establishment of national unity may have been an attempt of rethinking the country's collective memory.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established in 1995, was "called into being by the first democratic government as a mechanism to allow testimony of both victims and perpetrators of the worst atrocities committed during apartheid" and overall, it aimed to bring closure to all (Wyngaard 2019: xiii). This provided a sense of hope for re-birthing South Africa as a country, by using "the memories of the past to shape that of the present" toward re-establishing the unity of the nation (le Roux 2013:20). Researcher and artist, Ernst van der Wal elaborates on the use of memory as a "vehicle for collectively and publicly rethinking South African identities within a democratic framework", such as the TRC (2013:18). He suggests that the use of memory is applicable toward the re-establishment of the country. This suggests that memory can be used as a means of countering silence and amnesia, and as a tool for opposing Apartheid's grand narratives. (van der Wal 2013:18).

Regardless of whether closure was reached, there still appears to be a universal thread that runs through all the narratives of the past within Apartheid, and that is loss. These narratives speak of a loss of a way of life and the distinct division of life into a before and an after, which results in an individual's losing a sense of belonging. I relate this sense of loss to my Ouma's memory loss, that divides her life into a before and an after. She experiences a detachment from her past through the permanent erasure of some of her memories, emphasising the fleeting nature of experience and memory. Her lack of memories impacts and threatens her sense of belonging, leaving her with no referential past to rely on. She loses her sense of placement and belonging in those experiences and moments, rendering her physically lost and with a loss of identity.

I propose that, as a means of processing and working through traumatic events, one may transfer their intangible feelings into a physical object. These objects then get filled with associations through emotion. However, it is necessary to note that there too exist symbols and objects from violent pasts that are used to remember these pasts (Bubenzer, Gobodo-Madikizela & Oelofsen 2019:2), or they might represent affiliation to a certain group. The objects from my grandparents' home have been shared intergenerationally. This results in them simultaneously dominating mine and their pasts. As such, they embody my history and my grandparents' history. These objects are used mnemonically to reminisce and reflect upon the past, as an addition to the narratives of the past. These objects have agency and memories of their own, based on their socio-cultural meaning. However, I also impact on that meaning through my own personal associations with the objects.

The presence of these objects does not necessarily render them a physical reminder of the trauma of Apartheid, but rather formulates a representation of my personal past. My personal recollections that

are prompted by these objects may not necessarily provoke a sense of trauma. However, the privilege that they inherently represent may be seemingly reminiscent of trauma and a lack of privilege for many South Africans from the Apartheid era. For this reason, I often disrupt the objects that I work with, to emphasise the layered aspect of memory and the instability thereof. This disruption includes my interpretation of the objects and, therefore their transformation. My involvement with these objects through my jewellery praxis allows me to apply my own notion of trauma to them. It is separate to the trauma endured by many South Africans during the Apartheid era and how they would associate with them. The trauma that I associate with the disrupted objects, is representative of the loss of my Ouma's memory and the loss of my Oupa. Therefore, the object becomes a multifaceted embodiment, which is representative of many fragmented pasts and memories.

The jewellery pieces shown in this section incorporate items from a tea set retrieved from my Ouma's travels to England. The delicacy of detail upon these porcelain items and the fact that only a specific number of batches were produced<sup>40</sup> suggests a sense of European affluence. Contrastingly, they also suggest a sense of community and inclusivity because having a cup of tea during teatime can become a ritualised practice for members of a family or a community. The act of drinking tea then becomes symbolic of collectiveness. However, I disrupt these porcelain objects by means of drilling holes through them, which disables their functional use, which disrupts the usual associations had with the items. This disruption encourages another type of conversation about these objects as the pre-conceived associations are now eliminated. These objects can relate to the public on a much deeper level now, and possibly trigger a variety of memories. The multiplicity of conversation evoked, and memories triggered by these objects emphasises collective memory. The transformation of these objects into jewellery pieces enriches the objects for more than their utilitarian value and now these conversations and memories enrich the objects even further. These objects are no longer recognised as items from a tea set but rather as vessels containing a multiplicity of meanings.

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<sup>40</sup> Their batch number is hand painted onto the bottom of each item in the same gold enamel paint used for the detailing upon the item.



Figure 20. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Neckpiece. Found porcelain teacups, embroidery thread, found wooden clay sculpting tool, enamel paint, pressed flowers, lace, felt, sterling silver. Digital photograph.

Similar to the notion of objects having the ability to carry history and communicate personally and publicly, contemporary jeweller, Kristy Bujanic investigates the possibilities of communicating “childhood memories through jewellery and objects” in her series *The Cabinet of Love for a bit of Fluff* (2017) (2017 [Online]). The feelings attached to these memories are personal to Bujanic, yet recognisable and relatable to by the viewer. This is similar to how the objects from my grandparents’ home are significant to me, because of their embedded history and memory. However, the personal meaning I give to them is invisible to the viewer. It also relates to how the objects from my grandparents’ home may be recognisable and possibly relatable to by the viewer of my jewellery pieces. Therefore, the objects that I use in my jewellery pieces may be universally familiar and recognisable, but the associations and meanings attributed to them are unique to everyone that views them.

The familiar materials that Bujanic uses prompt these universal feelings of recognition and relatability in the viewer. Her work prompts the viewer to have a mental image of a house and to situate themselves in different rooms of this house, which prompts further recognition and relatability. However, the specific rooms that Bujanic refers to, only exist in her memory as she reflects on places that have made a lasting impression on her since her childhood. For this work, Bujanic chose the

bathroom, to communicate the space in which loved ones “are allowed to be their most intimate self”. (2017 [Online]).



Figure 21. Kristy Bujanic. 2017. Brooch. *Petried*. Soapstone, silver, steel. Digital photograph.

I relate to Bujanic’s work, with regards to her reference of a specific space and time in her memory. Similarly, this is how I am aware of, and familiar with the space of my grandparents’ home, and how their objects fit into it. However, the viewer of my jewellery pieces cannot see that personal background and context. Therefore, even though the objects in my jewellery pieces may be recognisable by the viewer, it does not mean that the viewer and I share the exact same familiarity with how or what we would relate the objects to in our minds.

This section has emphasised the unstable nature of memory through “revealing the ‘fabricatedness’ of the memory narrative in individuals and cultural groups” (le Roux 2013:35). Memory is not limited to the individual; it exists beyond the individual, within the social or public groups of the individual. As such, individual (personal) memory is influenced via social (public) memory. The *collectiveness* of public memory implies that there occurs a collective reconstruction of the past, where all individual memories are shared and intertwined. This suggests that individuals that constitute a group or a society often “synchronise their memories into one narrative with the same plotline” (Schiff, et. al. 2011:252). Within a society, “collective memory works by subsuming individual experiences under cultural schemes that make them comprehensible and, therefore, meaningful” (Schwartz cited in Kansteiner 2002:189).

Overall, individualised or collective memory is a multifaceted concept applied to the past, in attempt to understand it and learn from it. I use memory to make sense of my personal relationship with the past, to gain a better understanding of my own memories and to understand my disposition as an

individual amongst a collective nation. Understanding my disposition as an individual requires an understanding of my identity and how I have come to establish a sense of self through my memories. As such, the following section will discuss the informing relationship between memory and identity.

### **3.3 Memory and Identity**

An integral element within this study, is the notion of memory as an active factor in the construction of identity and our perception of self. This suggests that “our perception of ourselves, the singular knowledge of being here [in the present], is based purely on memory: the fact of remembering oneself” (Ricoeur 2004:3). This suggests that memory is bound to the human subject as our identities are “uniquely embedded within our social and personal experiences” (de Beer 2006:77). This section will investigate the interlinking and informative relationship between memory and identity towards establishing the extent to which memory influences and governs identity.

In this regard, I suggest that identity is a means of placing the personal within the public. We use our identity to establish our sense of self within a cultural and public context (Sturken cited in Jacobs 2007:10). In doing so, we activate our memories to inform our understanding of our sense of self. Therefore, this demonstrates the relationship between memory and identity. However, the stubborn, inconsistent nature of memory renders it to constantly be in flux. As such, our identity, as informed by our memories, will too be in flux.

Memories are said to be “acquired and consumed, like souvenirs, but to be without memory is to be that much less a self” (Lambek 2003:211). Consequently, I suggest that the fear of losing our memory may coincide with a fear of losing our sense or perception of self. This may result in a state of hyper-preserving the past. By doing so we heighten the meaning of each experience, as we may view our experiences (the accumulation and richness in quality thereof) in relation to and embodying of our identity. In this regard, the complexity of memory and the complexity of an individual’s identity equally inform one another. They uniformly develop together and determine one another. It is important to understand the complexities of memory and how it informs the human subject. Individuals consult their past in order to know how to act and interpret their present, therefore informing how they presently identify themselves. This suggests that “our whole life consists of remembering and without our personal memory, our own identity formation is not possible” (Schüle cited in Fink 2018:37). However, given memory’s recollective dimension, it is prone to change and fluctuation. Memory is therefore never a static phenomenon, nor written in stone. The reconstruction of memory through its change and movement, will have significant implications for understanding the practical dimensions of identity (Leichter 2011:224).



In this regard, it becomes evident that one's memory and one's identity is inextricably linked. Therefore, the deterioration of memory informs the sense of losing one's identity which can result in the nostalgic urge of preserving. When I consider the loss of memory with regards to my Ouma's dementia, I share the sentiments of South African Illustrator and Lecturer, Marike le Roux when she states that "the problem does not necessarily lie with the fragmented nature of the past, but rather with the ability to reconstruct it coherently in the present" (2013:33). I have experienced how my Ouma's loss of memory and her inability to coherently recall her past has influenced the way in which she views herself. This observation is explained by neuroscientific evidence that suggests that the "brain lesions which induce a loss of autobiographical memory may lead to an impairment of the sense of oneself" (Axmacher, et. al. 2010:6). Memory and identity then inform one another, suggesting that a sense of identity is constructed through the preservation (memory) of different selves that we accumulate throughout our lives (Misztal 2003:2). Consequently, a disconnection between memory and identity would be a complete loss of all that constitutes the self. This emphasises that the concern for loss of memory is rather more a concern for the loss of identity.

I believe that my experiences and their memories, although from the past, play a significant role within the present as they serve as a basis of the knowledge for how I respond to the external world<sup>41</sup>. This suggests that "*how* we know is intimately bound up with *what* we know, where we learned it, and what we have experienced" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2). Schacter emphasises this by suggesting that it is important for us to "surround ourselves with things that tell a story, our story. They are a part of us because part of our identity is dormant in them" (1997:n.pag.). In this regard, British Archaeologist, Christopher Tilley suggests that "the object world is...absolutely central to the understanding of identities of individuals and society" (2006:61).

New Zealand contemporary jeweller, Victoria McIntosh is a "collector obsessed with issues of history and identity and the highly personal practice of placing oneself in the world" (McIntosh 2019 [Online]). She sorts through collections of second-hand objects from local antique shops and is particularly drawn to objects that carry a sense of history. She acknowledges and invests in the stories that come with the found objects in hope that what she creates from them will inevitably prompt a new conversation about the objects (McIntosh 2019 [Online]). I relate this to the placement of my jewellery pieces within the public realm. A new conversation can emerge around my grandparents' objects, as to how the viewers interpret my jewellery pieces, and which associations they make with the objects within the jewellery pieces. These interpretations and associations would most likely be

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<sup>41</sup> I relate this to how I engage with and respond to the world on a phenomenological level (how I shape the world and how it shapes me, which in turn is how I shape my memory and how it shapes me).

informed by their own memories and experiences, just as mine are when I view and interact with my grandparents' objects within my jewellery praxis.

As seen in Figures 22 and 23, McIntosh uses a unique combination of skills that she was taught throughout her childhood, to create her jewellery pieces (sewing, quilting etc.) alongside those learnt at the jeweller's bench. The quilting and sewing present within her work is done using her grandmother's sewing machine, references her grandmother as being the person who taught her these skills. McIntosh's work pushes the boundaries of what may be considered jewellery as she weaves between the wearable and non-wearable, in which her objects and jewellery feed off one another (2019 [Online]).



Figure 22. Victoria McIntosh. 2016. Objects. *My Handbag, My Choice*. Digital photograph.



Figure 23. Victoria McIntosh. 2016. Brooch. *Grater Brooch*. Digital photograph.

Her work and the skills that she uses to produce her work communicates a sense of femininity. *My Handbag, My Choice* suggests a gendering of objects. Moreover, her use of quilting and sewing, and the fact that her grandmother taught her these skills from a young age, suggests a gendering of practices. The objects that she chooses to work with carry a very specific history, as they reference the role of the woman in a domestic setting. Therefore, McIntosh's transformation of domestic objects also ties in with references of femininity and gendering. I relate this to the technique of pressing flowers, which was taught to me by my Ouma<sup>42</sup>. This suggests that quaint practices such as the technique of pressing flowers, embellishing, decorating, sewing, and embroidering were generalised as *female* associated techniques. This implies that women are associated with craft techniques. In a modern-day context, I challenge these associations and pre-conceived ideals. My use of embroidery and pressed flowers in my jewellery praxis, has a two-fold meaning: firstly, to acknowledge my Ouma's role and influence within my childhood and, secondly to simultaneously disrupt my grandparents' objects. As a modern-day female, it seems ironic that I would adopt these techniques in my creative practice because I am aware of their pre-conceived gendering associations. However, even though I use these techniques for their pre-conceived embellishment purposes, I apply them to surfaces that would not typically be embellished by these techniques. Consequently, this communicates disruption. Therefore, I create an ironic parallel between the history of my grandparents' objects and the history of these craft techniques as I use the techniques to disrupt the history of my grandparents' objects, which simultaneously disrupts the gendered history of the techniques.

I relate to McIntosh's upbringing and creative practices specifically to the skills taught to her as a child by her grandmother, similar to those taught to me by my Ouma. The objects that she uses in her creative practice carry a sense of history, as do those from my grandparents' home. However, I feel that I have a deeper connection to the objects used within my jewellery praxis because of their relation to my grandparents, rather than objects obtained from second-hand shops that carry others' histories with them. I relate further to McIntosh's use of her grandmother's sewing machine when she is in the process of creating her objects and jewellery pieces. I use my Ouma's wooden clay sculpting tools as part of my jewellery pieces but also for their functional use when making the clay and porcelain aspects of my jewellery pieces. This comments on the present re-activation of the history found within the objects.

I view the accumulation of objects within my grandparents' home as an element of memory preservation. For me, this provides a sense of relief through knowing that regardless of not being able

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<sup>42</sup> Please refer to section 4.3 for an elaborated discussion on this process and its relevance.

to remember all aspects of the past, the past can still be saved, cherished and preserved through the objects in their home. In this regard, the objects from my grandparents' home embody emotional meaning because of their embedded history and memory. Their preservation heightens their symbolic value as they reference the planes of time that they have travelled across. As such, the jewellery pieces that I create from these objects embody a multi-layered meaning. They communicate a tension between the personal and the public. The objects have been displaced from my grandparents' home, which removes their personal context but not necessarily their personal meaning. However, their transformation into jewellery pieces transfers them into the public realm and subjects them to external associations and meanings. The jewellery pieces may serve as mnemonic objects to me, yet cultural artefacts to another.



Figure 24. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Pendant. Glazed porcelain clay, embroidery thread, felt thread, sterling silver. Digital photograph.

In this regard, I align with the sentiments of Psychoanalytic Professor, Karl Figlio when he states that:

The way we treat artefacts, relics – all the traces of the past – expresses the continuous process of invading, destroying, rebuilding, fearing, loving, respecting, repairing. To preserve a moment of the past is to infiltrate it at the same time as to keep it alive (2003:162).

This suggests that retrieving objects that have been preserved, which are embedded with memory and history, leads the objects to be placed against the backdrop of the present moment. The present moment invited new associations to be made with these embedded objects. This adaptation of new associations to the objects' contained history and memory begins to dismantle its history and memory. This dismantling also exposes a counter movement to rebuild and reconstruct.



Figure 25. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooch. Found porcelain shard, embroidery thread, found wooden clay sculpting tool, sterling silver. Digital photograph.

As I conduct this study, I also progress in my understanding of the significance of the material world and its impact on how I perceive my environment. From a post-humanist perspective, this communicates the co-constitutive relationship between humans and their environment. In this regard, a similar relationship can be seen between identity and memory. In a post-humanist context, identity is shaped through memory through how and what we remember. However, we also distort and shape our memories in order to model our identities in the present. I apply this thinking to all the physical objects that I surround myself with (not only my grandparents' objects, but objects that I have collected myself). The specificity of these objects gives insight into and mirrors my identity. I interpret these objects as an accumulation of physical collectables that serve as the embodiment of my identity. In this regard, it is possible for a collection of objects to reflect and collectively communicate a fragmented embodiment of my identity. The analysis of each object can be linked to a story that I can identify with and that shapes my identity. Such objects hold personal meaning but

are also subject to my current re-interpretation and associative development. Consequently, these objects can be seen as puzzle pieces that come together to form a certain image of identity relevant to my personal as well as cultural associations that is reflected by the objects in question.

The objects from my grandparents' home become visual aspects of the relationship I had with them, and the memories shared with them in their home. In turn, the objects become a visual accumulation of my identity. As such, these objects "bear witness to [my] own origins and ultimately contribute to the consolidation of [my] own identity" (Giersch cited in Fink 2018:32). By these objects acting as witness to my childhood years, they each act as a part of a whole: each object is a singular referent to the experiences within, and memories of my grandparents' home. These objects do not just embody the place of my grandparents' home but transport it. In this regard, contemporary jeweller, Anna Sophie Fink suggests that the objects become a "testimony that something is missing from another place, the place that makes the souvenir come alive" (2018:19). By removing the objects from their original context, being my grandparents' home and by placing them within a contemporary jewellery context, the objects become a binary indicator of profit and loss. By placing my grandparents' objects within a contemporary jewellery context, they profit by gaining new functionality and an extended existence, but they lose by their removal from the context that embodies and informs the meaning of the memories and narratives contained within them.

This section illustrated the dynamic, interlinking and informing relationship between memory and identity. However, identity is not solely constituted by memory. The following chapter will outline the relationship between memory and affect, and memory and nostalgia. Affect and nostalgia also inform identity as each are highly subjective and emotive elements of human nature, which too are moulded by memory. However, in turn, these elements also add to the complexity and instability of memory.

### 3.4 Conclusion

It is evident that cultural and social settings and conditions influence individuals and their personal memory to a large extent. This emphasises the instability of memory when we consider the collective aspect of memory. The collective aspect of memory suggests the "impossibility for a 'single' authentic version of the past, since others' *unstable* memories and stories become entangled with the individual's personal already *unstable* memory" (le Roux 2013:42).

Within a postmodernist framework, memory and identity are equally unstable constructs. This chapter demonstrated that identities are informed by, based on and constructed through memory. As established, the instability of memory defines it as a fragile construct. Therefore, because identity is



based upon and constructed through memory; the unstable politics involving identity closely relate to and are informed by the fragile and unstable construct of memory.

This chapter communicates to the overall objective of this study as it embodies memory as a wholistic and worldly concept. It demonstrates the integral nature of memory in all facets of life: personal and public. This knowledge informs my understanding of my own memories and past and how I situate myself within the history that my grandparents' objects foster. I also apply this knowledge to my identity formation through my memories and my past. Moreover, this knowledge informs my understanding of my jewellery praxis, by providing a thorough contextualisation of my grandparents' objects.

## Chapter Four:

### Memory: An Emotive Concept

#### 4.1 Introduction

From a postmodernist perspective, memory is fragmented, deconstructed and reconstructed, and affect and nostalgia only add to the complexity of memory, in terms of its instability. Whereas from a post-humanist perspective, the interconnected and informing relationship between affect and nostalgia runs alongside the idea of the present and past equally informing one another. As such, posthumanism builds on postmodernist concepts, resulting in non-binary ways of thinking about the past and the present, which allows for fluid movement between the two. In this regard, this chapter will investigate the emotive aspects of memory, in terms of the relationships between affect and memory, and the relationship between nostalgia and memory. This chapter will demonstrate how these aspects are possibly interconnected and how they inform one another, while they both simultaneously inform memory. This chapter branches off from the preceding chapter, specifically in terms of discussing how personal aspects of memory, such as affect and nostalgia, inform identity.

I explore the concept of affect in relation to the emotional associations forged with memories and objects, which supports the notions set out in the discussion of the nostalgic aspect of memory with regards to the idealisation of the past. I also discuss how objects can convey such ideas.

#### 4.2 Memory and Affect

This section investigates how the emotional associations that we forge with objects influence the way that we recollect the past. This suggests that the affect that is charged into objects is what makes them memorable and what transforms them into mnemonic objects (West 2003:55). As such, I investigate how emotion informs the object, transforming it into a mnemonic object. I relate these interests with my own experience by establishing a sense of significance with the objects from my grandparents' home when I interact with them. As such, I am intrigued by the emotional responses, or affective associations, that I have formed with the objects in question, and how such emotional responses can influence my recollections of my past.

The definition of affect suggests that to experience affect is to be moved emotionally (Cambridge University Press [Online]). In this regard, there is a higher possibility of an experience being remembered if there is an emotional association had with it<sup>43</sup>. In relation to dementia, what has been

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<sup>43</sup> I align this suggestion with the sentiments of Gordon Bower, a Cognitive Psychologist who studied human memory and emotion. He developed *Bower's Network Theory of Affect* which suggested four distinct ways in which mood could

forgotten can potentially be partially remembered through the emotion felt during, or in association with its occurrence.

However, it should also be noted that emotions too, fluctuate as they are influenced by our interpretations and perceptions in the present. This, once again highlights the instability of memory as it relates to emotion. In relation, it is important to note that the act of remembering is a subjective action because it occurs within the individual. This subjective and affective nature of memory piques my interest into how personal experiences, and physical and emotional states influence our perception, which infiltrates our memory. Through the engagement with my grandparents' objects, I investigate my own memories. The objects prompt an emotional response linked to my memories which, on a personal level, comments on the affective nature of memory.

In this regard, I am intrigued by the emotional and subjective side of memory, especially when investigating it in relation to the objects from my grandparents' home. I place specific emphasis on the symbolic role of the object because I believe that an objects' personal significance can drastically be heightened through its ability to stimulate memories of important life experiences. I suggest that individuals may even develop a reliance on objects to feel connected to their own past, as the emotional associations ascribed to those objects may assist in recalling past experiences. Therefore, individuals may invest a significant amount of emotional association into the object, to develop a sense of dependence on the materialistic object as a vessel for remembrance, allowing the object to function as a mnemonic device. This prompts me to question whether individuals are fearful of losing touch with their internal identity (emotions, memory, learnt perceptions or interpretations) which grants the action of giving an external and physical object such an intense significance. As such, I am interested in the ability of the object to act as a tool, which may assist an individual to feel in control of their perceived identity. This means that the object is considered as a form of assurance to remind an individual of their past self.

The Aristotelian philosophy of memory suggests that recollection is a form of affection; and that through evocation, we may understand the unexpected appearance of a memory (Ricoeur 2004:26). I use my jewellery to explore this notion through creating pieces from objects that, on a personal level, interlink the intangible notion of affect and its connection with my memories. I am interested in the emotional associations that I form with objects and how these objects (bestowed with emotion) allow

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have an observable effect on memory: (a) memory is facilitated when mood state at learning matches mood state at recall, (b) material with affective tone that is congruent with current mood is most easily retrieved from memory, (c) material with affective tone that is congruent with current mood is most easily learned, and (d) affectively intense material is learned best. (Salovey & Singer 1988:211).

me to access my memories. In this regard, the act of re-placing myself within my grandparents' home prompts me to reflect upon my childhood memories<sup>44</sup>. I also re-interact with their objects, which elicits a mixture of emotional associations and affective prompts when I am comparing the present with the past through a nostalgic lens<sup>45</sup>.

My art practice becomes a notion of accessing and enhancing my childhood memories through the transformation of my grandparents' objects, with which they are associated. Consequently, my jewellery pieces become visual embodiments of my past and present merging together. This creates a continuation and enhancement of the emotional associations that I have with the objects. When I re-place myself in the space of my grandparents' home and re-interact with their objects, I re-connect with the original experiences I had in that environment. This prompts me to also establish new associations with the space and the objects. I use the actual objects from their home in my jewellery praxis to comment on the nostalgic association that I have with the space of their home. I bring these nostalgic elements into the present, which allows the affective properties of the objects to remain captured and preserved<sup>46</sup>.

Gésine Hackenberg explores the emotional impact of utensils from daily life in her work, *Golden Cut*, as seen in Figure 26. Hackenberg challenges the arbitrary relationship between objects and jewellery through her work, by questioning how these ordinary objects become personally coveted (2006 [Online]). Hackenberg reinterprets the ancient techniques of repairing porcelain crockery. She adds a new dimension to this concept of restoration and reparation because she transforms the restored object into an independent piece of jewellery, which not only gives the object a new life but also imbues it with a new purpose (Hackenberg, 2006 [Online]).

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<sup>44</sup> This process of accessing memories of personal lived experiences, is known as episodic memory. Episodic memory is the ability to retrieve situations that have long passed through unpredictable gentle indications. This allows for an individual to review a collection of personal experiences of the past that occurred at a particular time and place. These experiences are entirely specific and unique to the remembering individual, which separates their recollection to someone else's recollection of the same experience. (Zimmerman 2014 [Online]).

<sup>45</sup> The following section, namely Memory and Nostalgia, will discuss the relationship between memory and nostalgia. However, this section may reference nostalgia when it is relevant to affect.

<sup>46</sup> Hodgkin and Radstone define the experience of nostalgia as the feelings associated with 'looking back' to a place or time in the past, which generally reflect a bitter-sweet, affectionate, positive relationship to what is lost (2003:42). I attempt to achieve the embodiment of the originality of my memories, in my jewellery pieces, however, I do acknowledge that a re-creation or re-enhancement will not be nearly as fulfilling as the actuality of that past moment within my memory.



Figure 26. Gésine Hackenberg. 2006. Necklace and Object. *Golden Cut*. Damaged plate, urushi lacquer on gilded textile, gold, silver chain.

As seen in Figure 27, I explore similar notions when I highlight the hairline fractures on my grandparents' porcelain crockery by tracing it with heirloom embroidery thread. The embellishment of these objects demonstrates a level of tension. The hairline fractures on the saucer represent my Ouma's fractured and fragmented memory, yet I embellish the object as a means of mending these cracks and fractures. Personally, these embellishments symbolise the way that I idealise the past and refer to the time before my Ouma's diagnosis, where she had apparent control over her memory. However, the cracks emphasise the reality of the present moment where she has almost no control left over what she is able to recollect.



Figure 27. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Neckpiece. Found porcelain saucer, embroidery thread, lace, felt thread and sterling silver. Digital photograph.

Jill Bennett refers to the transmission of bodily affect memory and argues that “affect associated with past experiences may be transmitted to others, particularly through visual media” (2003:23). In this sense, memory has the capacity to touch, affect and trigger emotion within others. Affect is the experience of sensation in the present. Therefore, expressing affect through visual media as an art practice results in the registration of emotion contained within memory. When emotion is registered within memory, it allows it to be directly experienced again through the body, as if the memory is being experienced again. This communicates a level of bodily affect. I suggest that the physical body holds great prominence in the process of experience and thereafter, the affective development as response to the experience and the environment within which the experience occurred. Therefore, the body is a central platform for experience to occur as well as a basis for reflection, externalisation, and processing experience into memory.



On the contrary, it is considered that within memory, emotions become “ideas, representations and representation inherently implies distance and perspective” (Bennett 2003:27). This suggests that although we remember that we have felt an emotion, we cannot remember just how that emotion felt. We can only access a memory of that emotion and therefore, not entirely access how that emotion was originally felt. To access only the memory of that emotion suggests that emotions may not be *retrievable* from memory, but they are *revivable*. (James cited in Bennett 2003:27). This suggests that when we recollect a memory that prompts those same sensations and emotions that we initially felt, we produce a new bout of emotion that is associated with the same memory. This is where a correlation between the nature of interpretation and the nature of emotion can be recognised as each fluctuate and depend on their activation within the present.

Bennett argues that an experience that cannot be spoken of, can only be registered visually. This produces visual icons in the mind’s eye which implies that visual icons provide the “most effective means of storing and retrieving memories, since the eye can function as a mute witness” (2003:31). Consequently, I apply the idea of visual icons to be the most effective way to store and retrieve memory, by means of the objects from my grandparents’ home. By using these objects that have high affectional value to me, in my jewellery praxis, I am underpinning the mnemonic function of art. Through my jewellery praxis and the jewellery pieces that I create, I attempt to express the abstract and intangible idea of emotional associations and affective sensations. My objective with my jewellery pieces is for them to embody continuations of the emotional associations with the objects, relative to the memories and narratives contained within my grandparents’ objects.

When I deal with affect within my jewellery praxis, I acknowledge that the objects used may be visual triggers for others that view and interact with my jewellery pieces. This, however, would emphasise the relationship between affect and memory, because my work is then *felt* rather than just *seen*. I then regard my jewellery pieces as stimuli because there lies an integral involvement of bodily affect in response to my visual objects.

This discussion emphasised that there is a notion of affect present when one accesses memory. This affect associated with accessing the past within the present, elicits notions of nostalgia as the past is emotionally charged. In this regard, the following section will discuss the relationship between memory and nostalgia and how nostalgia idealises memory.

### 4.3 Memory and Nostalgia

This section investigates the relationship between memory and nostalgia. However, Megill suggests there to be a distinct difference between memory and nostalgia when he states that:

...nostalgia is oriented *outward* from the subject (the individual person; the group), focusing attention on a real or imagined past; [whereas] memory is oriented *toward* the subject and is concerned with a real or imagined past only because that past is perceived as crucial for the subject, even constitutive of it (1998:193,197).

This suggests that memory serves to function the subject, in terms of identity formation and nostalgia serves the past, whether it be real or imagined, to keep it alive. Both phenomena (memory and nostalgia) work together in terms of how they both serve some event, place or thing (whether it be real or imagined) which the individual feels the need to remember. (van der Merwe 2013:25). This suggests that regardless of their distinct natures, nostalgia and memory have contributing factors that overlap and function co-dependently for the subject.

English Professor, Andreea Rítivoi notes that nostalgia encourages one to differentiate and to contrast their own past, which prompts it to function from a potent interpretative stance and as a tool of comparison and analysis (cited in Keightley & Pickering 2012:11). This suggests that nostalgia is integral in the contrast between the past and the present. Hodgkin and Radstone note that nostalgia expresses a contrast between *there and here* and *then and now*. The absent, lost or missing past is valued as somehow better, simpler, less fragmented and more comprehensible than its existing alternative in the present. (2003:82). Nostalgia has been associated with how losses and gains across time are handled, assimilated, and how private worlds move within and against the alternating currents of change in national and transnational worlds (Keightley & Pickering 2012:114). Nostalgia can be considered a direct consequence of modernity, resulting in a separation between experience and expectation. From a post-humanist perspective, this demonstrates how one responds to continuously changing material and symbolic environments, which makes it both existentially and socially valuable. Nostalgia allows us to understand change so that it can be reconciled with the remembered past in relation to strands of continuity in the present. (Keightley & Pickering 2012:115).

Nostalgia is not usually based off, or emphasised by, actual memories as it is usually governed by a sense of longing. Susan Stewart suggests that “nostalgia is a sadness without an object” (1993:23). This implies that nostalgia is a sadness that creates a longing, which is emphasised by the distance between the past and the present. It is important to note that nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss. Loss is a necessity for nostalgia to operate. Nostalgia is recognised in the present because of the loss of the past, consequently the loss of time. Similarly, Stewart suggests that “it is in this gap

between resemblance [of the past] and identity [of the past within the present] that nostalgic desire arises” (1993:145).

The nature of nostalgia inevitably glorifies and idealises the past. Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Pretoria, David Medalie, supports this notion when stating that nostalgia encourages “imaginative transformations and reinventions of memory”, which inevitably leads to the idealisation of the past (2010:37).

I transform my grandparents’ objects into jewellery pieces by drilling into them, sawing into them and removing aspects from them. This is my own process to preserve the objects, but not in a traditional way. From a postmodernist perspective, and within a contemporary jewellery context, this communicates a challenging of the traditional and conventional norms. Moreover, I challenge the pre-conceived functionality of objects, while I also exceed the boundaries of what can be considered jewellery. Some individuals might see my means of preservation as having ruined the objects’ uniqueness and beauty. However, I see my means of preservation, and the transamination of the objects into jewellery pieces as a visual depiction of how I merge my grandparents’ past with my past, present and future. This merging represents the great shift between their history and my history, in a South African context. My grandparents’ and I each have a vastly different understanding of South Africa’s past, relevant to each of our timelines of living in South Africa. However, my grandparents’ understanding informs my upbringing and how I experience and understand South Africa today.

My Ouma’s means of preservation of my grandparents’ objects was through the storage of them<sup>47</sup>. This elicits a sense of fragility in terms of the history and associations around these objects which implies a sense of preciousness and delicacy when handling and viewing these objects. I believe that she stored these objects away to preserve the memories shared with my Oupa. This communicates a sense of nostalgia and the idealisation of the past, as though the storage and retrieval of the objects would assist my Ouma in to maintain her memory, regardless of its deterioration. However, my Ouma’s preservation and storage of my grandparents’ objects goes hand in hand with my Ouma’s deteriorating memory. The preciousness and sentimentality that is associated with my grandparents’

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<sup>47</sup> My Ouma systematically stored majority of her and my Oupa’s objects away in the cupboards of their home. I retrieved most of the objects that I have used in my jewellery pieces by unravelling them out of the tissue paper they were wrapped in, and removing them from the boxes and cupboards that they were stored in. The veiling of these objects in tissue paper suggests a sense of secretiveness and protection from external influences and the eyes of others. This suggests an ironic parallel between depriving the objects of the attention and yet, in a mysterious way, simultaneously drawing attention to the objects. (Fink 2018:27).

objects, especially as a means for my Ouma to preserve her memories shared with my Oupa, suggests that there is a fear of loss or damage to the objects and simultaneously a fear of loss or damage to those memories. The fear of losing more of her already deteriorated memory causes her to maintain the preservation of the objects. I challenge this fear by removing my grandparents' objects from their concealment and revealing them in a new context. I remove them from their protected, hidden spaces and place them within a contemporary jewellery context. Consequently, I remove their usual functionality and association, but I do not remove their embedded history. I instead, enhance the history of the objects by transforming them into new objects which allows the original history to live on while the objects still gain new associations in their new form.

In this regard, I view the process of translating and expressing the history embedded in my grandparents' objects into practical jewellery pieces, as a means of preservation through a nostalgic lens. However, when I transform these objects into jewellery pieces, I disrupt and fracture and reassemble them which directly contrasts my Ouma's urge to preserve. Through my jewellery praxis, I am both preserving and destroying the original forms of the objects but creating a new form from their remnants. This communicates a binary of preservation and the impossibility to do so accurately, without idealising or romanticising the past. As such, I challenge the way that I idealise and romanticise the past. I began to investigate techniques of preservation that could emphasise the embedded history of the objects, through practical means. Pressing fresh flowers is a creative technique that my Ouma taught me from a young age. This act of preservation aligns with the attempt to capture an aspect of the past in hope that it remains in its original form. This externalises the idealistic and sentimentalised way in which I remember. The memories I have with my Ouma teaching me this technique are revived when I presently engage in the therapeutic process of retrieving flowers from nature and pressing them.

In my design process, I engage with my grandparents' photographs as a means of engaging with their past. I acknowledge that photographs contain a complexity of their own. By viewing my grandparents' photographs as a means of engaging with their past, I intertwine the complexity of photographs with the complexity of memory. I distort and disrupt their photographs to explore ways in which I can distort and disrupt their objects, toward their transformation into jewellery pieces. In this regard, I use the same distortion and disruption techniques upon my grandparents' objects as which I experimented with upon their photographs. One way in which I distort and disrupt the photographs and objects is by applying pressed flowers upon them. I merge mine and my Ouma's past by layering the pressed flowers (which reflect my past) over her photographs and my grandparents' objects (which reflect her/their past). Consequently, I reconstruct her/their memory and

mine, I take fragments from each and develop a new memory<sup>48</sup>. As such, I give the associations with pressed flowers, my grandparents' objects and my Ouma's old photographs a new meaning. This process comments on, illustrates and translates the tension between mine and my Ouma's memory. My Ouma's memory is deteriorating, while mine is developing and growing. This process also demonstrates the tension between the idealisation of the past (when my Ouma still had full access to her memories), and present reality (her having a nearly fully deteriorated memory).

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<sup>48</sup> I apply the meaning of this process to my jewellery pieces and art objects when I include pressed flowers in their creation, such as in the teacup series present in section 3.2.



Figure 28. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooch. Pressed flowers set in resin, found porcelain teacup base. Digital photograph.



Figure 29. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Object. *The Tea Set of Memory*. Pressed flowers set in resin, found porcelain teacup saucer. Digital photograph.



Although I use my grandparents' photographs only in my design process, it is necessary to acknowledge the compelling power that photographs have. Moreover, in a South African context, it is necessary to acknowledge that my grandparents' photographs capture a very specific time in history and therefore express a very specific narrative. The photographs reference times that are not familiar to me, but only to my grandparents. The layering of different materials that are familiar to me onto the photographs, creates a link between their past and my present. In doing so, I acknowledge the history and narrative expressed in the photograph. I consider my interaction with the photograph, through my creative practice, as the merging of both my own and my grandparents' histories and narratives, whilst also disrupting them. My creative engagement with these photographs links the personal content, contexts, and meaning behind the photographs to broader aspects of shared social memory and national identity (Kuhn 2010:304).

My interactions with these photographs in my design process is self -reflexive and allows me to simultaneously interact and acknowledge moments of difficulty in South Africa's past, regardless of me not having directly experienced them. In this regard, the layering of different materials on the photographs simultaneously disrupts and embellishes the difficult narrative associated with the era in which these photographs were captured. As such, through disrupting and embellishing these photographs, varied ways of viewing the photographs are created, which in turn, places emphasis on the distortion of our memory and how misleading our remembrances can be.



Figure 30. Lara Landsberg. 2020. *Memory: Layers and Im[press]ions 1*. Pressed flowers, found photograph, embroidery thread. Digital scan.



Figure 31. Lara Landsberg. 2020. *Memory: Layers and Im[pressions] 2*. Found photograph, embroidery thread, heirloom lace. Digital scan.



Figure 32. Lara Landsberg. 2020. *Memory: Layers and Im[pressions] 3*. Pressed flowers, found photograph, embroidery thread. Digital scan.

I reference the work of Bettina Speckner as she is known for her use of photography in her jewellery pieces and for “creating nostalgic narratives by gently altering ferrotypes<sup>49</sup> and translating them into jewellery” (Fink 2018:30). As seen in Figure 33, Speckner gives these historic photographs an abstract quality through her unique alteration of them. Her addition of precious stones, mounted on

top of the photograph, allows her to tell her own story alongside the captured remnants of the story in the photograph. Speckner recognizes the symbolic potential of the chosen components in her jewellery pieces, yet she deliberately keeps them open to multiple readings and connotations (den Besten 2012:43). The additional materials that she uses and their random placement on the photographs disturbs and disrupts the image in an uncanny way. The compelling content of the images that Speckner uses, alongside the combination of alternative materials with the images, directs our gaze and incites new meanings for all the elements present in her work. The borderline between embellishing and extending, distorting and hurting, is very narrow in Speckner's work. (den Besten 2012:43).

In this regard, the original meanings and associations with the images are no longer in the foreground. The image, now layered with a combination of new materials, has a new layered meaning. I suggest that there is also a play between the history of the image, versus the newness of the mounted materials. Therefore, suggesting a progression from past to present and a layering of time. Speckner's technique makes her jewellery pieces simultaneously an image and an object. She transforms the meanings and associations attached to jewellery pieces and extends the boundaries of conventional qualities and functions of jewellery. (Fink 2018:30) (den Besten 2012:44).



Figure 33. Bettina Speckner. 2010. Brooch. Ferrotypes, silver, baroque pearls, garnet.

I relate to Speckner's work by means of her alteration of pre-existing photographs, as I transform my grandparents' objects and photographs in a similar way. I combine the objects and photographs with different materials. Therefore, I layer new meanings and associations onto the pre-existing meanings and associations of the objects and photographs. In this regard, the layered photograph and object represents a merging collage of elements (materials), each with varied associations and meanings. I

layer the fragments of memory associated with those varying elements upon one another, and consequently reconstruct the original memories contained within the objects and photographs.

The jewellery pieces created from the combination of the materials and objects, is a wholistic embodiment of fragmented memories and narratives. By combining other materials with the existing objects and photographs, I layer my memory narrative over my grandparents' pre-existing memories and narratives embedded into the materials and objects<sup>50</sup>. In turn, this creates a visual combination of narratives, in the form of the jewellery pieces, which is accessible to the public eye. I relate to Speckner's work further by how I re-define the functionality of the objects by transforming them into jewellery pieces. The objects' boundaries of functionality and purpose are exceeded when they take on the new form of jewellery pieces.

The objects from my grandparents' home used within my jewellery pieces and art objects serve as vessels of memory and nostalgia combined. The objects' transformation transfers their embodied memory and nostalgia into their new forms as jewellery pieces and art objects. They maintain the remembrance of the moments experienced in my grandparents' home, which serves nostalgia. Simultaneously they serve memory by allowing those fond memories to be kept close (literally by placing the jewellery piece on the body, and figuratively through the reminder when viewing or interacting with the piece).

Figure 34, *Oupa's Little Princess* commemorates an aspect from my memories that I share with my Oupa that I treasure the most, being his reference to me as 'Oupas Little Princess'. The patterns that are sawn out of the metal components are copies of my Oupa's handwriting from one of the letters that I had received from him where he wrote: "Oupa's Little Princess". The deep and intense shades of red, as present in the enamel and embroidery thread aspects of the piece, mimic the process of oxidation that copper undergoes. I extended this mimesis by applying it to my Oupa's passing and my Ouma's memory loss. In this regard, this mimesis simultaneously symbolises the ageing of the body and then eventually its demise, and the deterioration and loss of memory.

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<sup>50</sup> In this regard, I transform these objects and photographs into mementos. The memento object is embodied by memories and narratives that are also passed on with the object. Therefore, the passing on and receiving of a memento becomes an expression of affection because it carries a "high personal value and becomes an emotional link between the persons involved" (Fink 2018:20). The objects from my grandparents' home act as mementos because they embody my grandparents' memories and their memory narratives, and in turn the memories I have of the time spent in their home. I enhance the memento quality of these objects when I transform the objects into jewellery pieces. By doing so, I emphasise the pre-existing elements of memory and narrative that are contained within the objects. The jewellery pieces become newly formed memento objects, which are open to gain further memory narratives.





Figure 34. Lara Landsberg. 2019. Brooch. *Oupa's Little Princess*. Oxidised sterling silver, Perspex, embroidery thread, copper, enamel. Digital photograph.

By reassessing and reconnecting with the objects from my grandparents' home, I bring the past into a dynamic relationship with the present, opening the possibility of critique in the movements made between them (Keightley & Pickering 2012:114). I use nostalgia to assist with the harsh contrasts between the past and the present that is associated with those objects. Nostalgia eases the anxiety that comes with how these objects remind me of my Oupa being alive and my Ouma's memory being whole.

The objects from my grandparents' home have a specific functional use associated with them, however transforming them into contemporary jewellery pieces and objects exceeds this preconceived capacity. Art historian, writer and jewellery curator, Liesbeth den Besten, emphasises that there is a place in contemporary jewellery design where domestic objects can be used as a reference to the everyday world of human beings. She states that "many jewellery artists today make jewels to be part of the everyday world that is filled with objects that have a domestic and ritual character in the life of human beings" (2012:55,56). By placing domestic objects within the realm of contemporary jewellery, the long-term tradition of preciousness, which is associated with jewellery, is also applied to these domestic objects. This allows them to attain a certain element of preciousness. The term domestic, however, is not solely applicable to objects, but to spaces too. Throughout my jewellery praxis, I use the objects obtained from my grandparents' home, but I also embark on a nostalgic remembrance of the memories of the actual space of their home. My grandparents' home was informed by the presence of these objects and therefore, so did my Ouma and Oupa become informed by these objects. Similarly, curator and jewellery critic, Monica Gaspar comments on the act of collecting objects and the space of the home:

The space of a house is a symbol of comfort, security, and memory; and therefore, the perfect place for accumulating objects – the personal museum of one's life. The house and the museum are both social spaces in which similar activities take place: people select and arrange objects in both contexts. It could be said that any grouping of objects is a type of exhibit, a portrait, and a statement of identity (2007 [Online]).

The act of choosing and collecting objects to be surrounded with, implies that there is a need to possess objects to turn a space into a home, and make it personal and safe. To reach out and touch a physical object and hold it in our hands, suggests the need to have something to hold onto, which speaks to the nostalgic aspect of memory (the longing of the past in attempt to hold onto it) (Fink 2018:19). The collection offers the object to be a referential symbol of the past, which results in the past serving the collection. In the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin; rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world. (Stewart 1993:151).

When the objects from my grandparents' home are worn on the body as contemporary jewellery pieces, they are removed from their original context, as domestic objects, and adopted by contemporary jewellery. Therefore, transferring the identity of the objects from the private domain of the home to the public sphere. The jewellery pieces can, however, comfortably enter the public sphere because they can be read and be interpreted by a wider audience due to the relational aspect of domestic objects used. This suggests that the removal of the objects from their original context and the placement of them into the public domain, will open a platform for varied interpretations of the objects to be drawn.

With regards to the contextualisation of this study within a New Materialist context, and from a post-humanist perspective, as outlined in the discussion found in section 0.6.2, I view the notion of functional objects having an element of preciousness associated with them to be a New Materialist approach to domestic objects, because they are affectively charged. While the functionality of these objects assists us in everyday life, we may feel close to, and dependant on them in another way or in a more sentimentalised way. From a post-humanist perspective, this is equivalent to how individuals have a co-constitutive relationship with their environment. From a New Materialist perspective, Garber describes these types of objects as those that serve the imagination. She explains that it is possible to have an affectively responsive relationship with objects that serve the imagination that is non-utilitarian. Each object holds some sort of meaning and association, regardless of its functional or non-functional nature. These types of objects seem to belong to us, while we simultaneously belong to them. (2019:8).

The relevance and significance of objects is usually associated with their function, yet the act of detaching them from their functional context gives them the power to stand on their own and serve



another function (Fink 2018:36). Noting the attention and devotion given to objects allows us to realise their significance. In this regard, British jeweller, Lin Cheung elaborates on how a direct link can be made between jewellery and daily life objects, in terms of the value we place onto them. She states that:

By observing how and what additional values are placed onto jewellery through the wearing and owning of it, we can aim to fully address the part that contemporary jewellery can play towards a greater understanding of the personal and social values manifest[ed] through all objects (2006:23)<sup>51</sup>.

The objects from my grandparents' home, regardless of their functional or non-functional nature, embody a specific meaning for me because of my Ouma and Oupa's interaction with them in the past. Knowing that my grandparents handled these objects and cherished them, references their past before I knew them.

As seen in Figures 35 and 36, by transforming my grandparents' domestic objects into jewellery pieces, I place them into the contemporary jewellery realm. This then transforms their functionality, forcing the viewer or wearer (the wider audience) to view the objects "in a new light and imbue it with a new function" (van der Merwe 2013:42). This underscores the value and meaning given to the objects beyond their usual functional association. The deliberate removal of functionality from the objects demonstrates an emphasis of how I imbue the object with a new function (in this case, as a jewellery piece). I relate this to the art objects that I create, when I deliberately dismantle porcelain teacups and saucers and grant them a new function, as an art object, in my series, *The Tea Set of Memory*. I view the fragmented pieces teacups and saucers as fragments of memory. These fragments of memory embody the new meaning and functionality of the teacups and saucers, as art objects. On the one hand, these teacups and saucers function to serve the remembrance of those fragments of memory. Yet, on the other hand, by selectively removing aspects of the teacups and saucers, I am deliberately choosing what to remember and what to forget, in terms of the memories associated with those objects. This process employs nostalgia to choose and remember certain elements of memory in a certain, idealised way.

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<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Swiss jewellery artist, Otto Künzli, suggests that it is not the visual attraction that makes [the] piece powerful. The emotional value and the history of the material is in the foreground. The pieces raise question and provokes them. He points out what a powerful emotional effect a piece of jewellery can put out to us, how much we identify with it and how strong our attachment to it can be. In return, however, we also write down our story in the material itself. (Fink 2018:21).



Figure 35. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Objects. *The Tea Set of Memory*. Pressed flowers, found porcelain teacup saucer, found porcelain teacup, sterling silver. Digital photograph.

I display the teacups on top of the saucers, like how they would usually be displayed for their functional use, however their highly noticeable distortion contradicts their actuality as teacups and saucers. I relate this distortion to the fragmented and non-linear nature of memory and nostalgia. Their placement in their usual way of display speaks to the idealisation of memory in the present, through the process of nostalgia. Whereas their distortion refers to the fragmentation of memory. This contradictory way of display alongside the disruption of the objects, serves as a metaphor for the nature of memory.

I acknowledge that others (viewers and wearers of my jewellery pieces and art objects) may not have the same relationship with my grandparents' objects as I do. This emphasises that no two people would share the exact same memory of the same event. Therefore, no two people would harbour the same nostalgic longing. Similarly, Bal states that "it has been convincingly argued that since viewers bring their own cultural baggage to images, there can be no such thing as a fixed, predetermined, or unified meaning" (1999:71). Although the others who view and wear my jewellery pieces and art objects may not harbour the same relationship with my grandparents' objects, there may still exist a certain level of recognition between the viewer, wearer, and object. In this regard, the relationship I have with my grandparents' objects versus the way in which others may view and interact with my jewellery pieces and art objects refers to the informing relationship between personal and public memory. My individual process of remembering is placed into the public domain when others view and wear my jewellery pieces and art objects. As such, collective processes of remembering are activated. Both processes of remembering are central to nostalgia because each inform what remembrances and longing will be ignited by viewing the objects incorporated in the jewellery pieces and art objects.



Figure 36. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Objects. *The Tea Set of Memory*. Found porcelain teacup saucer, found porcelain teacup, sterling silver, embroidery thread. Digital photograph.

This section demonstrated the interlinking and informing relationship between memory and nostalgia and how the presence of objects can disrupt and influence memory and nostalgia. It also emphasised how nostalgia is integral to memory's relationship with identity and toward the development of identity. The subjective nature of nostalgia and its influence upon memory inevitably contributes to the instability of memory, especially because of its ability to idealise the past.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how affect and nostalgia are emotive elements that create a sense of familiarity and relatedness to the generalised elements of the public sphere and identity, and their integral part within memory. Affect and nostalgia provide sensation, sensitivity, and a means of connection between the personal and public. Affect and nostalgia are shaped by memory but also shape memory. The personalised nature of memory and its informing relationship with identity, deem affect and nostalgia as contributory to the uniqueness of identity. Identities are formative of the collective, public sphere, which too are informed by memory. However, affect and nostalgia are the grounding basics to which we can return to distinguish our own memory and our own identity within the public realm.

In this regard, this chapter communicates to the overall objective of this study as it illustrates that objects can govern a deeper meaning which exceeds their utilitarian value. Affect and nostalgia, as personalised elements of memory, transcend objects into vessels of personal history. Moreover, these elements allow one to understand their own identity in relation to their experiences and memories.

My use of these elements is threefold: to understand my own experiences and memories, to understand my own identity, and to interpret my grandparents' objects within the historical context in which they were acquired.

## Conclusion

This dissertation theoretically investigates a multiplicity of elements that influence memory. These elements all prove the unstable and fragmented nature of memory. My jewellery praxis allows me to critically analyse my personal memory by re-engaging with and transforming objects from my grandparents' home. In turn, my practical body of work, as a mutually informative component to my theoretical engagements, stimulates critical conversation within the public realm, with regards to the fragile and fragmented collective memory of South Africa. The interlinking relationship between my theoretical component and the practical component of this study, leads to an understanding of my grandparents' objects, and the jewellery pieces created from them. They act as cultural signifiers and mnemonic devices, which communicate more than their utilitarian purpose.

Chapter One serves as an overview and introduction to memory, outlining the foundational concepts that inform this study. This overview flows into a discussion about the hermeneutics of memory. This chapter aided in achieving the objective of this study, which demonstrated the role of interpretation within the personal and the public realm of memory. My grandparents' objects elicit interpretation in my personal memory. My jewellery pieces which incorporate these objects and prompt interpretation in public memory. The multiplicity of interpretations in the public sphere illustrates the fragility and fragmentation of memory.

Chapter Two investigates the fragile and fragmented nature of memory and is informed by the hermeneutical investigation of memory conducted in Chapter One. In this regard, interpretation is equivalent to construction. When my grandparents' objects elicit interpretation in my memory, I construct a new memory around those objects, which is based on my interpretation of them. This emphasises the fragmented nature of memory as new constructs of memory that are continuously being established. This chapter also investigates the function that the imagination plays in the reconstruction of memory, specifically concerning its function to construct connections between that which is forgotten and that which is fictionalised. These elements align with my Ouma's diagnosis of dementia, which demonstrates their impact on her memory. This chapter illustrates the fragmented and fragile nature of the personal memory of the individual. In this regard, it also illustrates how a collective of individuals can have a collective memory that is fragmented and fragile.

Chapter Three contextualises collective memory in a South African context. This discussion demonstrates how memory is shaped and passed on by generations and how collective accounts of memory infiltrate personal memory. This contextualisation informs how my grandparents' objects are placed and perceived in a public, cultural South African context (as cultural signifiers), versus how I personally perceive these objects (as mnemonic objects). This informs the following discussion

about the influence of memory on identity construction. This chapter also explores the fragility of memory in a larger South African context and how the personal realm is identified and placed in the public realm.

Chapter Four elaborates on elements that contribute to personal identity construction. These elements also inform memory and how the individual affectionally or nostalgically remembers. This chapter demonstrates that the objects from my grandparents' home can communicate more than their utilitarian purpose.

Through my theoretical and practical investigations, I have gained significant insights into the nature of memory. I can conclude that memory is fluid and open to manipulation, distortion, and influence. Memory is embodied by a variety of elements. These elements are continuously in flux, which contributes to the unstable, fragmented, and fragile nature of memory. However, memory is also a necessary cognitive tool to make sense of these continuously morphing elements that embody memory. I perceive my grandparents' objects and my creative jewellery praxis as representations of the extensive, undefined, and limitless nature of memory. I transform, translate, morph, and distort the memories, narratives and meanings carried with these objects, by transforming them into jewellery pieces. However, this only extends and expands their possibility of gaining more memories, narratives, and meanings. This is a never-ending process, for as long as these objects and jewellery pieces are being interacted with. The interpretations of them will continuously evolve, which will in turn, continuously add layers of association, memory, narrative and meaning to the objects and pieces.

In this regard, I view my practical and theoretical explorations as an accumulation of fragments that take wholistic form, through means of my practical exhibition and written thesis. These components accompany and inform one another continuously but remain open-ended. Consequently, like the fluctuating and fragmented nature of memory, I believe the interpretations and meanings of my jewellery pieces and thesis will also fluctuate when reflected upon in retrospect. This continuously leaves my jewellery pieces and written thesis as fragments, only to be constructed together and understood in relation to the present moment in which they are being viewed and interpreted.



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## Addendum



Figure 37. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Exhibition Title Displays. *Illusive Objects*. Found wooden circular boards for pottery wheel, laser engraved lettering. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 38. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Exhibition Display. *Illusive Objects*. Found wooden circular boards and cast-iron stands. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.





Figure 39. Lara Landsberg, 2021. Exhibition Display. *Illusive Objects*. Found wooden circular boards and cast-iron stands. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 40. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Exhibition Display. *Illusive Objects*. Found wooden circular boards and cast-iron stands. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.





Figure 41. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Neckpiece. Sterling silver, embroidery thread, felt thread, found porcelain shards. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 42. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Jewellery pieces on display in ornate wooden boxes. Found wooden ornate boxes, sterling silver, oxidised sterling silver, embroidery thread, paper, Perspex, copper, enamel. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 43. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 34 on display in ornate wooden box. Found wooden ornate boxes, oxidised sterling silver, embroidery thread, Perspex, copper, enamel. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 44. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 17 on display. Object. *Mango & Memory: Deterioration*. Mango skins, heirloom lace, wooden embroidery clamp, embroidery thread. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 45. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 20 on display. Neckpiece. Found porcelain teacups, embroidery thread, found wooden clay sculpting tool, enamel paint, pressed flowers, lace, felt, sterling silver. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.





Figure 46. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 27 on display. Neckpiece. Found porcelain saucer, embroidery thread, lace, felt thread and sterling silver. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.





Figure 47. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figures 7 (*A Deep Dive*) and 25 on display. Brooches. Found porcelain shard, embroidery thread, found wooden clay sculpting tools, sterling silver, enamel, copper, Perspex. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 48. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Earrings. Raw porcelain clay sculptures, embroidery thread, sterling silver.  
Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 49. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Earrings. Raw porcelain clay sculptures, embroidery thread, sterling silver. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 50. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Earrings. Raw porcelain clay, found wooden clay sculpting tools, embroidery thread, sterling silver. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 51. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooch and Neckpiece. Raw porcelain clay, found wooden clay sculpting tools, embroidery thread, sterling silver, felt thread. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 52. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Neckpiece. Raw porcelain clay, found wooden clay sculpting tools, embroidery thread, sterling silver, felt thread. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



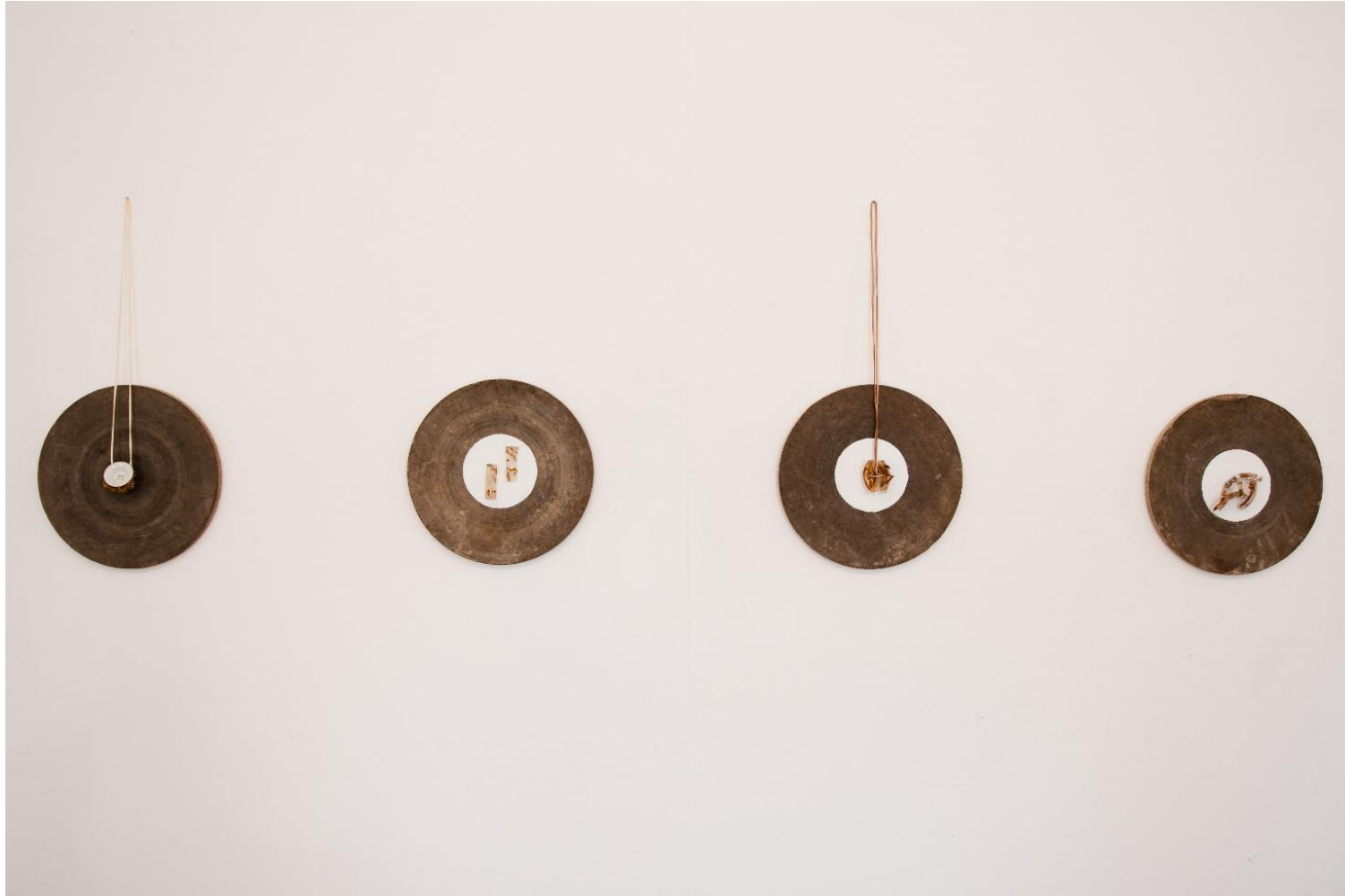


Figure 53. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figures 15 (Earrings: *Bittersweet Slices*), 16 (Pendant: *Bittersweet Slices*) and 28 (Pendant) on display. Mango skins, sterling silver, resin, pressed flowers set in resin, found porcelain teacup base. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 54. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooch. Mango skins, sterling silver, resin, enamel paint, embroidery thread. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 55. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11 on display. Neckpiece, Brooches and Earrings. Glass, crushed found porcelain beads, embroidery thread, sterling silver, enamel paint, felt thread, Perspex, copper, enamel. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 56. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 36 on display. Objects. *The Tea Set of Memory*. Found porcelain teacup saucer, sterling silver, embroidery thread. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 57. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 36 on display. Objects. *The Tea Set of Memory*. Found porcelain teacup, sterling silver, embroidery thread. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.





Figure 58. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 35 on display. Objects. *The Tea Set of Memory*. Pressed flowers, found porcelain teacup, sterling silver. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.





Figure 59. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 35 on display. Objects. *The Tea Set of Memory*. Pressed flowers, found porcelain teacup saucer, sterling silver. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 60. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 29 on display. Object transformed into a Neckpiece. *The Tea Set of Memory*. Pressed flowers set in resin, found porcelain teacup saucer, embroidery thread, sterling silver. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 61. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Figure 24 on display. Pendant. Glazed porcelain clay, embroidery thread, felt thread, sterling silver.  
Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.





Figure 62. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooch. Glazed porcelain clay, embroidery thread, sterling silver, magnets. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.



Figure 63. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Pendant. Found ornate box, embroidery thread, pressed flowers, felt thread. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.

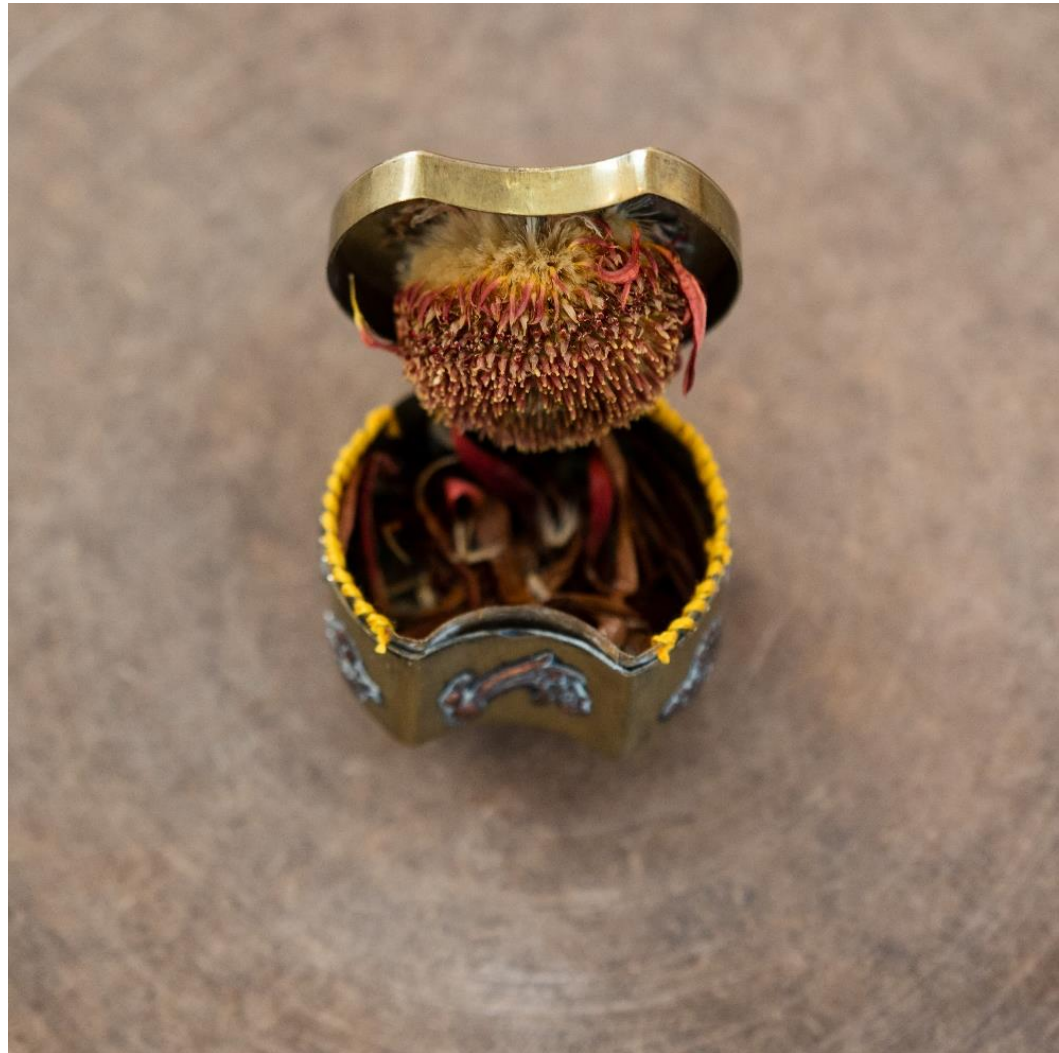


Figure 64. Lara Landsberg. 2021. Brooch. Found ornate box, embroidery thread, pressed flowers, sterling silver, magnets. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.





Figure 65. 2021. A special moment captured: Ouma viewing my exhibition in person. Digital photograph: Tal Chowney.