

HOMING: Navigating the notions of home

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the complexities of home through the exploration of the embodiment of architecture, both human and non-human. I see the notion of home as a multifarious, visceral experience; therefore my investigation is informed by my own lived experience. I investigate the notion of home in terms of locale, history, identity and memory. My argument is informed by two phenomenological texts, namely *The Soul of the White Ant* by South African poet Eugene Marais and *The Poetics of Space* by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. I investigate these texts as well as the work of three selected South African contemporary artists, namely Nicholas Hlobo, Joani Groenewald and Zanele Muholi, in conjunction with my own artistic practice. I demonstrate the concept of home as navigating through time and space by employing the use of narrative in this thesis and the particular configuration of my art installations.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die ingewikkeldheid van tuiste deur die vergestaltung van menslike én nie-menslike argitektuur te verken. My ondersoek is geanker in my eie geleefde ervarings, en daarom sien ek die idee van tuiste as 'n veelsoortige, innerlik-beliggaamde ervaring. Ek ondersoek die idee van tuiste in terme van ligging, geskiedenis, identiteit en herinnering. My argument word ondersteun deur twee fenomenologiese tekste, naamlik *The Soul of the White Ant* deur die Suid-Afrikaans outeur Eugene Marais, en *The Poetics of Space* deur die Franse filosoof Gaston Bachelard. Ek ondersoek beide tekste, asook die werk van drie kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars, Nicholas Hlobo, Joani Groenewald en Zanele Muholi in verhouding tot my eie kunspraktyk. Deur die gebruik van narratief in die tesis en die spesifieke opset van my kunsinstallasies toon ek aan dat die idee van tuiste 'n reis deur tyd en ruimte behels.

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... Vir die een wat my letsels versier...

Vir Dot.

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INTRODUCTION

HOMING

In this thesis, as well as in my art practices, I investigate space, place, and material to explore the embodiment¹ of home found through inherited objects and architecture².

I see the notion of home as a multifarious, visceral³ experience. To explore this notion of home, I draw from two key texts namely *The Soul of the White Ant*⁴ by Eugene Marais and *The Poetics of Space*⁵ by Gaston Bachelard, as well as the work of three selected South African contemporary artists, namely Nicholas Hlobo, Joani Groenewald and Zanele Muholi, in conjunction with my own artistic practice.

In South African poet Eugene Marais's manuscript, *The Soul of the White Ant*, the human body is used to describe the inner workings of a termite colony. Marais determines that the entire termitary forms a unity akin to a highly developed animal, the only difference being, according to Leon Rousseau⁶ (1982:274) that it is immobile. Eugene Marais consequently describes the termitary as a metaphor for the human psyche.

¹ A touchable or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling. Author's Xiaobo and Yuelin explain, (2014:166) "embodiment" was first proposed by Merleau-Ponty, a French phenomenologist. Merleau-Ponty believed that the perceptual subjects of humans are their bodies and that humans interact with the world through their bodies, perceive and understand the world through the effect of their bodies on the objective world.

² Defined by Oxford Online Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2016, s.v. 'architecture') as the complex or carefully designed structure of something. In this thesis I explore both human and non-human architecture.

³ Relating to deep inward feelings rather than to the intellect; also relates to intuition (Merriam-Webster, 1882).

⁴ First published in Afrikaans in 1925 as "*Die Siel van die Wit Mier*" and translated into English in 1937. *The Soul of the White Ant* is the result of Marais's ten-year study of the habits of termites, or white ants. He proposes his extraordinary theory that the termitary is in fact a separate composite animal at a certain stage of development.

⁵ First published in French in 1958 as "*La Poétique de L'espace*", translated into English, in 1969, it remains one of the most appealing and lyrical explorations of home. Bachelard takes the reader on a journey from cellar to attic, to show how our perceptions of houses and other shelters shape our thought, memories and dreams.

⁶ Author of *The Dark Stream: The story of Eugene Marais*, the autobiography of Eugene Marais.

In *The Poetics of Space* French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1969:47) describes a house that has been experienced as “not just an inert box”. His study breathes life into geometric spaces and in his words, “inhabited space transcends geometric space” (Bachelard, 1969:47). He relates the house as metaphor of the human psyche, and *The Poetics of Space* becomes a process of navigation through the deep recesses of the human mind. The concept of home appears to be intrinsically linked to the site of the house.

The notion of home is also explained in an article entitled, *New meanings of “home” in South Africa*, by Professor Maria Marchetti-Mercer⁷ (2006:192), in which Marchetti-Mercer cites Geomatti’s thought that “[h]ome is a concept, not a place, it is a state of mind where self-definition starts”.

0.1. Topic and Motivation

In this thesis and in my art practices I investigate the notion of home by examining my own home and the objects within it. Through the use of specific materials and their sculptural reconfiguration within spaces I aim to illustrate and navigate the notion of home. By the use of my own autobiographical accounts and lived⁸ experiences I demonstrate that my notion of home is influenced by locale, history, memory and identity. Both local and international authors and a selection of phenomenological texts including *The Soul of the White Ant* by South African author Eugene Marais and *The Poetics of Space* by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard inform my argument. Both these authors write from their own lived experiences within the framework of phenomenology.

⁷ Maria Marchetti-Mercer is a professor of psychology at the University of Pretoria

⁸ From the German word, *Erleben*, meaning to live through (Blackwell Reference Online, 2004 s.v. ‘erleben’).

0.1.1. An overview of the concept of home

I mentioned in the introduction that my notion of home is multifarious. Furthermore, I investigate the notion of home as a visceral experience of architecture. In the paragraphs to follow I will briefly give an overview of the main threads found in literature examining the notion of home.

The concept of home is often investigated in terms of architecture, history, identity, and memory. These elements also aid in shaping my notion of home.

0.1.2. The architecture of locale

The term locale⁹ contains in it both space¹⁰ and place¹¹. When referring to the architecture of locale, it becomes evident that locale/location is often investigated for its physical qualities. For example, it can refer to the site of a termitary or the home of a colony of termites, or the site of a house.

In a survey of literature on the topic of home this focus on physicality becomes clear, as home is often only defined by locale (place and space). Place and space are frequently informed by displacement¹².

⁹ A specific place or position also referred to as a location. Within a South African context the term "location" also refers to informal settlements or townships usually found on the outskirts of towns and cities. These locations were the result of segregation laws implemented by the Apartheid government and led to the displacement of communities of people. Although the implementation of these laws was officially abandoned in 1994, these informal settlements still exist (Findley & Ogbu, 2011).

¹⁰ A continuous area or expanse within which all things exist and move (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2016, s.v. 'space').

¹¹ According to Eric Prieto (2013) place is a space in which distance is not pertinent, the locus of desire, a setting to which individuals are emotionally and culturally attached. It is a locale whose form, function and meaning are self-contained within boundaries of the physical contiguity.

¹² In contemporary theory, displacement is convergent with the term 'diaspora', which was initially used "to denote the dispersal of Jewish people" but is used in contemporary theory as a "widespread term", applied to the "great variety of global migrations and exiles of the twentieth century" (Wilmse, 2010:2).

Displacement is most often described as being a “loss of home”¹³ (Fourie, 2011; Wilmse, 2010; and Basserabie, 2004). Within a South African context, locale, migration, and physical displacement have a long history¹⁴.

0.1.3. The architecture of memory

The ways in which we are known to recollect or remember home, constantly informs our present notions of home. Memory or the act of remembering, much like history, is influenced by both the individual’s memory and by society or collective consciousness (Marchetti-Mercer, 2006).

Author Joëlle Bahloul’s¹⁵ book, *The architecture of memory, a Jewish-Muslim household in colonial Algeria 1937-1969* (1996), provides an example of how

¹³Reasons for this include the role of both World Wars as catalysts of migration and diaspora over the last century. Within the last century the field of social sciences and sociology have provided research and studies of Jewish and Asian global migrations and diaspora (Fourie, 2011:2).

In a recent article on human migration, Professor Alex Betts, director of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford, writes on the current crisis facing the world as the numbers of displaced people worldwide have increased drastically. Previously, he adds, the general assumption was that displacement only significantly affected the Middle East and Africa, but in recent years the crisis has finally reached Europe’s shores in excessive numbers. He continues to say that, “[r]efugees and displacement are likely to become a defining issue of the 21st century” (Betts, 2015). Adding to this, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHRC, n.d.), global forced displacement has increased in 2015, with record-high numbers.

¹⁴In her 2010 thesis entitled *The Phenomenon of Displacement in Contemporary Society and its Manifestations in Art*, Emma Wilmse notes some examples of colonial invasions of land, the history of forced removals in the Apartheid era and more recently, in 2008, the xenophobic attacks that caused the displacement of 46 000 foreigners in South Africa (Wilmse, 2010:2). Adding to this, a report by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHRC, n.d.) states that sub-Saharan Africa hosts the largest number of refugees recorded in 2015, at 4.4 million individuals.

In extending the conversation of place and displacement specific to South Africa into a larger global perspective, I find my own understanding of planetary migration and movement to be personal from the perspective of my paternal family’s migration to South Africa; and yet I understand that these disputes surrounding physical locations, and human and animal migrations, have formed part of our planet’s history for tens of thousands of years.

¹⁵Bahloul is a Professor of anthropology at Indiana University, Bloomington, her work focuses on an ethnographic exploration of the process of migration and its result in the diasporic experience of Jewish cultures in Europe.

the architecture of memory changes from a tangible experience into a historic interpretation of home. Bahloul explains how the re-telling of stories by aunts and uncles about their ancestral home after the family no longer lived there gradually shifted the house from a tangible reality to what she refers to as a “genealogical memory”¹⁶. These memories were being incorporated into, and became family history (Bahloul, 1996:1).

Joani Groenewald (2015:26), a contemporary South African artist, summarises a thought¹⁷ by American sociologist, Professor Michael Schudson, noting that “[m]emory is not a property of individual minds, but rather a diverse and shifting collection of material artifacts and social practices”. Groenewald additionally notes that memory is just as much a cultural and public phenomenon as it is personal and private, and that the two are mutually informative. The public memory influences private (individual) memory, and vice versa.

0.1.4. Identity: the architecture of the self

Self-identity and body can function as an embodiment¹⁸ of home¹⁹. Since the notion of home is largely subjective, each person will have a unique

¹⁶The idea of a shared memory has been present in literature for a long time; Carl Jung believed in the existence of a collective consciousness that connects all people, especially to previous generations (Basserabie, 2004:51) Individual memory often relies on society or public to be complete. Carl Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist who founded analytical psychology. His work has been influential not just in psychiatry but also in philosophy, anthropology, archaeology, literature and religious studies.

¹⁷From her dissertation, *Fragmented mnemonics: An investigation into contemporary jewellery as means of externalizing memory*.

¹⁸This statement is in agreement with Dr Leora Faber’s (2004:42) use of the term embodiment. Faber states that the body as the ‘lived body’ is a vehicle through which lived consciousness or physical being in the world is experienced and mediated. In this sense, the body becomes a locus of agency for the embodied subject in relation to various controlling cultural discourses.

understanding of the notion of home. Furthermore the notion of home is largely informed by the psyche, which lives in the body-mind, in the conscious, and in the unconscious.

Therefore the notion of home can be investigated through the self. South African artist Sue Williamson²⁰ (2008:102) states that she sees the body as an instrument of communication that is as profound as any spoken language. Furthermore, Emma Wilmse²¹ (2010:28) is of the opinion that the home is a suggestion of the self and symbolically associated with the human body and psyche. Furthermore Wilmse notes that the philosopher Martin Heidegger²² has argued this. Heidegger in Wilmse (2010:28) states that;

Dwelling or house is the primary attribute of our being – our essence in effect. We do not dwell because we have built, but we build because we dwell, because we are dwellers.

Consequently my own lived experiences and autobiographical accounts shape my investigation. According to Marike Le Roux²³ (Le Roux, 2013:1), to write an autobiography is to write one's own life²⁴.

¹⁹Wilmse (2010:43) states that the home as a symbolic place of meaning can be seen as a symbol of the self. Therefore remembering is crucial. Remembering takes place through our bodily and psychological interaction with place and the symbolic meanings that are generated by such interaction.

²⁰Sue Williamson is a South African artist and writer born in Litchfield, England in 1941. Her family immigrated to South Africa in 1948 (South African History Online, n.d).

²¹From her thesis dissertation *The Phenomenon of displacement in contemporary society and its manifestations in contemporary visual art*.

²²Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher, widely acknowledged to be one of the most original and important philosophers of the 20th century. Heidegger's main interest was ontology or the study of being (Korab-Karpowicz, 2016).

²³From her thesis dissertation, *Narrating an unstable memory: A postmodern study of the fictional pasts in the auto/bio graphic novel*.

²⁴Furthermore, my own autobiographical accounts play a significant role in formulating my notion of home. In agreement to this, Wilmse (2010:43) states that lived memory is always located in individual bodies, their experience and their pain, even when it involves collective, political or generational memory.

Eugene Marais's *The Soul of the White Ant* and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* are both informed by the authors' own auto-biographical and lived experiences. Le Roux notes that writing a life story can be closely related to "the art of creating a self" which "offers the individual an opportunity to reify, to constitute, to create an identity" (Le Roux, 2013:1).

0.1.5. My ethnographic²⁵ understanding of the notion of home

My understanding of the notion of home is informed by my personal history²⁶. Clinical psychologist Darren Bassarabie²⁷ elaborates on the connection between the notion of home and history by explaining how our ideas are constructed within the context of our lives, history, discourse and relationships. Our ideas of home are intimately related to these processes, as are our identities. They do not arise in a vacuum nor can one necessarily trace a linear causal connection between them (Bassarabie, 2004:120). Consequently, my own history influences my notion of home.

As a first generation South African²⁸ with German ancestral history I grew up in a suburb of Pretoria mostly inhabited by middle-class white Afrikaans-speaking people.

²⁵In the field of Anthropology, Ethnography is the study of people and cultures. Ethnography has however grown over time to represent more than a qualitative look into an individual or group's life; "[t]he ethnographer goes beyond reporting events and details of experience. Specifically, he or she attempts to explain how these represent what we might call "webs of meaning", the cultural constructions, in which we live" (Hoey,2016).

²⁶As Raymond Aron notes (Njami, 2007:62), history only has value if we can directly apply it to our own context. The subjective understanding of my history and sense of place – my ancestral connections – inherited language, land and families become the personal ways that I make sense of and contextualize myself in the complexities of world migration, travel, location and relocation. My own personal history resonates with collective personal histories and allows me to understand my place in the context of a social and collective history.

²⁷ Bassarabie's 2004 thesis is titled *The search for home, a dialectics of alienation and belonging*.

²⁸ A large part of the white population in South Africa have strong European roots and represents fairly recent immigration to this country (ranging from first to third-generation immigrants). This latter group is of particular interest as many were born in South Africa yet hold a second passport, indicative of an allegiance to another country, to other roots. However, these are people who have contributed much to this country and as a result have strong emotional and economic attachments (Marchetti-Mercer, 2006:211).

Pretoria is one of the three capitals of South Africa, situated in the Gauteng province. I attended predominantly white, Afrikaans, Christian schools although my home languages were German and English, and my family was Catholic.

The context and history of one's family-of-origin becomes significant because of its influence on social experiences, which may impact the process of identity formation²⁹ (Marchetti-Mercer, 2006:197).

²⁹ Maria Marchetti-Mercer explores the link between one's history and one's identity, and states that "[w]ho one is and how one defines oneself are inextricably linked to where one comes from, where one finds oneself, and where one may be going. One must make sense of these different levels of experience in order to develop a sense of one's identity and find out where one truly belongs. However, the goal of this process should not be to achieve a fixed, one-dimensional sense of identity, as the journey is closely linked to one's social and historical experiences. Rather, one must make sense of, and find meaning in the many ambiguities and contradictions that often inform who one is" (2006:197). In agreement to this, author Simon Njami (2007:62) uses an example of an identification card, stating that they are used less to say who we are but rather they indicate where we are from. This type of identity refers to a sameness, an identification with a whole of which we are one of the elements – a nation.

0.2. Research Question and Aims

How does the retrieval of inherited objects, uninherited instinct³⁰, architecture, and lived experience illuminate / realise the notion of home in my art making processes?

The aim of this thesis is to investigate, through my art making, my notion of home by retrieving selected inherited objects, reincorporate and recontextualise them as sculptural form in various ways. In this way I aim to demonstrate how I can alter their meaning and re-examine my relationship to them and the history they embody.

I aim to demonstrate the notion of home through contemporary artworks and various architectures, both human and non-human. Furthermore I will demonstrate that the notion of home is subjective in nature, and therefore the “self” acts as the site for the embodiment of the notion of home.

30. According to Marais (1937:49), we find hereditary instinct throughout nature, inherited by an organism only from parents with similar instinct. Through his observations of termite colonies, however, Marais discovered what he termed “uninherited instinct”: specific behaviours or traits displayed by the offspring but not found in the parents at any stage. For example, photophobia (fear of light) is a behaviour displayed by the worker and soldier termites but never by the parental King or Queen.

0.3. Research Methodology

This thesis document, serves as theoretical integration to the art installations that I have created, with each component influencing the other. Therefore this research is practice-based. In her article, *Image as insight: Visual images in practice based research*, Julia Marshall elaborates on the purpose of practice-based research within the field of visual art (2007:23);

Art practice as research casts art making as inquiry - as a particularly experiential and constructivist process of learning in which imaginative synthesis and creative image making are ways of constructing knowledge.

Furthermore Marshall (2007:23) adds that through creating visual experiences, practice-based research within a studio-based inquiry allows information to be seen differently, in a fresh, more meaningful, personal, and experiential way.

This investigation will also be substantiated by a number of site-specific field trips influenced by *The Soul of the White Ant*. Primary and secondary sources of literature from both South African and international authors inform this text. The investigation is qualitative in nature and inter-relates various texts, including core texts written within the framework of phenomenology and from various fields of study, including philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, architecture and the visual arts. I will discuss South African artists' Nicholas Hlobo, Joani Groenewald and Zanele Muholi in relation to the topic, and explain how their artworks function to demonstrate and relate their own lived experiences, therefore illustrating in turn their notion of home.

0.4. Practical Research

In the creation of this body of work I have employed various materials and techniques in each work. At the heart of this process is an attempt to reflect the various threads and ideas that accompany my notion of home. The practical work provides a visual narrative and, like this thesis document, is a navigation of various points of a journey. My art works become, to use Joani Groenewald's (2015:9) term, a visual autobiography.

0.5. Contextualising choice of visual artists and contemporary art practices

To demonstrate the multifarious nature of the notion of home, I discuss the work "*Umthubi*", by contemporary artist Nicolas Hlobo, "*Teesiffie #1*" by contemporary jeweller Joani Groenewald, and "*Being*", a photographic series by activist and artist Zanele Muholi alongside my own artistic practice. I demonstrate how the notion of home can be navigated through the investigation of these artworks, each of which are influential as autobiography and lived experience of the artist. Furthermore, each of the works engages with their audience on a visceral and tactile level, and asks of the viewer to engage with it in relation to the viewer's own body. The audience completes the artworks by becoming part of the experience.

Similarly, in my art installations the viewer becomes part of the experience, and in so doing completes the artworks. The installations are always made in relation to my own body and to that of the viewer whose vantage point or point of view in each work has been taken into consideration while configuring each set of works.

The materials used in the work of the selected artists (and within my own practice) have been chosen to convey their history conceptually. For example, the use of rooibos tea in the work of Joani Groenewald roots the work in South Africa and acts as a metaphor of the artist's Afrikaner identity.

Within my own work I use found objects, as does Nicolas Hlobo. These objects convey our cultural and personal histories and aid in challenging their meanings. Sue Williamson (2008:190) notes that found materials already have a history imbedded within them. Other materials question their own traditional legacy, such as the application of bronze in my practice. Similarly, in the photography of Zanele Muholi the artist questions the traditional relationship between photographer and subject, and the relationship between viewer and photograph. When examining various international³¹ and local art biennials and art fairs it becomes evident that the boundaries of what is regarded as art has shifted to include a variety of creative practices³² and materials, making it difficult to determine a single and completely resolute definition of what art is. As in the work of the diverse artists Muholi, Groenewald, and Hlobo distinct variety, difference, range, and multi-dimensionality mark the multifarious nature of my notion of home.

³¹ According to Marilyn Martin, (2013:51) one of the main features of *Documenta 13*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, was “the brain”. It contained a dense array of paintings, drawings, sculpture, photographs, video, and ceramics that were damaged and stolen objects. Additionally there were objects that would not normally be regarded as art, but they took on new meanings in the context of this associative space and these telling juxtapositions. Other inclusions to the exhibition were a massive compost heap and butterfly garden.

³² Anna Moszynska (2013:7) states that many younger artists are unashamedly promiscuous in their artistic range, mixing sculptural approaches with painting, collage, printmaking, photography, film, music, light – which in a manner reminiscent of a DJ echoes the tenets of the term ‘postproduction’ coined by influential French curator Nicolas Bourriaud in 2001 (Moszynska, 2013:7).

0.6. Core Literature, Key Theorists and Theoretical Framework

In this study I argue that the notion of home as a multifarious concept can be investigated through lived experience. I examine my own notion of home and demonstrate that it is influenced by my lived experience. Therefore I have selected as core literature the manuscripts of authors who write about their own lived experience. I see the notion of home as largely subjective, a personal journey, influenced by personal histories, locale, identity and memory.

As mentioned, the two core texts used for this investigation are *The Soul of the White Ant* by South African author Eugene Marais, and *The Poetics of Space* by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. These texts fall within the framework of phenomenology. These two texts, along with supporting texts from South African and international authors, inform my study. Furthermore, my creative practice serves as a vehicle through which I can investigate my own lived experiences that inform my notion of home.

Although Marais' work has been widely investigated within the field of animal behaviourism, South African history and literature, it has not yet been investigated to the same extent within the field of visual arts. I am of the opinion that *The Soul of The White Ant* can contribute to and serve our poetic understanding of the notion of home within the field of visual arts.

Visual arts can serve to facilitate and catalyse conversations and interactions between people. Investigations through the field of visual art allow for poetic explorations, both text-based and experiential, in which the nuances of topics can be explored. The field of visual art allows creative license that other fields or modes of research do not.

Furthermore, the field of visual art allows for visceral experiences of research topics. Keeping in mind the nature of inquiry of this study and the subjective nature of the notion of home, I am convinced that this topic is best explored

through the experience of art installations and the complementary informative thesis document.

Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* serves as a lens through which I can investigate both Eugene Marais's text and my own practical work. *The Poetics of Space* is an investigation into the psyche and the self that is the site of artistic production and serves as producer for the notion of home. *The Poetics of Space* also serves as a vehicle that allows me to navigate and understand phenomenological readings of architecture, which is at the heart of the investigation in this study. In addition, John Stilgoe (1969:ix) notes in the foreword to *The Poetics of Space* that Bachelard's text provides a universal vocabulary of space, and that his analysis is truly cross-cultural since it focuses on physical items known and cherished the world over.

This study is aimed at investigating how the notion of home can be explored through architecture and inherited objects. I rely on text written within the framework of phenomenology that, as echoed by Bachelard, is concerned with participative action involving and embodying lived experience. I explore the various ways in which contemporary art can function to facilitate and articulate my notion of home.

0.6.1 Phenomenology in context of this study

This study emphasizes lived experience as an entry point for examining the notion of home. Phenomenology, as cited by Bachelard (1969:xvi), and explained by author Anna Teresa Tymieniecka³³ is not "a feeling of being, of existence," but rather constitutes constantly participative flow through time and space (Bachelard, 1969:xvi). Phenomenology allows me to investigate the complexities of the notion of home by permitting me to explore the work of

³³ In her book *Phenomenology and Science*.

contemporary artists and my own artistic practice in relation to space and time. Keeping the afore-mentioned statements in mind and noting that this study is largely informed by my own lived experience, art making and that of the two key authors in this study, phenomenology allows me to subjectively explore my notion of home.

In addition, when examining contemporary art practices, author Anna Moszynska (2013:7) notes in her book *Sculpture Now* that a work of art is often deliberately framed to be a phenomenological experience rather than a purely visual or intellectual stimulus, and it may make sense only through a durational process and over time. Furthermore, noting the involvement of the audience Moszynska (2013:7) adds that the audience seems to have a more active role in engaging with these art works. In addition, the role of art as a form of perception is currently echoed in cognitive science, digital theory, and philosophies of phenomenology. All of these fields now posit human consciousness and perception, as a moment-to-moment series of events, gathered from a wide, rich mixture of mind, body and environment. As Bachelard (1969:xvi) states, "In order to determine the being of an image, we shall have to experience its reverberation".

0.6.2. Eugene Marais and Gaston Bachelard, scientists, poets and philosophers

Etienne Gilson³⁴, a specialist in the philosophy of science, states that (Bachelard, 1969:xii) Bachelard devoted his early career to the problems raised by the nature of scientific knowledge, especially in the field of physics. Bachelard's entire university career was based upon his philosophical critique of scientific knowledge and his conception of a free type of rationalism.

In 1938 Bachelard published a book entitled *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*³⁵, in which he turned from a universe of science and reason to that of imagination and poetry. In this work, Bachelard used a psychoanalytic approach to analyse a non-human element. What Bachelard calls imagination is a most secret power that is as much of a cosmic force as it is a psychological faculty. Bachelard distinguished between two forms of imagination, viz. the formal and the material imagination. He found both forms at work in nature and in the human mind. Gilson (1969:xiii) states that Bachelard was conscious of defining a new concept necessary for a complete philosophical study of the poetic creation. In other words, he was turning from the philosophy of science to the philosophy of art and aesthetics. Gilson notes that Bachelard was a man deeply rooted in the soil of everyday life and in intimate relations with the concrete realities of nature. Gilson (1969:xiv) states that after carefully studying the devices whereby man achieves cognition, Bachelard yielded to an irresistible urge personally to communicate with the forces that create it. The only field where Bachelard could hope to observe them at play was in poetry. In my study I relate my research as a poetical investigation that takes various forms through visual and text based experiments.

Marais, according to Rousseau (1982:301), similarly applied human psychology in his study of animals, including his study of the termites in the

³⁴French philosopher and historian, and Bachelard's work colleague.

³⁵More volumes followed: *Water and dreams, Air and Revery, The Earth and the Reveries of the Will, The Earth and the Reveries of Rest.*

Waterberg. Eugene Marais felt confident that through his medical and psychological treatments and experiments he understood human motivation. Marais used his observations as a starting point to guide his scientific explorations within the field of animal behaviourism. Marais's research was at first intended for the field of animal behaviourism, but by constantly anthropomorphising the animals he was researching, it became clear that his study was more than just animal behaviourist research, and that it was also an investigation into the human psyche. Both Bachelard and Marais used their own observations and lived experiences to inform their research.

0.6.3 Chapter Outline

Overview: Before my investigation of the notion of home starts in Chapter One, I provide the reader with an overview of the multifarious nature of this notion. This overview is comprised of locale, history, memory and identity.

In Chapter One I examine how objects can relate ancestral history. The chapter starts with *Experience One*, which sets the tone for my investigation of the nature of home. *Experience Two* is an account of my action of dismantling a bullet, an inherited object. In this chapter I examine how objects speak to their ancestral history. I also examine the texts of South African authors Maria Marchetti-Meccer, Joani Groenewald and Mathew Partridge in relation to the ways in which objects function in relating memory. These are discussed alongside Gaston Bachelard's notion of the ways in which objects function to convey their history. I briefly discuss specific aspects of Marais' autobiography, and speculate how his lived experience is reflected in his book, *The Soul of The White Ant*. I also refer to Leon Rousseau's book *The Dark Stream: The Story of Eugene Marais* to substantiate my speculations. In addition, I examine Eugene Marais' notion of uninherited instinct as a possible method to question, subvert and re-assign patriarchal histories. I examine the work of contemporary artist Nicolas Hlobo, as well as my own artwork, to extend the realm of questioning into a visceral exploration in the field of visual art.

I refer to texts by Sue Williamson and William Kentridge to elaborate on contemporary art practices. I also reflect on my own autobiography and recall lived experiences.

Chapter Two investigates the ways in which different manifestations of architecture can function as a visceral embodiment and serve as an exploration of the notion of home. *Experience Three* starts the discussion. I investigate how the matriarchal nature of the territory, as explained by Eugene Marias, offers an alternative to patriarchal assumptions of the home. I examine the different functions of architecture, as proposed by Bachelard, and I investigate how inhabitation and site can alter the function of the house. I refer to the text of Nicola Grobler and study the work of Joani Groenewald, as well as my own work. I continue this chapter by investigating intimacy and intimate spaces by referring to the work of Zanele Muholi, and demonstrate how the self becomes the site for my notion of home. Here I refer to Bachelard's concepts of the construction of nests. Supporting texts to this chapter are works by authors Eric Harper, Sue Williamson and Mary Corrigan.

In Chapter Three I discuss how I form a dialogue with the materials I use in my artistic practice, and I investigate how the process of making is equally important to the end result and how this process influences my notion of home along with the materials I use. *Experience Four* opens this Chapter. *Experience Five* provides a walk-through of the exhibition space. Furthermore I refer to Roselind Krauss' concept of sculpture becoming self-contained. I investigate the questions surrounding art or craft and refer to the relevant text by Pieter Swanepoel. *Experience Six* serves to introduce Bachelard's concept of naturalization. I explore different ways in which I can use naturalization within my own work to overcome aspects of my own history with which I grapple.

In the Conclusion I discuss reverberations of the notion of home. I argue that language is subjective and therefore it is necessary to take into account how it functions in the formation of the notion of home. I discuss the poetic nature of Bachelard's text, and the use of narrative in the Marais work.

In addition I remind readers how the use of narrative is reflected throughout the thesis and used to convey my autobiographical accounts. Finally I discuss the relevance of the topic of home within the context of South Africa, and conclude that this study serves as a self-reflective inquiry through which I can investigate the multifarious nature of the notion of home.

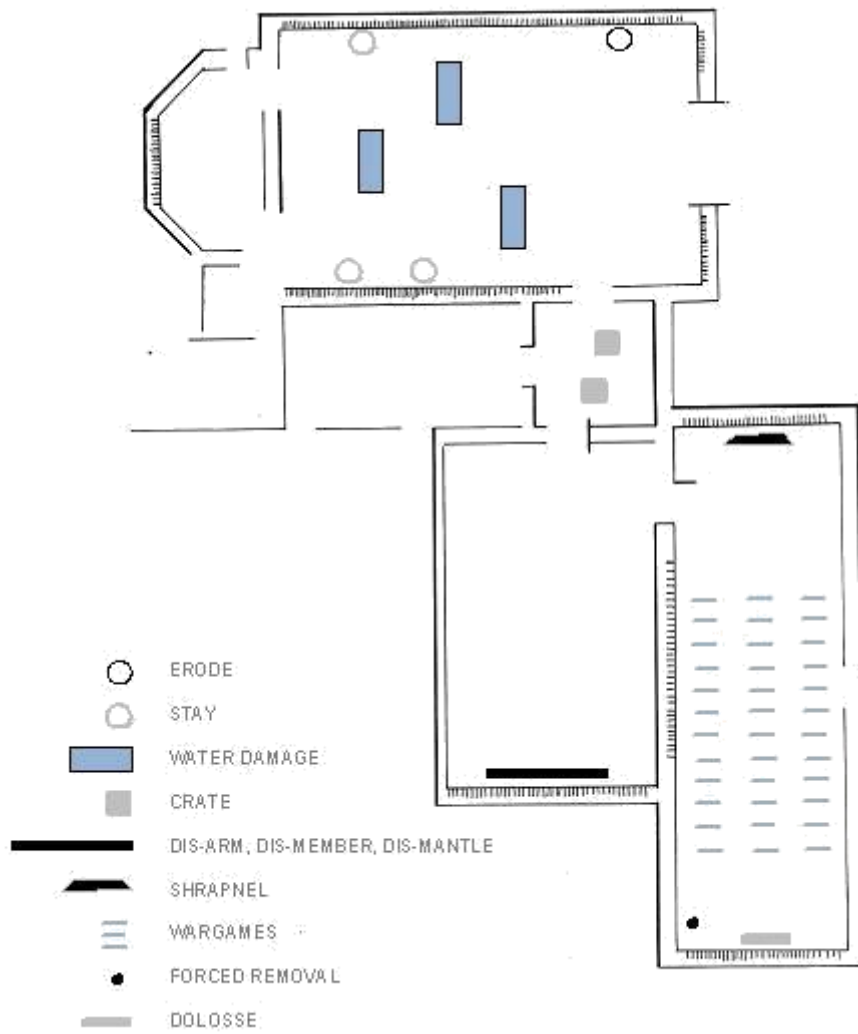


Figure 1. Diagram of the exhibition space

CHAPTER 1 / ROOM 1

UN-INHERITED, INHERITED INSTINCT – INVESTIGATING MY NOTION OF HOME THROUGH RETRIEVED OBJECTS

To illustrate my lived experience to the reader I employ the device of narration by providing personal experiential accounts throughout this dissertation. As complement to the narrations I employ a notion used by Bachelard, who states that it is possible to “read” a house. In *The Poetics of Space* Bachelard (1969:38) explains that we can read a house or room, since both house and room are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy. In this dissertation, therefore, each chapter can be understood as a room and considered as a “psychological diagram” for navigating my journey of the notion of home. See Figure 1.

These rooms each have an entrance in the form of my experiential account, and coincide with the physical rooms that my artwork occupies.

Bachelard states that in order to sense and love a work of art we must, “start from the centre, at the very heart of the circle from where the whole thing derives its source and meaning (Bachelard, 1969:xxi).

Taking my cue from Bachelard, this chapter will begin its first pulsating beat with a lived experience of my notion of home.

EXPERIENCE 1

THINKING ABOUT HOME, FORMULATING A FOUNDATION

Triangle-shaped **shards** of sunlight flood in through the living room window, slowly moving from the white tiled floor to the red Persian carpet where I sit with my legs stretched out. The warm triangles **of light** touch my hand and I move my palm across the spiky soft carpet. Tiny molecules of dust rise up in an agitated state around my hand, only to gently float back down again. The triangular window frames the world from the inside and out. It serves as a constant to the divisions **that play** out on either side of it. Simultaneously I watch the **interior** and **exterior**.

On the **outside** I see triangular **shadows** cast by trees **growing** longer as people pass by. I **see** a yellow weaverbird with a blade of grass **in its beak**, resting for a moment between the tiny triangular **leaves** of the bay tree in front of the window. I wonder if his laborious efforts in constructing a **symbol of courtship** have yielded a nest for new life. Or will this be his first attempt at **architecture** and **construction**? The leaves tremble as its tiny temporary tenant **looks** around. On the inside the shards of sunlight have moved to meet the years of grey ash collected in the fireplace. I inhale the ash particles; **smells**, like sounds, seem to hold my memory.

My eyes **follow the lines** of the brickwork up over the fireplace where an old watercolour of my ancestral home (figure 2) is suspended. Layers of dust delicately ordain the edges of the clouds. I survey the landscape, exploring the different **architectural forms** and **shadows**. I wonder what I would see if I could peep through the **keyhole** in the front door. A boundary halts my observations; a frame of glass **separates** me from it. The glass reflects the triangle-shaped window in the living room as the exterior world **merges**, for a second, with my ancestral **history**. The past seems to become the present and the present turns into a **memory**.



Figure 2. Unknown Artist. Unknown Date. Artwork of the castle “Bolkoburg” (Mertz ancestral home), and “Rittergut, Klein Waltersdorf” in the foreground. Reflection of living room window, 20 Mashie Road. 2015. Photograph by Author.

Time shifts.

Time seems to **weave the tapestry** of my “home”, composed of threads of locale, history, memory and identity. These threads mutually construct a pattern. My notion of “home” is multifarious and the present time provides an **access point**.

Now, I find myself sitting in a **new bedroom**, still looking through the **window**. The frame still seems the same - triangle shards of light flood in, covering my bedroom in warm **light**

END OF EXPERIENCE.

Contemplating this feeling of home that always stays the same no matter where I am, motivated me to explore and question the reasons why certain objects, in my case inherited objects, can appear to be so intrinsically linked to my experience of home. In *Experience 1* I refer to an image of my ancestral home in Germany. I have never visited the location, yet I have always felt that it was somehow my “real” home. It was waiting for me. I imagined that one day I would walk up to the front door and I would know which key unlocks the door. The landscape, the hills surrounding the castle, felt like my own backyard and I knew which window of the house would be my bedroom window.

These old houses can be drawn – we can make a representation that has all the characteristics of a copy. An objective drawing of this kind, independent of all day-dreaming, is a forceful, reliable document that leaves its mark on a biography.

(Bachelard, 1969:48).

This statement by Bachelard led me to re-evaluate the meaning I had formed about my family heirlooms and history. How do inherited objects aid in forming my notion of home? What factors do I inherit along with these objects, and how can I question and subvert their meaning?

In this chapter I explore the embedded meaning in selected objects retrieved from my childhood home, and I question how they function as vehicles of my inherited history. I examine their history, and the transference of that history. This chapter is informed by Eugene Marais' notion of uninherited instinct and is supported by various texts including Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*. I refer to the work *Umthubi* by Nicholas Hlobo, alongside my own artwork, to serve as visual examples of my inquiry into inherited objects and their role in shaping the notion of home.

1.1. Eugene Marais' notion of home

As I have mentioned before, my notion of home is encompassed and influenced by various threads to form a whole. Each thread plays a part in my understanding of my notion of home. Similarly, through his observations and experiences, Eugene Marias sees the termitary as a composite animal, being comprised of various parts. He equates the termitary to the human body, or, to use a better term, the self. The self therefore becomes a site through which the notion of collective and individual functioning within the home is formed. In the human body, various organs each have their independent function and serve a purpose in the collective functioning of the body. Marais states that the body is the most perfect example of the group soul;

Each organ is in constant activity and has a separate purpose – at least the purpose appears to be separate and independent; but on closer observation we find that all the organs are really working for a communal purpose.

(Marais, 1937:50)

Similarly, in Bachelard's description of the house as metaphor for the psyche (1969), I find an example of a wardrobe, a desk and a chest. These "objects", each with their own function, form part of the whole and serve as entry points into different parts of the psyche;

Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed without these "objects" and a few others in equally high favour, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy.

(Bachelard, 1969:78)

Using these ideas, I speculate that *The Soul of The White Ant* can serve as an inquiry into Marais' own notion of home. In the first paragraph of this chapter I briefly highlight some events from Marais's life that, in my opinion, informed his findings on the group soul and therefore his notion of home.

Through the retrieval of certain parts of Marais' autobiography, I can speculate about what his notion of home was influenced by. Through the retrieval of selected inherited "objects" from the architecture of my childhood home, I investigate how inherited objects can serve as tools with which I can understand my present notion of home.

In the formation of a new termite colony, Marais marks the beginning of the termitary with the maiden flight of the termite queen. The first flight of the queen kick-starts the life cycle of the colony. Marais (1937:16) observes that;

You will understand presently why this is so essential, just as necessary as the preservation of its life and therefore it takes just as much trouble to fly – even more perhaps, for the urge is greater – as to protect itself from enemy.

It seems that, in order for a new termitary to begin, the future queen must fly from the termitary, in other words, she must leave the nest. When relating this to Marais's own life, we see that he too left his childhood home at a very young age³⁶. His ten-year study of the behaviour of baboons and termites in the Waterberg region³⁷ was one of the longest periods he spent in one place.

³⁶In a biographical note by his son I gather that Eugene undertook his schooling in Pretoria, then in Boshof in the Orange Freestate and later in Paarl in the Western Cape (Marais, 1937:7). As an adult, Marais moved around frequently studying in England, working in Johannesburg and Pretoria to note just some of his movements.

³⁷Ever since his childhood the Waterberg and its wealth had fascinated Eugene. Marais wrote, "...it represented the ideal theatre of manly adventure, of great endeavours and the possibility of princely wealth" (Rousseau, 1982:200). He went to the Waterberg region, originally to speculate for tin and platinum but in 1907 decided to move there permanently. He

Author Marchetti-Mercer (2006:203) notes that being connected to one's home does not necessarily imply being a physical part of it, and that to truly find home one might be forced to leave it. Marais (1937:39) elaborates on "homing instinct" or homesickness, stating that it is the strongest of all psychological urges, except for the sexual. Maybe for him this held some truth, but this is only speculation, as there were many events that influenced his life³⁸.

When reading *The Soul of the White Ant*, it is evident that Marais indulges in the magical nature of the queen of the termitary, seeing her function as the brain of the community. He writes very little about the king in the termitary. Describing the function of the king in the termitary, Marais (1937:24) notes that;

"The king apparently does nothing. He appears to be a mere hanger-on in the palace".

Elaborating on Marais's relationship with his own parents, author Leon Rousseau (1982:7) notes that the Marais' children described their father³⁹ as "genteelly poor and a perfect invalid". His mother Catharina, on the other hand,

built a permanent house there in the high lying valley. Writing about his first years in Doornhoek Marais said, "...the whole region was a delightful one for the purpose we had in mind, and I do not think that I ever passed a happier time in my life than those three years we spent in the mountains of Doornhoek." (Rousseau, 1982:202) During the decade Marais spent in the Waterberg region, he lived on a farm named Rietfontein for the majority of the time, one of the most beautiful in the Waterberg region. It belonged to Gys and Maria Van Rooyen, Maria, the more energetic of the two had the stronger personality and according to Rousseau (Rousseau, 1982:204) she always had the last word and played an important part in the household having an acute sense of business. Here, "the mother of strangers" as Maria was affectionately known by the Waterberg community, Eugene found a friend, a colleague and at times a caregiver.

³⁸Marais had a lifelong addiction to morphine that in many regards influenced his movements, including his decision to live in the Waterberg region where according to Leon Rousseau (1982:209) Marais believed he would be able to wean himself off the drug.

³⁹Eugene Marais grew up fatherless, and during the course of his childhood and teenage years he would live with various family members, including his older brother Charles of Boshof, who he considered to be his real father. (Rousseau, 1982:16)

according to Rousseau (1982:6), was a strong influence in the house. What Eugene learnt during childhood about life, he learnt from her, including her affection for animals and wonder of nature.

In the opening of *The Soul of the White Ant*, Marais notes that his study of termites came about as a result of his investigation into animal psychology and the lack of research in the field of animal behaviourism in South Africa. Furthermore he notes that his research is founded upon his observation of the daily lives of the termites and that these observations reveal new wonders every day. Marais mentions in one instance;

The group-psyche of the termitary is just as wonderful and mysterious to a human being, with a very different kind of psyche, as telepathy or other functions of the human that border on the supernatural.

(Marais, 1937:15)

Speculating on the above I deduce that his autobiography aided in shaping his notion of home and his theories in *The Soul of the White Ant*. This made me wonder about my own history and inheritance. What history do I inherit from my family? How can I challenge my inherited history, both within my direct family and within my broader societal context? How does my autobiography inform my present understanding of the notion of home?

Marais investigates inherited instinct and what he calls uninherited instinct by studying the puzzling occurrence of traits and behaviours that are visible in the king and queen termites and not in their offspring. Their offspring, in their turn, conduct actions that seem to be new and not inherited from their parents. Marais wonders how it is possible for the offspring to exhibit completely new behaviour. They seem to be a different species. Their parents, the king and queen termites, seem unrelated to their offspring, the worker and soldier termites.

These questions prompted a visit to my childhood home in Pretoria early in 2015. I had not been back there for a number of months and the house was in the process of being sold. The familiarity I once felt in the house, where I used to play as a child, was absent on this occasion, as stacked boxes of books, ornaments and other household items greeted me as if they were stiff soldiers awaiting an order. Walking through the house in which I had spent the greater part of my childhood, I looked for some familiarity resonating with an earlier time.

Two artworks of our families' earliest known ancestral home, both still fixed in place as they had been for years, drew my attention. The first, a colour illustration, the artist unknown, had layers of dust delicately built up over time. The dust, lining the edges of the clouds, seemed to be perfectly in place in the landscape. In the background the family castle is visible, and I remembered my father telling that there was a ghost of a knight that kept watch in the tower. The second was a small etch of Bolkoburg, the ancestral castle. It hung over the fireplace. My father had brought both of these artworks with him from Germany when he moved to South Africa in 1980.

Walking through the house, I paused in my sister's room to listen for the slight buzzing in the ceiling that seemed to have been there for as long as I could remember. There had been a colony of bees there, which had to be removed due to the sale of the house. Some months before, a beekeeper came to remove them, but because he could not move the queen, the bees had to be exterminated.

My mother had asked me to go through some of the boxes upstairs in my parents' room, to see if there was anything that I would like to keep. My father's collection of tin toy soldiers was hidden among the debris of old documents and

books. My father had grown up during the Second World War⁴⁰, and took great care in making and collecting these tin soldiers. Amongst some of the other boxes and crates I found a single bullet, an 8mm Mauser⁴¹ cartridge that belonged to my grandfather⁴². He was a German Colonel during the Second World War, who received the German Golden Cross⁴³ in 1942 as commander of artillery regiment 262, and was stationed in Russia and Eastern Prussia. In October 1944 he was gravely wounded, and his active duty ended after the incident (Dokumentenforum.de, n.d.).

This visit and these objects – the tin toy soldiers, the Mauser bullet and the exterminated bee colony – catalysed the first visual investigations for my installations. It led me to ask how objects relate to their history and in turn to the next generation who holds this inheritance.

⁴⁰September 1, 1939 to September 2, 1945 (Historynet, n.d.).

⁴¹The 8mm Mauser cartridge was adopted by the German empire in 1905 and was the German service cartridge in both the first and Second World War. The rifle model 1888 was in service from 1888-1921 and again 1944-1945. The Mauser was one of the widely used combat rifles in military history (MilitaryFactory.com, n.d.).

⁴²Joachim Joseph Stanislaus Mertz, born 11th May 1894 in Potsdam and died in 1969 (Dokumentenforum.de, n.d.).

⁴³Instituted by Adolf Hitler in 1941 and was awarded in two divisions: gold for repeated acts of bravery or achievement in combat; and silver for distinguished non-combat war service (German U-Boat, 2005).



Figure 3. *Unknown Artist. Unknown Date. Etching of the castle "Bolkoburg" (Mertz ancestral home). Photograph by Author*

1.2. Inherited Objects

These retrieved objects and the representations of my ancestral home carry within them the history of my ancestors, and serve as access points through which I can investigate my notion of home.

Bachelard explains how “objects” from our past can function to convey their history in the present and future;

The Casket contains the things that are unforgettable, unforgettable for us, but also unforgettable for those whom we are going to give our treasures. Here the past, the present and a future are condensed. Thus the casket is memory of what is immemorial.

(Bachelard, 1969:84)

Objects, like people, can carry memories. In her 2016 MA thesis⁴⁴ Joani Groenewald explores the memory of objects, citing an article by curator and cultural historian August Casely-Hayford. The article describes an interaction with a Northern Ghanaian diviner who stated that “everything remembers”, and that “if we knew how we could draw memories from deep within the fabric of objects.”

The Ghanaian diviner added that fading echoes of its past emanate from every object; and in turn every object that touches us somehow remains with us, percolating its essence down through our flesh into the fabric of our bones, where its records stay frozen forever (Groenewald, 2015:4). In addition, Mathew Partridge⁴⁵ (2014:12) notes that objects act as evidence of lived human lives. How do objects convey the story of lived lives? I wonder about the objects that I have retrieved from my childhood home. Does the history of an

⁴⁴ *Fragmented mnemonics: an investigation into contemporary jewellery as means of externalizing memory.*

⁴⁵ Writer and art critic, MA Thesis: *The Spectres of Biography: Archive as Artwork*, 2014.

object change if the object is altered? Groenewald (2015:51) elaborates on this by noting that, when an object or piece of equipment loses its functionality, we can see it and experience it for what it truly is. We can experience it as a thing or being in the world.

From the statement(s) above I determine that objects carry memory, and contain history “from the fading echoes of their past”. Keeping this in mind, I ask whether, if an object can hold memory and transfer it to me, am I then obliged to be complicit with its history?

Before discussing un-inherited instinct, I look to Marais for an example and an explanation of hereditary⁴⁶ environmental memory. Marais uses the example of a South African weaverbird that had been kept out of its natural environment for four generations. The chicks were hatched under canaries and were fed a different diet to that which they would have had in their natural habitat. The fifth generation of weaverbird was returned to its natural environment and instinctively knew how to build a nest and feed its young. Marais explains;

Their ancestors had never seen a plaited nest or tasted a worm, yet the fifth generation remembered what to do. This is called instinct or hereditary environmental memory.

(Marais, 1937:98)

From the above I understand that there are some instincts that we inherit from our ancestors, and I draw a connection between objects that we inherit and hereditary environmental memory.

⁴⁶ A descriptive term for conditions capable of being transmitted from parent to offspring through the genes (Dictionary.com, 2016, s.v. ‘hereditary’).

Marais observes what he later calls “uninherited instinct” in termites by breaking through the protective outer crust of the nest, and studying the behaviour of the queen termite directly after she lays the first eggs of the colony. He explains how, after the first larvae hatch as “small, white, helpless babies” one can already distinguish between the soldier and worker termites, seemingly different from both parent and one another. Marais explains these uninherited traits by observing;

With this feeding and preparing of the first soldiers and workers, the individual labour of the king and queen comes to an end, and so does our opportunity for observation. From now on the community suffers from photophobia – fear of light – to such an extent that the usual methods of observation are impossible.

(Marais, 1937:93)

Marais continues his observations on uninherited instinct by detailing photophobia⁴⁷, experienced by the soldier and worker termites who are completely blind and dislike light in the termitary. Their parents, the king and queen, do not possess instinctive photophobia and are seemingly unaffected when light is introduced into the otherwise dark termitary. On the contrary Marais notes that they react like ordinary winged insects;

How can they possibly inherit a hereditary instinct, which the parents do not possess?

(Marais, 1937:93)

Marais adds that the soldiers and workers have many instincts that the parents do not possess. They immediately begin to build complicated structures.

⁴⁷ Photophobia is explained as an atypical sensitivity to light and in psychiatry as a morbid fear of light with an irrational need to avoid light places (Miller-Keane Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health, 2003, s.v. ‘photophobia’).

They make cells, passages, aqueducts and a crust containing various forms of arches. The king and queen never take part in these activities. Some qualities are therefore not inherited but completely new actions.

In these experiments and observations it seems that the transference of knowledge and instincts can be broken, adapted, changed from generation to generation. Under different circumstances it is clear that inherited instinct does exist, as in the weaverbirds, but un-inherited instinct also exists as seen in the photophobia experiment conducted by Marais.

Therefore I speculate that it is possible to question inherited history and to assign new meaning to objects by experiencing them, as Groenewald (2015:51) notes, for what they truly are.



Figure 4. Nicolas Hlobo, *Umthubi* (2006). Exotic and indigenous wood, steel, wire, ribbon, rubber inner tube. (Micheal Stevenson Gallery)

The work entitled “*Umthubi*” by contemporary artist Nicolas Hlobo⁴⁸ serves as an example of the way in which an inherited cultural object, in this case a kraal, can function as a symbolic reference between the artist’s ancestral past and his current role as contemporary artist. In translating his history, he assigns new meaning to it.

By recontextualizing the kraal as symbolic - as a means through which to describe his new narrative - the kraal is rendered functionless.

In the work *Umthubi*, Hlobo presents a large circular construction assembled from indigenous, exotic and invasive wood within a gallery space. The structure is delicately woven together with pink ribbon. According to Hlobo (2006) the structure signifies a kraal⁴⁹ which was the first image that came to the artist’s mind when he considered the production of an artwork that was particularly masculine. Traditionally the kraal is a space where livestock is kept, and where certain rituals take place. It is a symbol of wealth and it is a space where women are not freely allowed.

This artwork subverts the traditional, heterosexual patriarchal structure and cultural role of the male in Xhosa culture, within which Hlobo was raised. The use of hand-woven pink ribbon speaks of femininity and needlework, which is often associated with women and the tradition of craft.

Hlobo (2006) explains that the woven ribbons were added to resemble a trampoline or a “play thing”. Hlobo (2006) states that the reason for adding the element of play is to challenge the notion of what is respectable, and what is respected as a man’s space. This structure closes the viewer off from entry, but allows the inside to remain visible.

⁴⁸Hlobo born in 1975 in the Eastern Cape in South Africa and is of Xhosa decent.

⁴⁹An enclosure for cattle or sheep often associated with African traditions. With regards to Hlobo it refers to his Xhosa heritage.

In my opinion this resembles a den⁵⁰ and conjures notions of a private and intimate enclosure.

The black inner tube shapes evoke skin and resemble masks, suggesting notions of sexual play. This private space, within the public gallery, presents onlookers with a voyeuristic point of view of the work. Sue Williamson (2008:132) adds that Hlobo celebrates his sexual identity as a gay man as well as being Xhosa in all of his work, wishing to share his pride as a member of both groups.

Elaborating on the construction and material used in *Umthubi*, Hlobo (2006) notes that some of the wooden branches or “stakes” have knots and scars on them that resemble wounds or genitalia. This evokes questions surrounding sexual identity and the daily prejudices and victimisation that often confront gay, lesbian and transsexual individuals. Furthermore, Hlobo’s use of a Xhosa title without translation signifies his cultural identity and, according to Williamson (2008:132), supports in overturning prevailing linguistic power structures that aid in shaping the concept of an art gallery, a cultural space largely dominated by white artists and audiences.

Hlobo’s work therefore succeeds in questioning and subverting patriarchal structures culturally ascribed within Xhosa tradition. The artist re-assigns meaning to a traditional family object by transforming it into an arena of play and intimacy, marking it with his present identity as a homosexual man.

Keeping this in mind, I consider my own ancestral legacy and history, and note that I am the first descendant who has not served in the military and has not fired a weapon. I will discuss my video piece *Dis-arm, Dis-member, Dis-mantle*

⁵⁰ Hidden animal borrow or small room.

in relation to the ideas of inherited and un-inherited instinct mentioned above.
Experience Two serves as an entry point for the discussion of this video piece.

Similar to Hlobo's recontextualization of the kraal, I interrogate and re-assign symbolic meaning through the process of dismantling my grandfather's 8mm Mauser cartridge.

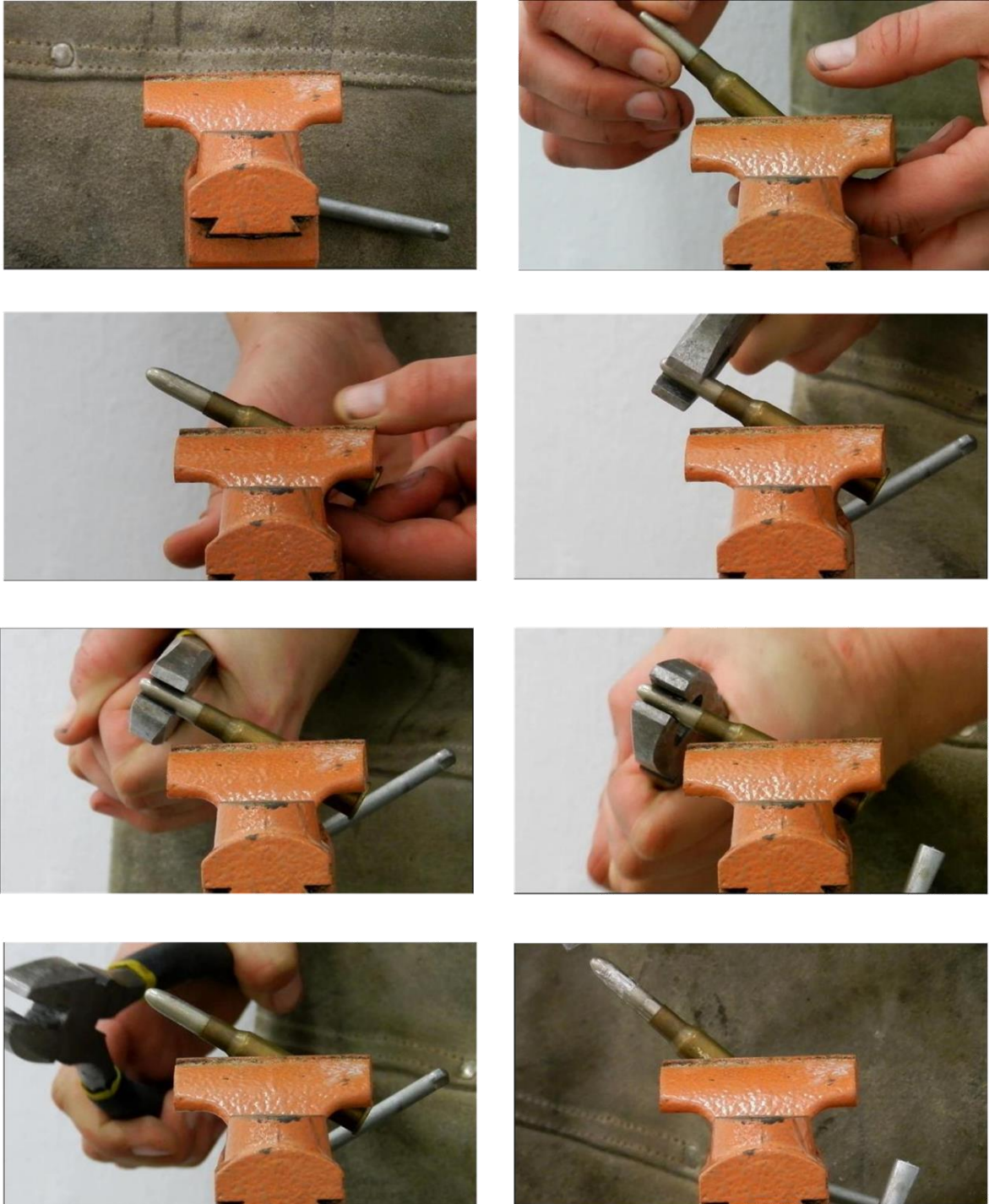


Figure 5. Isabel Mertz, *Dis-arm, Dis-member, Dis-mantle*, (2016). Digital video loop 8 min

EXPERIENCE 2

Shaky hands, fumble with bright orange vice.
Breathe in, and count, one, two, three
GRIP tight, white knuckles, clench my teeth

Hold on, **two, three...**

The table moves, exhale, try to not make a
sound, **CLENCH** my teeth, white knuckles

twist

Hold on, two, three...

Move my foot to BRACE the table
white knuckles, **CLENCH** my teeth

twist

Hold on, **two, three...**

A bead of sweat rolls down my face
it collects between my lips
Hold on, two, three
CLENCH my teeth, white knuckles burning

twist

REPEAT, indefinitely

END OF EXPERIENCE

The video *Dis-arm, Dis-member, Dis-mantle* (Figure 4), set on an 8 minute infinite loop, reveals to the observer my hands, grappling, pulling and prying at the tip of a live 8mm Mauser ammunition round. With a set of general-purpose pliers my hands twist and pinch at the lead tip, mangling it. The lead tip slowly starts to wiggle. The video loops to the beginning before the lead point is completely removed, leaving the viewer in the present and perpetual state of un-doing.

This video is not a performed or rehearsed action but rather evidence of the labour of the physical activity I undertook while dismantling the bullet. When I initiated this action I was uncertain of what the outcome would be. The action becomes the work. This act of disarming a live round of ammunition is a questioning of the history of the object and its direct association with violence and pain. The act of loading a bullet into a dark chamber of a gun and firing it is renounced, and consequently the patriarchal structure it embodies is contested and placed in a continuous state of being dismantled.

The recording of this act of dismantling serves as a record of my personal history now altered from the ancestral past. To use William Kentridge's (2015:51) concept, the screen becomes a "compression chamber" for the images, ideas and historical links of my past. This act of undoing is not without a fearful aspect, as the potential danger of the mangling or mishandling of the bullet rests within the mind's eye of the observer. For me, it was this prospect of pain that became a driving force, resulting in either dis-arming or self-harm.

Marais (1937:87) remarks that pain in general is a warning signal to living creatures. If pain were to disappear from this earth, life would soon cease. Without pain organic matter cannot exist -here too it became the driving force for me to succeed in disarming the instrument of violence. In the video of the dismantling process I alter the function of an inherited object. Through this act I can question and examine my own family history and assign new meaning to it.

I have investigated the work *Umthubi* by contemporary artist Nicholas Hlobo alongside my own and determined that I can investigate my notion of home through retrieved ancestral objects; I can alter their meaning and function, and through this process they aid in forming my new notion of home.

In the following section I will continue my investigation of the complexities of home by exploring ways in which architecture can aid in the formation of my notion of home.

CHAPTER 2 / ROOM 2

EMBODYING THE HOME – A VISCERAL EXPERIENCE OF ARCHITECTURE

In this chapter I explore the notion of home through the investigation of different architecture. *Experience Three* serves as the entry point into this chapter, and leads into investigations of *Teesiffie #1* by contemporary jewellery artist Joani Groenewald, and *Being* by activist and artist Zanele Muholi. I explore these works alongside my own creative investigation.



Figure 6. Isabel Mertz, *Crate* (2016). Found termite nest, invasive eucalyptus wood. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

EXPERIENCE 3:

I move away handfuls of **earth** and look for any visible signs of its tiny **tenants**. I dig my fingers **deeper** and **deeper** into the cavity of **excavated earth** and feel the **crackling** of tiny roots breaking between my **fingers** as I start to **pivot** and **tilt** the mound. It **moves** quicker than I expect and I try to brace it from **toppling** over. The hard exterior **bursts** open and I can see the **inside** cavities and chambers of the termitary. I see storerooms filled to capacity with wood chips and twisting corridors leading into **dark** chambers.

A **single soldier** termite appears from the darkness, quickly followed by **another**. They examine the breach in the perimeter of their shell, carefully feeling around the edge and the new foreign object, my hand, now **invading** their **mound**. I feel simultaneously at awe and ashamed, I was wrong about the termitary being **empty**. However, I know that this is probably a very small section of their nest and the breach will soon be repaired. Feelings of **shame** are quickly replaced with **awe** and **curiosity** as I wonder where the **queen's chamber** could be. How long has this termitary been here?

END OF EXPERIENCE

2.1. The queen and her nest: an alternative to patriarchy

The Soul of the White Ant serves as an investigation into the human psyche. It also serves as an investigation into the matriarchal structure of the termite community. By relating this to the notion of home, the matriarchal structure is seen as an alternative to the patriarchal structures and functions. This presents a starting point through which I can interrogate my notion of home. The queen of the termite colony is both mother of the colony and, as Marais describes her, the brain of the termitary. Her royal chamber, Marais notes, fits her so perfectly one would assume it was built around her (1937:22). Marais describes her as a “very young modern woman” (1937:19). Bachelard too, provides an image that embodies the house as a maternal figure;

The house clung close to me, like a she wolf, and at times I could smell her odour penetrating maternally to my very heart. That night she was really my mother. She was all I had to keep and sustain me. We were alone.

(Bachelard, 1969:45)

Two wooden crates placed in front of the video *Dis-arm, Dis-member, Dis-mantle* extend this subversion of patriarchy in my own work. One holds a precious cargo, a habitat of some sorts; the other one is empty. It seems unclear whether the nest, protruding from the side of the crate, has broken through the walls or whether the crate has decayed around the nest. Maybe it is both, with the installation simultaneously decomposing and pregnant with potential for life.

It is also unclear whether the nest still contains any termites. If it does, the possibility exists that the termites could devour and invade the architecture of the gallery. Insects, more specifically termites, are often regarded as pests.

Building materials are usually treated chemically to repel these burrowing insects. In my installation I have left the wood untreated.

The crates, constructed from invasive sugar gum wood, stand knee high and occupy a small central room in the heart of my installation. They continue my questioning of patriarchal structures both within my own history and that of contemporary art practices, which I raise in the video *Dis-arm, Dis-member, Dis-mantle*. Furthermore they ask what can be considered as sculpture, and how art can facilitate mediation between human and non-human.



Figure 7. Isabel Mertz, *Crate, Detail* (2016). Found termite nest, invasive eucalyptus wood. Photograph by Morgan Trimble.

2.2. Architecture as an investigative tool for the exploration of the notion of home

In the previous section I elaborate on how inherited objects retrieved from my childhood home can serve as an investigation into the notion of home and on the nature of Marais' studies of inherited and uninherited instinct. I have also started a series of questions around patriarchal structures, and suggested an alternative in the work *Crate*. In this section I extend my investigation into the notion of home by continuing the examination of different architectures. As I have mentioned before, architecture can be defined as the design of complex structures. For the purpose of my investigation I divide the architectural references into human and non-human structures and I ask how these structures serve to continue the investigation of my notion of home.

My inquiry starts by observing some of the functions of architecture. Preliminarily the site often ascribed to the home is the house. It serves its occupants by protecting them from the elements, as Bachelard (1969:90) notes, and as such it functions as a shield from the outside world. Bachelard describes the rugged cathedral in Victor Hugo's *Quasimodo* as the protagonist's armour. Similarly in *The Soul of the White Ant*, Marais describes the termite hill's function as armour and protection for the termite colony within. However, as Marais states (1937:59), this armour that encapsulates the termite colony is not just an inactive "dead heap of earth". Rather it is the skin of the termitary, and much like the skin of the human body that holds the body intact, when damaged, it is re-formed from the inside.

Marais investigates the skin of the termitary by breaking through the exterior crust to observe the inner and outer simultaneously. He anthropomorphizes the termite mound, reminding us that;

The termitary is no more dead than the dead matter of cell walls which constitutes nine-tenths of your own body. We are ourselves no more than dead termitaries, through which circulates a living substance.

(Marais, 1937:59)

Here, once again, the termitary is equated to the body, which then functions as a site for the home, or in other words, the life or living parts that make up the sum of the body. Therefore the body or self can function as the architecture through which I can investigate the contents and structure of home.

Before I explore the body as site of the home, and as a lens through which the notion of home can be investigated, I want to elaborate briefly on the idea of inhabitation. How do we occupy the architecture of our own bodies and that of built geometric bodies? How do these different bodies affect each other to form the notion of home? What does it mean to inhabit⁵¹? Bachelard (1969:47) elaborates on inhabitation by stating that inhabited space transcends geometric space. Considering its definition, which is to “dwell in”, and in agreement with Bachelard, I consider the act of inhabiting as a verb or action of entering into and experiencing a space. Therefore this space also becomes embodied and animated when it is inhabited by energy, the soul or psyche.

⁵¹ The word inhabit is derived from the Latin, *inhabitāre* which means to dwell in, as people or as animals (Dictionary.com, 2016, s.v. ‘inhabit’).

In addition “built or constructed structures” that function as a site⁵² for the home are not merely passive and dormant inert objects. In agreement with Bachelard,

I am of the opinion that these architectural ‘sites’ are structures within which active participants shape and alter of the notion of home. Consequently then, in laymen’s terms, it means that the places where I have lived influence my notion of home.

Bachelard continues on this trajectory by illustrating how the house as site for the home can alter its function. Sometimes the house grows and spreads, and alternates between security and adventure as we live in it. The house becomes both cell and world. He offers an example in the writings of Georges Spyridaki;

My house is diaphanous⁵³, but it is not of glass. It is more the nature of vapor. Its walls contract and expand as I desire. At times I draw them close about me like protective armour ... But at others, I let the walls of my house blossom out in their own space, which is infinitely extensible.

(Bachelard, 1969:51)

In addition, Nicola Grobler⁵⁴ (2004:1) notes that the “home” is not merely a neutral stage on which events unfold. Instead, she argues, the “home” shapes us as we continue with our daily lives. The “home” becomes an arena in which physical and emotional energy are transferred and animated.

From the ideas posited above I deduce that the body can function as the site for home. The embodiment of the notion of home exists in the self, as a psychological space, a physical being and the surrounding structures that contextualize the architecture of the body both animal and non-animal, human and non-human.

⁵² Author Rebekah Lee’s article, *Reconstructing “home” in Apartheid Cape Town: African women and the process of settlement* (Lee, 2005) examines how home improvements, as both an internalised process and externally visible practice can reflect not just the structural changes but also serve as an indication of the underlying process of settlement.

⁵³ (especially of fabric) light, delicate, and translucent.

⁵⁴ From her 2004 thesis entitled *The enigma machine: Unraveling the domestic experience*.

As a physical manifestation of this, built structures⁵⁵ and dwellings that function as the site of the home, play an active role in shaping the notion of home for their occupants.

2.3. The Embodiment of Architecture

By examining the work entitled *Teesiffie #1* by contemporary jeweller Joani Groenewald, I investigate how the architecture of the body and man-made architecture have amalgamated to serve as an inquiry into the notion of home.

Teesiffie #1 is a brooch⁵⁶ made from a combination of silver, hand-embroidered lace and thread, a tea strainer and rooibos tea. The tactile nature of the object and its classification as a wearable jewellery piece, speaks of the body. The object invites touch, tempting the viewer to participate in the artist's experience. Through the making of *Teesiffie #1*, the artist investigates her notion of home by examining her identity as an Afrikaner woman. In conversation with the artist (2016), Groenewald explains that the choice of titling the work in Afrikaans communicates her Afrikaner identity to the viewer. She adds that it wasn't an option to translate it to English, because the translation would have been a falsehood of what she was trying to convey about her inquiry into her Afrikaner identity.

⁵⁵These structures carry their own historical and cultural meaning.

⁵⁶ A piece of jewellery that is held on clothing by a pin and usually worn by a woman at or near her neck.



Figure 8. Joani Groenewald, *Teesiffie#1* (2013). Brooch: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainer, rooibos tea. (Groenewald, 2015)

When I consider the tonality and pronunciation of the word 'teesiffie' in Afrikaans, the word feels light, almost weightless, and it seems to roll off my tongue. This is echoed in the weightlessness and delicate nature of the object. In the English translation of the title, 'tea strainer', the word 'strain' implies tension and the title becomes weighted, implying labour. Keeping in mind the subjective nature of language, it is also important to add that I make this observation based on my own South African heritage and understanding of English and Afrikaans. This paradox presents an interesting observation in both the making of the object and the object as a metaphor for the artist's identity as

an Afrikaner woman, its associations and the weight and weightlessness of memory. The object speaks of the uncomfortable space we constantly navigate when examining our own personal history, our culture, and our complacent acceptance or challenging thereof. The implication of the object as a brooch, intended to hang around the wearer's neck, conjures an image of a noose, perhaps a warning or a reminder of the turmoil of Apartheid.

When considering the act or ritual of making and drinking tea, the object once again interrogates something that is generally considered to be nourishing to the body, recreational and a source of relaxation. A spill or stain on the object is caused by the residue of tealeaves left by the act of drinking. The latter is visible and intentionally embedded on the object. The ritual of drinking afternoon tea echoes a femininity enhanced by the artist's use of hand embroidery, a skill she learnt by observing her mother and grandmother. It speaks of her matriarchal role in the family and poses the question of how her children will possibly inherit these traditions and histories. The use of indigenous rooibos tea places the object firmly within the borders of South Africa. The object raises questions around my own identity as a woman, and presents a nuanced experience of Afrikaner identity through juxtapositioning of the past and present.

I stated above that *Teesiffie#1* serves as a fusion of architecture of the body and the hand-made object. It provides a simultaneous view of the inner and outer developing of the notion of home. The artist presents the inner workings of her cultural experiences embodied in the brooch in much the same way as Marais does when cracking open the termitary to observe its inner workings.

In a similar way to Groenewald, in my work entitled *Stay*, I appropriate objects and employ traditions of cast metal to re-examine the nature of objects to their history and environment. In this piece I echo the geographical demarcation of Shembe worship circles, usually marked by painted white stone circles.

The production of the work *Stay* serves as a catalyst for the destabilization of Calvinistic⁵⁷ opinions of my Afrikaner history.

Shembe⁵⁸ worship circles, which are usually found on the periphery of towns in South Africa, serve as gathering places where religious ceremonies and worship take place. I pass one such circle on my daily commute.



Figure 9. Isabel Mertz, *Stay* (2016). Granite stone and cast bronze. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

The work acts as the periphery of my exhibition and consists of granite stones that seem to float off the gallery walls. I collected the stones in 2012 during a walk in a veld on the outskirts of Pretoria. The ground in that area is filled with

⁵⁷ In South Africa in the early twentieth century Calvinistic churches became an impediment to political reform. Racial separation was widely accepted, as many Afrikaners came to believe that their own survival as a community was threatened, and as the belief in racial separation was gaining acceptance among white South Africans in general. Social and spiritual survival became intertwined in church philosophy (Byrnes, 1996).

⁵⁸ An African sect that combines Christianity with aspects of Bantu religion (South African History Online, n.d.)

various minerals and sedimentary rock such as dolomite, resulting in pulsating electric storms during the summer rain. These stones, however, are granite. Granite is known as igneous rock⁵⁹ and is comprised of large mineral grains that fit tightly together.

I tried to pick up stones that fitted comfortably into my hands so that I could carry them easily as I continued to look for more. The stones were heavy to carry and it became a strenuous exercise to retrieve them from the veld. They became precious markers of that experience, and every time I relocated them, the stones demarcated my new home.



Figure 10. Isabel Mertz, *Stay, Detail* (2016). Granite stone and cast bronze. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

⁵⁹ Igneous, derived from the Latin word *ignis* meaning fire, is one of the three main rock types found on earth, the others being sedimentary and metamorphic. Igneous rock is formed through the cooling and solidification of magma or lava (The Gale Group, Inc., n.d.).

In *Stay* I grafted tiny bronze cast bees onto the crevasses of the stones. The cast bronze memorializes the search for a home, as the bees sit like stalagmites, frozen by time, waiting for a new suitable home. In addition, the material application of the bronze, the diminutive stature of the casts, and the bees' smudged, distorted appearance, are reminiscent of missed casts, a term which refers to a failed or unsuccessful bronze cast. Missed casts are usually discarded. By deliberately employing the missed casts in my work I question the traditional patriarchal assumptions of the medium. The title *Stay*, as a verb, refers to remaining in the same place or to remain in a specific state or position. Into the rock I have carved small markings referencing the various locations where the stones have been. These works carry a spiritual reference and speak of time and place being transposed to new sites as they are reconfigured within a new space. They become metaphors for my continual search for a locale or home.

I connect this search for habitat and a sense of place and space to the behaviour of the bees. When wild bees look for a new suitable site to construct their hive they cluster together when they rest for protection and to keep warm. They look for potential nesting sites in the crevasses of stones and in cavities of trees. They will only start constructing their hive if the conditions are perfect.

I relate this work to Marais' (1937:100) portrayal of a breach in the termitary, as he explains the behaviour of the two kinds of termite as corresponding to the function of the blood corpuscles in the body;

Just as the white corpuscles make a cordon round the wound, which the red corpuscles begin healing, so the soldiers form a protective circle while the workers mend the breach.

(Marais, 1937:100)

In a similar way the granite stones become embodied and function as the white blood cells of the exhibition, creating a protective circle within which my new formation of home can occur. The image of the stones as blood cells exposes the inside of the body, linking it to the inner workings of the notion of home.

To summarize my investigation into architecture thus far, geographical sites can serve as lenses through which I can investigate the ever-shifting connections to history, home and place. I have reasoned that the position of the house that functions as the site of the home plays an active part in the production of the notion of home. Furthermore, inhabitation transcends the boundaries of geography and object to the embodiment of the notion of home in the self. The self becomes the home. We breathe to extend and contract, lose and find our notion of home. The self as the architect of the notion of home reveals it as an intimate⁶⁰ experience. How can I echo this intimacy?

⁶⁰A close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship or experience (Dictionary.com, 2016, s.v. 'intimate').



Figure 11. Main church hall, *Installation view*, (2016). Photograph by Morgan Trimble

2.4. An intimate experience of architecture

Through the process of making sculpture I experience an intimate exchange between my body and the material with which I am working. The body is always involved or implicit in some way in the production of sculpture. This intimate space is transferred to the viewers as they are invited into the experience. The sculpture becomes the embodied site where mediation between the viewer and the intimacy of the experience of the notion of home is transferred. Therefore intimacy and intimate spaces are created by and through the bodies that occupy them. Intimacy is created from the inside and is a visceral experience.

I find an example of the production of intimacy in Bachelard's description of a bird constructing its nest (Bachelard, 1969:100). He describes a bird's own body as its tools for construction. Bachelard provides a vivid example of nest building through the writings of Michelet. The form of the bird's nest is determined from the inside, as the female makes the nest into a felt-like padding by exercising an active pressure;

The house is the bird's very person; it is its form and its most immediate effort, I shall even say its suffering. The result is only obtained by constantly repeated pressure of the breast. There is not one of these blades of grass that, in order to make it curve and hold the curve, has not been pressed on countless times by the bird's breast, its heart, surely with difficulty in breathing, perhaps even, with palpitations.

(Bachelard, 1969:101)

This image illuminates the continual, active production of intimate space. I relate this active production of intimacy to the notion of home. It is a production that is infinite and finds various forms.



Figure 12. Zanele Muholi, *Being*, (2007). triptych, silver gelatin prints and a Lambda print (Micheal Stevenson Gallery, 2007)

In contemporary artist Zanele Muholi's⁶¹ photographic series *Being 2007*, intimate space envelops the focal plane of the image. These photographs reveal to the viewer two bodies in an intimate embrace. In the first and last black and white photographs in the series, the figures seem to float, huddled together, their faces partially covered from our view. Their bodies fill the entire visual plane, becoming the architecture of the image. The central photograph of the series, in colour, reveals to the viewer that they are the bodies of two women. The bodies face each other to acknowledge one another and their lives.

The title, *Being*⁶², communicates that these images are about the women in the image, about their lives, their existence. Bachelard (1969:xvi) speaks of the reverberation of the being of the poetic image. He notes that we have to experience the reverberation of an image in order to determine its being. This series therefore acts as a reverberation of the lives of the subjects.

⁶¹According to Sue Williamson (2008:130) Muholi describes herself as a visual activist first and as an artist second. Her work focusses on the documentation of black lesbian and transgender people and challenges homophobia, racialized patriarchies, and social injustice.

⁶² The quality or state of having existence (Merriam-Webster, 2016, s.v. 'being').

The series can be seen to destabilize patriarchal assumptions of the notion of home and heterosexual notions of partnership.

The photographs serve to subvert heterosexist, western, and patriarchal bourgeois assumptions of the world (Harper, 2012). Furthermore, they question the relationship between the photographer, her subject, and the viewer. As Sue Williamson (2008:130) states, these figures strike a balance between formal value and a gaze that manages to be non-objective.

In an interview Muholi notes that her images are about capturing relationships, not documenting subjects (Frankel, 2012). She adds that it is important for photographers to understand that they are dealing with human beings who participate in the production of the photograph, and that they are not subjects. She also states that her images are about revealing intimate spaces. Revealing this intimacy, Muholi says, “disrupts the mind-set of the homophobe” (Indaba, 2014).

Muholi’s use of black and white photography aids in making the images timeless, while the interruption of the colour photograph in the series illuminates the image with life, and personalises the couple, showing them as live human beings. As Mary Corrigan (2014:3) notes, Muholi confronts viewers with the reality of homosexual existence in such a way that it perhaps demystifies these relationships, revealing them not as abstract or imagined reality, or a news story, but rather a lived experience; it is life.

From this analysis I reason that Muholi’s triptych *Being* can serve as an example of how the notion of home is constructed by the self and is an intimate experience. As Bachelard (1969:48) notes, a house is a space that is supposed to condense and defend intimacy. As such, the architecture of the body serves as a tool to investigate the notion of home.



Figure 13. Isabel Mertz, *Water damage, Detail* (2016). Indigenous wild fig wood and invasive eucalyptus. Photograph by Carla Crafford

EXPERIENCE 4

Before I **collapse** into your surface I question my motives. Is it a conquest for an imagined land, the vast landscape filled with the possibilities of discovering bountiful secrets?

Or is it an attempt to create a strange mirror reflecting my insecurities and the paradoxes of my **past**?

END OF EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER 3 / ROOM 3

A MATERIAL DIALOGUE, MATERIALIZING MEANING THROUGH MATTER

In the previous chapters I investigated the various threads that weave together the multifarious nature of the notion of home. The notion of home can be explored and understood through examining different architectures and altering the meaning of retrieved objects. Similarly, in my creative practice these threads influence the creation and production of my visual work. In Bachelard I find an example of continuous construction when he describes the nest as the centre of the world;

Like the swallow, we construct the world – an enormous nest, an agglomerate of earth and sky, of death and life, and of two sorts of time, one we can dispose of and one that is lacking. Yes, two sorts of time, for what a long time we should need before waves of tranquility spreading out from the center of our intimacy reached the ends of the world.

(Bachelard, 1969:104)

Bachelard continues by adding that, as in the case of the swallow nests, the building of our own shelter is never finished. When relating this idea to my own artistic practice and the notion of home, I find that this construction of home is in a constant state of formation. I regard the process of making an artwork⁶³ as of equal importance to the art object on display; and I believe that the pieces are in a constant state of making and changing and therefore, similar to the construction of home.

⁶³ Anna Moszynska (2013:6) notes that sculpture along with the wider category of art has undergone comparable questioning and change in the last century. Examining museums, galleries, art biennales and art fairs in the present it appears that the “traditional” notions of sculpture have largely been affected.

This chapter will focus on my creative practice, its production and the reconfiguration of the work within the exhibition space. Through the investigation of the making and configuration of the work within the exhibition space I narrate the experiential nature of my visual practice.

Before a story can be told there are various elements to consider. Firstly, who is the storyteller? Secondly, why did the storyteller choose a particular tale⁶⁴; and lastly, who is the intended audience for this tale? In any good story there are different characters that play various parts in verbalizing the tale. I consider my art practice as a form of visual narration. Therefore, the choices I make when I select the material in which to work are influenced by the particular narrative I want to convey.

In this visual narration, the selected materials are the different voices in the re-telling of a tale. Individually each material has a voice; and each voice has its own nature, history and context. I listen to each voice and consider its tonal value within the score of the narration. These visual narrations are therefore mutually authored by myself and by the materials that have been selected. Further considerations in the plot formation of my visual narratives are the process of making that leads to the final result. Is the narration a chronological process where the end result is what is displayed to an audience? Or is the process of making⁶⁵ the narration?

Both process and end result are equally important in my practice, and are considered part of my visual narrative. Therefore I see my art practice as a marriage of materials and process. As mentioned earlier, however, every story has an audience, and the role the audience plays in my visual narrative is also an important consideration in the making of the work.

⁶⁴I use the term tale as it may imply non-truth.

⁶⁵Handmade: In her book *Sculpture Now*, author Anna Moszynska (2013:156) notes the longstanding relationship of labour to sculpture.

Where is the viewer in relation to each piece? What is the viewer's point of view towards each piece or installation? In what ways do I ask viewers to engage with the dialogue? Are they passive witnesses or active agents in the narrative?



Figure 14. Isabel Mertz, *War games*, Installation view (2015). Pen on drafting film. Photograph by Morgan Trimble



Figure 15. Isabel Mertz, *Shrapnel*, Detail (2016). Cast tin. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

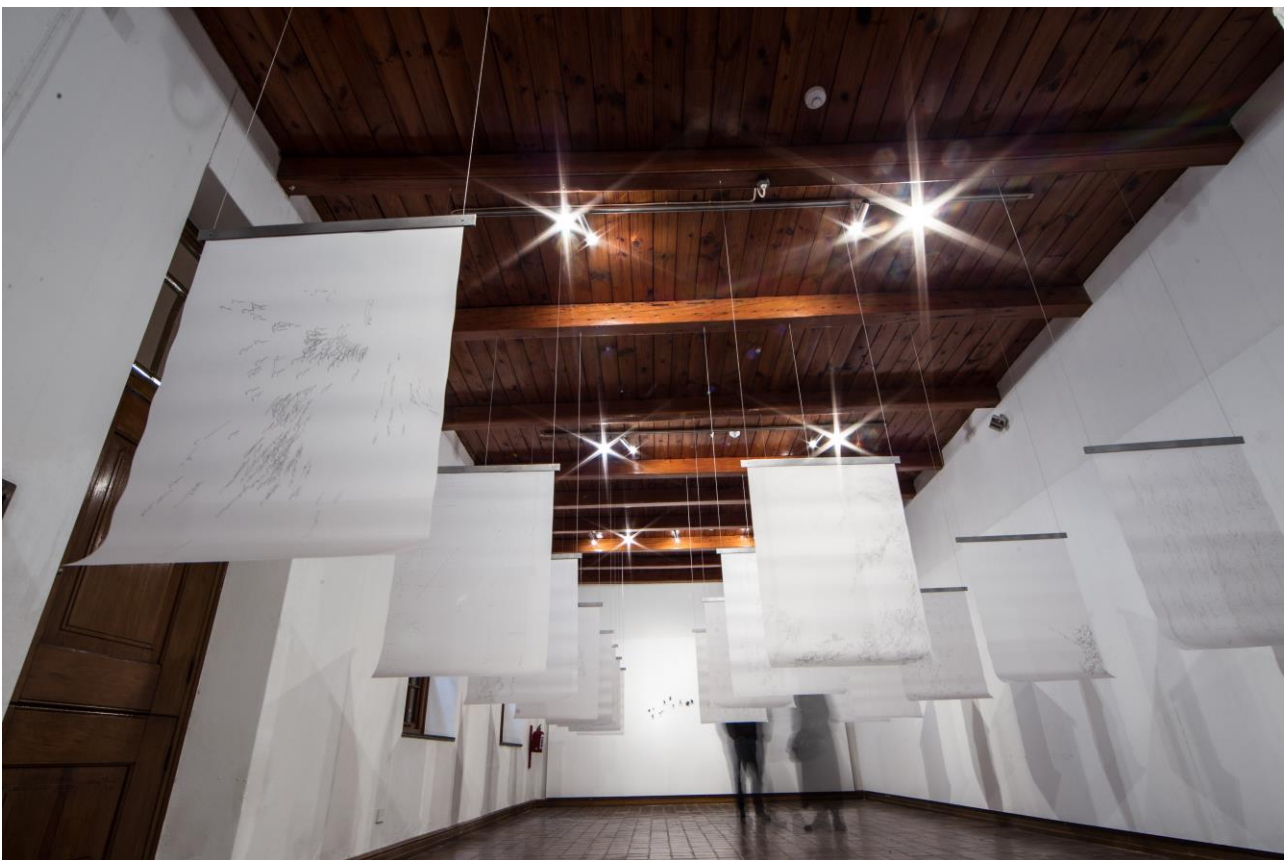


Figure 16. Isabel Mertz, *War games*, Installation view (2015). Pen on drafting film. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

EXPERIENCE 5

The room **echoes** with my **footsteps**, the emptiness is misleading I walk through the first room, my imagined landscapes hold it in place, I walk up the creaking staircase they provide a better vantage point from which I can survey. The dots on the wall sit like markers on a map, they traverse my route. I **walk** back down and turn a corner, the crates wait, pregnant with potential; I listen closely for signs of their breath. My eyes fool me in thinking I saw something move, I look again and see the twisting and turning of my own reflection in the darkness. I turn a final corner into the cool light, pinned to the wall a new **galaxy** awaits.

END OF EXPERIENCE

3.1. The exhibition space

Experience five serves as walk through of the exhibition space. The historical significance of a building, in this instance a church re-appropriated as a gallery space⁶⁶, and its patriarchal legacy is conceptually relevant to the configuration of this body of work. For the practical component of this research I selected a number of works and installations that I have produced during the course of my study. I configured them within the building which serves as the gallery space. The architecture of the building leads viewers into different spaces where I have placed my various installations. The tonality of the exhibition within each room acts as windows into my psyche, and so, too, it reflects my notion of home.

The first room, or the “main church hall”, is flooded with natural light during the day. I installed my large wooden trestle pieces entitled *Water Damage* here. These pieces echo the old wooden floor of the church, and reach to the height of my own waist. The second, smaller, middle room of the church is occupied by

Crate, which leads to the video piece *Dis-arm, Dis-member, Dis-mantle*.

When stepping down from here into the fourth room, sound interrupts the otherwise quiet gallery space. In this last room, where all natural light has been blocked out, an installation consisting of three of my art pieces *War games*, *Shrapnel* and *Dolosse*, envelop the viewer and unfolds to reveal the source of disruptive sound from the video piece of bees dropping to the ground in *Forced removal*.

⁶⁶ The exhibition space, GUS is an old Lutheran church in Stellenbosch. Situated on Dorp Street and designed by Carl Otto Hager, the architect of the Moederkerk and the Ou Hoofgebou, the church was erected in a Gothic style dated from 1851. The church was purchased by Anton Rupert, after it had been disused and was donated to the university as a gallery space. I have considered the different architectural features of the building and natural occurrences such as the different light, tonality and texture of each room of the space.

These rooms embody and thereby navigate my notion of home. Each room becomes visual evidence of my research. They serve to convey my different perceptions of time, inviting viewers to partake in a visceral experience of my notion of home.



Figure 17. Isabel Mertz, *Shrapnel*, installation view (2016). Cast tin. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

3.2. Continuous construction

The termitary, with all its inner workings seems to be growing constantly. From the inside the workers relentlessly build their nest pebble by pebble. The colony never stops feeding their young, repairing broken structures and irrigating their fungal gardens. Marais (1937:51) asks;

Why do they continue working? What is the spring of this restless activity?

In the queen's chamber, too, there is persistent activity: at one end of the chamber a stream of worker termites flows in, feeding her one drop of liquid at a time, while simultaneously another stream of termites carries away the eggs that she endlessly lays. Marais (1937:133) calculates the number of eggs at fifty thousand a day! Surely at some stage there should be enough termites in the colony and the nest should be big enough? In searching for the answer to their continuous labour I find a motive behind it: it is that this labour is their life, and what keeps them alive.

I relate this process to the labour of art making. My art production becomes an extension of my life. As such it becomes a vehicle for my notion of home. My artworks and the process of making them are the embodiment of my notion of home, place and placelessness. My process of art making becomes a vehicle through which I can reflect and interrogate my locale, history, identity and memory. The mediums I use facilitate these interrogations.

This is evident in the series of work entitled *Water Damage*, the departure point for which was an investigation into the architecture of beehives and the apiaries of paper wasps. I have observed beekeepers removing a giant hive in my mother's house. The nest weighed close to sixty kilograms, and the structure hanging from the wooden roof beams oozed yellow honey as thousands of bees crawled about, dazed by the smoke produced by the beekeepers.

The bees seemed torn between protecting their nest and survival, and clustered together in tight balls until many of them succumbed to the smoke, dropping to the ground. The intricate nest, which had taken years to construct, was removed effortlessly by the beekeepers. Using scrapers they broke the combs from the wooden beams.

Bees construct their nests by chewing pieces of soft wax until it becomes malleable, and then bond large quantities of wax together to form the characteristic hexagon cell shape. They store the honey that sustains the colony during winter months in these cells. The bees also construct "brood cells" where bee larvae develop and grow. For the bees their nest serves numerous functions: as home it secures their safety, it serves as store, factory, and source of food, and as incubator it ensures new life. Their labour is incessant towards accomplishing all these functions, and it is their labour that shapes the nest from the inside out.

Similarly, paper wasps build their nests by chewing up bits of wood that they collect from logs, trees, or wooden fences. The wasp uses its mouth to break up the wood fibres into minute particles, simultaneously mixing it with saliva and water to form a pulp. The wasp uses this pulp to construct the cells that make up its home. Wasps do not overwinter, but rather construct new nests each spring, demonstrating the cycles and rhythms of production and generative growth in nature.

On a walk I found a paper wasp constructing a nest. I watched her building the small hexagon cells, laying an egg in each one and then flying off. I found an abandoned nest close by and delicately pulled the nest from the wall. It took a second to pluck the nest from the wall, and felt weightless in my hand.



Figure 18. Isabel Mertz, *Wasps nest* (2016). Indigenous wild fig wood. Photograph by Ledelle Moe



Figure 19. Isabel Mertz, *Wasps nest* (2016). Indigenous wild fig wood. Photograph by Ledelle Moe

Two things struck me as a result of these events. The first is how effortlessly the beekeepers destroyed the nest. The paper wasp nest, too, gave way from the wall without resistance when I pulled at it. The second is how laborious and time consuming it must have been for the insects to construct these shelters. These two nests, their construction and their destruction, their weight and weightlessness, initiated a series of investigations into a variety of materials.

Construction and destruction; this dichotomy stayed in my mind's eye in the studio. I wanted to produce a series of works that would allude to both of these experiences and the fragility of these life-cycles. The first nests I made were roughly the size of my hand and carved from offcuts of indigenous wild fig wood. The wood was light in weight and had a spongy quality to it. I used small hand-carving tools which easily cut into the wood. For these carvings I let the material lead the making.

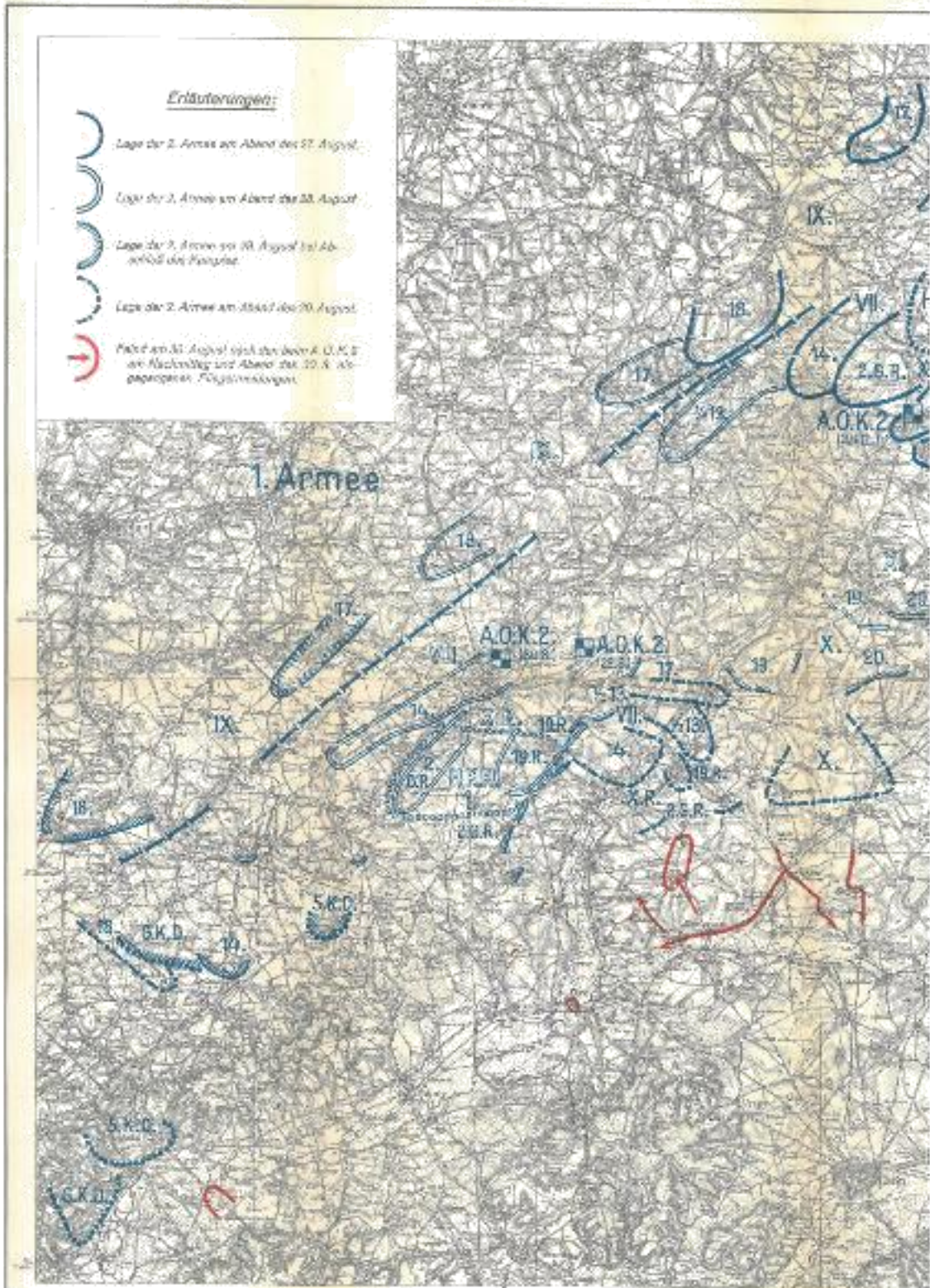
There was fungal growth and water damage in certain areas of the wood, and other areas had hard knots, and the grain seemed to twist and turn continuously. In each nest I allowed my hand to find the shape through the process of carving, relying on my memory of what the nests looked and felt like. The process of carving was slow and laborious; and the more wood I removed the more delicate each nest became, and the slower I had to carve to ensure that I didn't break the nest. In places I carved completely through the wood, revealing the inside and the outside simultaneously. The fragility of the carved object echoed the wasp's nest. Here, destruction of the wood had to take place in order for the nest to be revealed.

The experience I relate above leads me to the question of weight. In the first small nests it was possible to make lightweight fragile carvings. I wanted to make larger pieces that would convey the mass of the beehive. In addition, these pieces had to evoke the loss of home. Their weight and size should communicate to the viewer, and in the making, too, they should impose on me the gravity of my history. I predetermined the size of the wooden pieces, and ensured that each

log had the same width. The biggest piece came close to my height, and the other pieces were also selected in relation to measurements taken from my body.

The carving process was the same as with the smaller nests: my hand and the nature of the wood led it. The wood was not chemically treated and had been exposed to rain in the timber yard. Natural fungal growth, water stains and insect burrows were visible. I integrated these existing elements with the construction of the nest carvings, working around insect burrows where I found them. Using hand tools, a variety of chisels and a mullet, I shaped the nests, which became a collaborative process with nature. I tried to mimic the bite marks made by insects in the wood, making it unclear which marks were made by my hand and which were already there. These carvings become authored by human and non-human voices. In my opinion a hierarchical collapse happens between human and non-human, and the authorship is a mutual act.

The marks caused by water damage on the wood resembles intricate maps. The water damage is an indication of the history of the wood, the conditions it has been kept in, a clue to its past. I incorporate symbols found in my grandfather's old military maps in these stains. These symbols are cut and bent pieces of bronze, which I inlay into the wood. I force selective small bronze pieces into cracks, resembling a stitch. The impulse to stitch and graft the bronze with the wood is an attempt to reconcile my personal history and the reshaping of it in the present.



Each nest is wedged between two invasive Eucalyptus wooden trestles. The fig nests are cut to fit exactly into the grooves of the trestles, echoing Rosalind Krauss⁶⁷ (1979:280) notion that the sculpture reaches downward to absorb the pedestal⁶⁸ into itself, thus becoming self-contained. The trestles stand perpendicular to the nests and the exacting geometric qualities of the trestles have an architectural quality.

When placed together, the nests and the trestles form a table like structure standing waist high in relation to my body. They echo war game tables⁶⁹ where strategies play out. This referencing to furniture, planning and strategy allude to dynamics in the home where ambiguous power struggles occur. It is also unclear whether the pieces are in a state of decay, being invaded by the insect nests hanging below the surface, or if they had been constructed. It is uncertain whether the nests are empty or if they contain life, and whether the nests are the result of carving or natural forces, such as burrowing insects.

Both the nests and the trestles were not sealed with varnish or treated against insects; therefore as the work ages, slight colouration will occur, depending on the amount of direct sunlight to which the work is exposed. Over time the bronze inlays will oxidize and change colour, and there is the possibility that insects might occupy the carved cavities of the nest. The work is therefore not complete and will continue to develop and change over the course of time.

⁶⁷Art theorist and critic.

⁶⁸The sculpture and supporting structure become one.

⁶⁹According to Rodger Smith, war game tables date as far back as the Roman Empire. Where commanders used sand tables and abstract icons to represent soldiers and units in battle. These allowed leaders to visualize and manipulate a small physical copy of the battlefield allowing them to see information in geographic perspective (Smith, 2016).



Figure 21. Isabel Mertz, *Water damage* (2016). Indigenous wild fig wood, invasive eucalyptus and bronze. Photograph by Carla Crafford



Figure 22. Isabel Mertz, *Water damage, Detail* (2016). Indigenous wild fig wood, invasive eucalyptus and bronze. Photograph by Carla Crafford

I reference traditional African wood carving where practices surrounding wood carving as craft⁷⁰ or as professional practice⁷¹, are still strongly debated. This ambiguity, along with the continued patina and aging of the material speaks to the dismantling of hierarchies within the material process and authorship of the work.

Similarly, in the stone carving *Erode*, process directs the piece, and the work becomes an investigation of time. As the title suggests, the piece conveys the result of erosion⁷², purposefully initiated by human and non-human interferences.

The granite stone was collected on the outskirts of Pretoria, the same location where the stones for “*Stay*” were collected. This stone, however, is much larger and heavier, challenging me physically during the realisation of this work. The method of erosion, or the removing of matter, convey the slow process and labour involved in coming to terms with my past. The process of eroding the stone become a meditative act for me, as I recall memories of my past in imagined places where the stone could potentially have been. I imagine how the stone was formed and what it looked like in its core. In my mind the stone evokes the time it had been in the veld, and how it had endured and survived seasonal fires and electric rainstorms.

The process of removing or eroding was achieved by submerging the stone in water for a number of hours, erasing layer after layer of sedimentary material. As the water was drawn into the stone the sedimentary layer became soft

⁷⁰ Craft refers here both to the skilled labour of making an object and aesthetic notions surrounding African traditional art objects. As Pieter Swanepoel (2005:22) notes a general argument concerning the distinction between art and craft will claim that the artwork is concerned with aesthetics, whereas the primary interest or purpose of the craft work is utilitarian.

⁷¹ Swanepoel (2005:22) states that an investigation into the art/craft debate reveals how classification highlights hierarchical structures: the two categories or classes distinguished are never equal. The one is always set up or played off against the other, often resulting in critical debates concerned not so much with art-*and*-craft, as with art-*versus*-craft.

⁷² Erosion is defined as the process of matter being worn away by natural elemental forces. These include wind, water and other natural agents.

and I could crudely chip it away with a hammer. I used a grinder to hack at the surface, scarring and cutting marks into the stone. Once again I let my hand find the shape in the stone and was guided by touch rather than sight. This became a tactile exploration of the surface and material accelerated by the ongoing process of gradual sanding and rubbing.

This process became an ongoing form of meditation, a metaphor for time, where the past and present intersects anchored by the physicality of the stone. When I was satisfied with the surface, I used old maps from my grandfather, denoting various tactical military manoeuvres as reference for the creation of an imagined map which I meticulously carved into the surface of the stone. This work functions as an intersection of imagined and real locations. Removing the granite stone from its location in Pretoria and transplanting it to Stellenbosch suggests these different locales and their histories. The process of making became a way to reflect, and the ritual act of removing matter and washing the stone served as a signifier for personal cleansing.



Figure 23. Isabel Mertz, *Water damage, Detail* (2016). Indigenous wild fig wood, invasive eucalyptus and bronze. Photograph by Carla Crafford



Figure 24. Isabel Mertz, *Erode* (2016). Carved granite stone, *Detail*. Photograph by Morgan Trimble



Figure 25. Isabel Mertz, *Erode* (2016). Carved granite stone. Photograph by Morgan Trimble



Figure 26. Isabel Mertz, *Dolosse* (2016). Cast bronze, Installation view. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

EXPERIENCE 6

Haphazardly, hopeless, heartbeats

Grapple and gaps for air,

Light and airy your wing fall, beats

I hear your breath

I remember that day, I remember how I felt. Anxious. Tense. You were unaware, content in your existence. They came in white suits, frivolous attempts at negotiations.

For symbiosis?

A coalition perhaps?

All just diversion tactics.

Thick smoke filled every cavity and trickled down. The only sound is that of heartbeats,

Falling.

I search for your

breath

END OF EXPERIENCE



Figure 27. Isabel Mertz, *Dolosse* (2015). Cast bronze, Detail. Photograph by Morgan Trimble



Figure 28. Isabel Mertz, *Dolosse* (2015). Cast bronze, Detail. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

3.3. Naturalizing the past

In the sections above I reflect on how my process of art making becomes an extension of my existence, and so reflect my ever-shifting notion of home. I examine various inherited objects, questioning and subverting their histories, and delve into various bodies of architecture through which I can experience my notion of home and place. In transporting the past and absorbing it into my present, new meanings are assigned to it. There are, however, certain events where further transposition needs to occur in order for it to catalyse new meanings.

I look to Bachelard for a technique to grapple with events that seem deviant of transformation. Bachelard offers a solution in naturalizing⁷³ the event. He looks to his garden and the sound of a woodpecker working in a tree;

However mysterious and inviable among the leaves the green-garbed woodpecker may be at times, he nevertheless becomes familiar to us.

(Bachelard, 1969:97)

Bachelard continues and applies naturalization when faced by distress. He explains;

In my Paris apartment, when a neighbour drives nails into the wall at an undue hour, I “naturalize” the noise by imagining that I am in my house in Dijon, where I have a garden ... I say to myself: that’s my woodpecker at work in the acacia tree.

(Bachelard, 1969:97)

This makes me wonder how I can naturalize events from my past. In the final room of the installation space, the configuration of work conveys various techniques that I investigate and through which I naturalize my past.

The first technique I find in play. In the work entitled *War games* I use my father’s collection of tin toy soldiers as implements to produce a set of twenty drawings through playing a game. I arrange different soldiers on the pieces of paper, and over a number of days move the pieces around, outlining their shadows. Traces of their origin remain in the drawings as their serial numbers identify the different soldiers. In certain places on this imagined battlefield I use “K.O” and “O.K”⁷⁴.

⁷³In biology, to naturalize a plant or animal means to establish a species in a region so that it lives wild where it is not indigenous (Oxford University Press, 2016, s.v. ‘naturalize’). Here I refer to naturalize in making something familiar or natural.

⁷⁴K.O refers to the term ‘Knock Out’. In which an opponent is defeated in one hit, or punch. O.K refers to the opposite; the opponent remains standing.



Figure 29. Isabel Mertz, *War games, Process* (2015). Digital Photograph by Danika Schultz



Figure 30. Isabel Mertz, *War games, Process* (2015). Digital Photograph by Danika Schultz

These drawings serve as a re-enactment of the past through play; their past is alluded to in the use of the tin soldiers. The drawings, suspended from the ceiling, are configured in a rigid grid, with footpaths between them. Navigating these footpaths, my shadow and that of the viewer become intertwined, forming part of the work and the game.

In the works *Dolosse* and *Shrapnel* I further extend the act of playing in the recasting of the tin soldiers. The purpose of re-casting the soldiers is not to reproduce exact copies of the original, which would serve as a symbolic gesture of memorializing them, but rather to re-interpret, re-intact and (re)-remember them. The title *Dolosse*⁷⁵ echoes a childhood game, and also refers to caltrops⁷⁶.

The use of bronze and heavy green patinas in these objects evoke history, while it is also reminiscent of fungal growths on the side of old buildings. In *Shrapnel*, the pieces are delicately pinned to the gallery wall, reminding one of insect specimens as they “float” and cast multiple shadows onto the surface behind them. Here too, the re-casting of the toy soldiers contributes to the loss of information. In this way there is a translation, removal and “erasure” of their original state.

Sounds lend colour to space, and confer a sort of sound body upon it.

(Bachelard, 1969:43)

⁷⁵The title of this work, “Dolosse” is derived from the Afrikaans word “Dolos” and has two given derivations. The first according to Elizabeth Kott (2016) refers to a contraction of ‘dobbel osse’, a game also known as “Jacks”, while the second refers to divination practices by Sangomas, South African traditional healers who usually throw animal bones to predict the future.

⁷⁶Is the ideal passive weapon and is a ball from which four spikes projected in such a way that when three spikes were on the ground the fourth was always pointed upward. (HistoryNet, n.d.)

Echoing in the installation, a sound reminiscent of raindrops fills the space. This sound is from the video *Forced removal*⁷⁷. Located at the back of the room this video footage documents the removal of the colony of bees in my childhood home and records the dead bees falling onto the surface of the camera from the hive above. When applying Bachelard's notion of naturalization to this sound and experience I imagine the sound throughout the installation, not as bees falling to their death but rather as rain falling gently onto a surface.

Using the act of play and the medium of sound in this configuration of work, I hope to evoke a sense of participation and imagination through the re-telling of my personal history. In so doing I personally re-assign new meaning to these objects, and also suggest new ways of decentring my notion of place and displacement, of inherited and un inherited histories.

⁷⁷ The title, "forced removal", references the large-scale displacement that occurred in South Africa. By 1982, under the Group Areas Act of 1950, over 3.5 million people were forcibly removed and many more faced removals thereafter. This was one of the largest mass removals of people in modern history and was a result of the apartheid government Group Areas act in 1950, which mandated residential segregation throughout the country. (South African History Online, n.d.)



Figure 31. Isabel Mertz, *War games* (2015). Pen on drafting film, *Detail*. Photograph by Morgan Trimble

Looking at the body of work as a whole, I demonstrate various modes of inquiry through the examination of different architectures. I question and subvert patriarchal assumptions through various interventions with inherited objects. I suggest ways in which to naturalize certain events in order for them to be re-articulated through a poetic and subjective sense of home. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, I propose that the embodiment of the notion of home exists in the “self” and in turn plays itself out through the participation of viewers in the various art installations. By using a variety of materials and techniques, the notion of home, history, and place as multifarious, visceral experience reverberate in my art.



Figure 32. Isabel Mertz, *Forced removal* (2015). Digital video 3min loop

CONCLUSION

THE REVERBERATION OF HOME

This thesis set out to demonstrate that the notion of home is a multifarious, subjective experience that can be investigated through the poetic exploration of different architectures and inherited objects. I selected two key texts, namely

The Soul of the White Ant and the *Poetics of Space*, by authors who wrote from a phenomenological perspective to demonstrate the subjective, multifarious and poetic nature of inhabiting space and place. Their texts, supported by various local and international authors, aided my autobiographical investigation of the notion of home.

Furthermore, through the production of my artistic practice and the investigation of the work of contemporary artists Nicholas Hlobo, Joani Groenewald and Zanele Muholi, I reflected on visual languages that embody the notion of home.

In Chapter One I demonstrated how inherited objects carry memory and hold the potential to transfer memory, and how these memories or inherited histories can be subverted and questioned. I speculated, along with Bachelard's notes, about how objects can become evidence of my ancestral history. I referred to Eugene Marias' notion of uninherited instinct and examined it alongside my own work and that of Nicholas Hlobo.

In Chapter Two I investigated how different manifestations of architecture can function as a tool of inquiry into the notion of home. I explored the termitary and the house as situated homes. I examined the concept of inhabitation and intimacy, and looked at how the "self" can ultimately function as home and explored the work of Joani Groenewald and Zanele Muholi alongside my own work to demonstrate these ideas.

In Chapter Three I focused on my creative practice by examining how process, the labour of making, and participation form modes of inquiry through which I realise my notion of home and place in my art. I provided a walkthrough of the exhibition space, and also explored different ways in which I can naturalize past experiences and integrate them into my present understanding of the notion of home through the use of different materials, sounds and installations.

4.1. On language

I find that the subjective nature of language plays an important role in understanding the notion of home⁷⁸. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard uses language in a poetic manner to illustrate how phenomenology becomes a mode of enquiry through the examination of architecture of the home. For example, Bachelard (1969:xvi) refers to the reverberation⁷⁹, sonority⁸⁰, and being of the poetic image. In agreement with Bachelard I find that it is within the reverberation of the notion of home that the understanding of home is partially constructed.

Additionally, the subjective nature of language makes the use of narrative and autobiography important tools through which I explore my notion of home.

The use of narration is evident throughout *The Soul of The White Ant*⁸¹. Marais uses the tool of narration to instruct the reader how to participate in his observations. For example, he instructs the reader as follows, while witnessing the behaviour of a female termite after her maiden flight;

You become aware that she is seeking a suitable place for some further purpose...you must watch patiently if you wish to discover what she intends to do...if you become impatient and walk away the secret of the flying termite will remain a secret to you forever.

(Marais, 1937:17)

⁷⁸This is echoed in the writing of Marchetti-Mercer (2006:191-218) who adds that the concept of "home", like language, will have different meanings for different people and cultures and must be understood as a complex phenomenon that, although containing very powerful individual elements and experiences, is simultaneously situated in a number of larger contexts such as one's family of origin, one's community, and one's culture, as well as being influenced by other social phenomena.

⁷⁹Reverberation refers to sound, more specifically to the echoing of sound.

⁸⁰Sonority refers to sound, more specifically the loudness of speech. In this study sonority is related as the pitch.

⁸¹Eugene Marais originally wrote *The Soul of the White Ant* in Afrikaans, although he was more accustomed to writing in English. His use of Afrikaans reflects his opposition to the imperial rule by the English in South Africa and was a result of his disdain after the atrocities of the Great Boer War 1899-1902 (Rousseau, 1982).

Marais asks the reader to take part in his experiences. He asks the reader to re-enact his experiments and observations, through which they can experience what he did. Therefore the reading audience shares the experience. In a similar way I use narration as a tool to relate the understanding of the notion of home as an experience. I echo my experiences throughout this thesis in the form of autobiographical accounts. In addition, in the practical component of this research I ask the viewer to participate, in this way enabling their contributing to the development of my notion of home.

The selected artworks discussed in this paper echo the relevance of language in the notion of home. In the work of both Hlobo and Groenewald the artists chose to title their works in their mother tongue, Xhosa and Afrikaans respectively. In my work too I have selectively used Afrikaans in the titles, conveying my personal history.

In agreement with Marais and Bachelard, I also consider the notion of home to be a complex, multi-faceted concept that is subjectively constructed and informed⁸² by one's personal, cultural, societal and historical contexts and relationships with family and community units.

⁸² To use the term "coalition" as used by Tabosa-Vaz (2008) the "home" is always a form of coalition, between the individual and the community, between longing and memory, between home as a safe haven or site of violence and home as a place and finally home as a metaphor. Strengthening this notion of complexity, cited in Marchetti-Mercer (2006:193), Magat notes that the idea of home may not just be where a person wants to live but also where one wants to die and be buried. He continues that it may serve as a centre which contains an integration of past, present and future and ultimately an element of reconciliation between the immediate (proximate) and ultimate (abstract) concerns.

4.2. Relevance of notion of home in South Africa

Within the borders of South Africa, the questions surrounding the notion of home are particularly significant considering South Africa's status as a 'new' democratic country, according to author Camilla Tabosa-Vaz (2008:356). South Africa's history of Apartheid⁸³ from 1948 to 1994, and its former colonial and imperial legacy, shaped from 1806 to 1910, has played a major role in how the notion of home is constructed in this country. Forced removals of populations of South Africans to different areas under the Apartheid regime created a fraught and complex history⁸⁴.

In agreement with the afore-mentioned authors in this paper, and after conducting the practical component of this study, I am of the opinion that the notion of home as a subject of study can serve to facilitate conversations and interrogate individual and collective history within the context of South Africa.

Although this paper does not investigate the particulars of South Africa's history as a platform for this study, in reflection and conclusion I locate myself as a South African and speak to the autobiographic links of my inherited history from this vantage point. In doing so I can stretch the notion of naturalization that

⁸³Racial segregation and white supremacy had become central aspects of South African policy long before apartheid began. The controversial 1913 Land Act, passed three years after South Africa gained its independence, marked the beginning of territorial segregation by forcing black Africans to live in reserves and making it illegal for them to work as sharecroppers (History.com, n.d.)

⁸⁴In the newly democratic South Africa, these abuses of power are being reconciled and rightful ownership to land is being negotiated. This makes the ground of many areas in South Africa an issue of contested rights and belonging. In the apartheid era- the Group Areas Acts (GAA) physically determined how individuals and communities lived and how their notion of home was formed and fragmented. Tabosa-Vaz notes without hesitation that a key factor during the implementation of the GAA, and the resulting forced removals, was the deliberate attempt by the government to destroy not only houses but also people's homes, communities and sense of belonging. This affected the growth of individual and community identity (Tabosa-Vaz, 2008) and resulted in a violent and fragmented sense of place. Although these laws are no longer enforced within the new democratic structure today, their legacy is still felt on geographical, economic and psychological levels. This is because the notion of "home" is more than just physical attachments to the structure and its content. The destruction of the communities and the persisting pain and displacement today result in a psychic and psychological fragmentation of people and place.

Bachelard (1969:97) speaks of, to reflect on the reinterpretation of land and territories to my own memory and autobiographical narrative. In doing so, I return to the notion of labour and reflect on the interconnectedness of body, locale, and architecture.

In the various installations I have created, I find a way to dismantle my own notions of inherited history and patriarchal structures. I find poetic ambiguities and reflections of place that is not rooted in one locale, but rather connected to memory and recollection. In so doing this navigation serves as a reinterpretation of my notion of home. I end with a thought from Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*;

Poems are human realities; it is not enough to resort to "impressions" in order to explain them. They must be lived in their poetic immensity."

(Bachelard, 1969:210)

This study serves as a self-reflexive inquiry into my notion of home, and ultimately finds that it is within experience, shared or otherwise, but ultimately in oneself that the notion of home is shaped. It is a continuous practice and, in spite of disruptions in a sometimes disturbed world, it endures, embodied in creative acts and in being.

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