

Narratives and Home: Remembering an almost forgotten walk

By

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Declaration of originality

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

Natasha Bezuidenhout

Date

Abstract

The title of my exhibition *Bittersoet* alludes to the self-exploratory nature of my practice, as I interrogate the personal memories associated with objects that characterise the relationship between myself and my mother (mamma). This supporting document, *Narratives and Home: Remembering an almost forgotten walk*, considers the key conceptual concerns informing my practice. In this mini-thesis, I address the question: 'What is a home?'. Drawing from my own Fine Art Practice, I explore how home can be examined as a product of the imagination, rather than only as a physical place. I consider how 'home' is constructed as the primary objective within an ideological framework defined by history, memory and narrative. Engaging beyond the idea of 'home' as a fixed structure or place, I examine the idea of 'home' as something fluid that is negotiated and defined by the interaction between objects and language. It is concerned with dialectics of memory and narrative as they pertain directly to an experience of both searching for and reimagining home through metaphorical representations. In particular, I explore how home can be seen as equally familiar and unfamiliar, existing in-between, always changing, never fixed, rather in a constant state of flux.

The concept of home is addressed in a dialogical process by using Afrikaans as my mother tongue, I narrate informal conversations between myself and my mother. These conversations transform and expand into hybrid words, memories and narratives to form a layered continuous dialogue between my practice and research. This notion relates to exploring oneself and the 'fictions' of the past. The self being fundamental to the individual comprehension of both 'place' and 'space'.

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Introduction:

*Ons het net begin loop, die lewe is kort, dus het ons net begin loop...*¹

The above paradoxical statement by my mother lead to my re-enactment of a peculiar walk that expanded into the attempt to retell a story of how my mother, brother and I walked almost three hundred kilometers spanning over three days from East London to the *plaas dorpie*² called Ugie. Prior, to telling my story I examined the concept of home through the question, 'What is a home?'. How does one "find" home as something simultaneously physical and conceptual, How can the art making process assist in working through this question?

This inquiry lead to the development of two thematic threads, revealing "for every mapped-out journey contains another journey hidden in its lines..." (Winterson 1989: 23). This metaphoric journey was to weave together an underlying search for home, as the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adchie puts it, "I think you travel to search and you come back home to find yourself there".

These aforementioned quotations point to two key themes that are central to the self-exploratory nature of my practice as research, namely I have discovered that the meaning of home was far 'closer to home' than I originally thought. I started to examine how my personal memories attached to objects are symbolic of certain aspects of the relationship between myself and my mother. This interaction expanded to a narrated version of events, in particular, a fictional, yet simultaneously factual journey of a physical walk from East London to the town of Ugie. My recollection lead to the overlapping of conceptual threads that were to define *home* and a sense of selfhood. I examined this process through a dialogical approach and hybridised use of language, which I utilised through incorporating my own mother tongue (Afrikaans) to narrate informal conversations

¹ Translation of Afrikaans into English: We just started to walk, life is short, thus we just started to walk.

² Translation of Afrikaans into English: Farm town

between myself and my mother. These recorded dialogues were to aid a layered continuous discourse between practice and research to determine a multitude of meaning and understanding concerning *home* and notions of self.

The aim of this research was to explore how notions of home could be perceived as fluid, mutable and unfixed. My exhibition, *Bittersweet*³, consists of evocative large-scale drawings in clay and chalk pastel on canvas and several series of smaller works in fired clay. I did this as a means to establish how dialectics of memory and narrative pertain to an experience of both searching for, and reimagining, home, through metaphorical representations in clay.

My interest in the concept of *home* stems from the Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal's (2002: 24) *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, in which she states, that, "concepts are not fixed. They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities". This statement offers an alternative strategy for combining the duality and multiplicity of concepts to explore how a contentment with a certain place or with oneself was to be defined by certain memories and narratives arranged or re-arranged, even misplaced or imagined. To how *home* was to be seen as a tangible place, yet the fluidity of the concept was to translate how someone's face or voice, even their laughter was to convey a sense of *home*.

Through elucidating the fragments attached to *home* I trace back to my childhood home, where nostalgic objects and subjects are reworked and retold through narratives and unseen spaces. These hidden spaces were to conceptualise the nooks and crannies of an intimate intertwining between *home* and objects ultimately defining the self. My interest in the impalpable nature of *home* can be discussed in relation to the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who applies the method of phenomenology to the study of human consciousness and self-awareness. That's to say, Bachelard (1994), aimed to address how the structures of experiences and consciousness were to relate to *home*. Drawing

³ Translation of Afrikaans into English: *Bittersweet*

attention to the complexity of memory coinciding with the imagination by the perplexing definition of space. This perception of unseen space were to address how the elusiveness of *home* is to be built upon by Bachelard (1994: 8), stating:

Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated.

To comprehend the unseen spaces that define this research, I consider how the ambiguities attached to a told narrative is blurred between the nomadic and diasporic self. I conceptualised home as a myth by realising how the notion of *home* was to be considered as an imaginative space rather than a physical place. I was to expand on the concept of nomadism by referring to the French philosopher Édouard Glissant, who in his text *Poetics of Relation*, refers to home as neither here nor there, by stating "Rome is no longer in Rome, it is wherever I am" (1997: 14). Glissant asserts that home is not fixed. Home is what resides in-between, a temporary makeshift of nomadism, relying not on the root, but on movement (Glissant 1997: 14). A similar view is held by Lionel Thaver (2006: 17), stating that the concept "at home" in term of its affective dimension (feeling at home), as a relation to the self, suggests that one can potentially be at home anywhere". This viewpoint offers a contrasting notion of home, "one which entails not being tied to a particular place although indeed situated" (Thaver 2006: 17).

Through the aforementioned slippages of *home*, I was to further engage with the intersecting relationship between home and exile as examined by Magda Biernat-Webster (2010: 5) describing "the notion of Home, rather than a House, with the sense of 'being at home' even if faraway from the native homeland". This theory speaks directly to how home could be fragmented. Rather, one travels between the nomadic self and the diasporic self, which "is in a constant position of flux, the in-between, torn between essentialist ideas of homeland and history and the alternative nomadic status of a wandering self" (Biernat-Webster 2010: 5).

Peter Somerville, a Professor in Social Policy at the University of Lincoln, brings together the two ideological frameworks of home and homelessness by suggesting they are intrinsically linked. According to him, "homelessness is ideologically constructed as the absence of home and therefore derivative from the ideological construction of home. As with home, then, the construction is one of both logic and emotion" (1992: 530).

What is to be considered prevalent throughout this research, is an examination of how language can be seen as a signifier of home. This relationship between home and language, argues that language is fluid and not fixed, and, similarly, it is often not a place, nor a specific location that comes to define you. Rather, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o states, "language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (1986: 13). This statement adds to how I intend to make use of my own home language (Afrikaans) to narrate various informal conversations between my mother and I, merging into short stories, throughout my practice and research.

My memories and narratives shape this mini-thesis and exhibition. The practical component consist of works that engage with the idea of home not necessarily manifesting as a visible, mapped place but rather existing as "fiction in the space between" (Chapman & Kershenbaum 2000). Pertaining to this idea of incorporating memory through narrative, I use my own memories and narratives, to question how memory exist as a temporary makeshift archive. Arguably, as expert of the arts Susanne Leeb notes, "history occurs as a discourse that can be intervened with, without acting in a way that is factually 'correct'" (2015: 48). This is in line with the view of Mark Freeman in *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (1993: 8), suggests that one "cannot help but culminate in fictions, in selective and imaginative literary constructions of who we have been and are", asking "how are we to escape the conclusion that we ourselves are ultimately fictions?".

This mini-thesis provides in-depth analysis of the conceptual threads that bind the sculptural works of *Bittersoet*. In the same document, I position my own work, in particular the ongoing series *’n Ring-oortjie en Spaar sleutels* in relation to Doung Anwar Janhangeer’s *The Other Side (City Walk)*, (2012). I conduct visual analyses of Randolph Hartzenberg’s *Three days*, (2012) to the work *Om brood te breek met 293⁴ kms*. I further draw from Willem Boshoff’s *Stokkiesdraai*, (1980), to the installation *Kom-kommer*. Richard Serra’s earliest works *Splashing*, (1968), to the *Wall Text* series. I have divided the thesis into two chapters: Chapter One: *Notes on a peculiar walk* and Chapter Two: *Reimagining home in italics*. This research examines how the intersecting notion of *home* attempts to define the unseen spaces of the psyche, memory and narrative as it pertains to my own hybridised use of my mother tongue. This method relates to my own practice as well as the above-mentioned artists.

In the first chapter *Notes on a peculiar walk* retells of an accidental journey. Where lines blur, as I consider how the concept of *home* is altered in tendencies of illusion and visual ambiguities. This idea has been extended on by Lionel Thaver (2006: 18), citing Edward Said (1983), where he makes portable suggestions:

Between the place as home, or its physicality, and the social relations that ensue within this place such that it produces that state of being "at home". It is quite possible to be "home" and not to feel "at home", and conversely to be elsewhere and yet to feel "at home".

In the discussion of my own work, I consider how informal dialogues between my mother and I was to reimagine *home*. This interaction expanded into the framing of unseen spaces by drawing connections between the definition of ‘place’ and ‘space’. According to Cathy Turner (quotes Michel de Certeau⁵), who made “a distinction between ‘space’ and ‘place’, “defining space as ‘a practiced place’. That is, space is created by the ways in which place is moved through” (Turner 2004: 373). I elaborate between fragmented

⁴ Translation of Afrikaans into English: *To break bread for 293 kms*

⁵ A French theorist, whose most notable work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, combined his varied scholarly interests to develop a theory of the productive and consumptive activity inherent in everyday life.

conversations and hidden spaces by referring to the ongoing *Wall Text* series. *Notes on a peculiar walk*, expands on ideas of the psyche as inseparable from one's sense of *home* and belonging.

Chapter Two, explores the idea of *Reimagining home in italics* by considering how *home* is constructed and defined by language and memory. I address my own experience of trying to translate my memories from Afrikaans into English with reference to the theorist Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo and his discussions around language and identity. I go on to discuss the artworks *Kom-kommer* in relation to the work of Willem Boshoff and *Koljander, koljander* to my conversations with my mother.

Chapter One

Notes on a peculiar walk

Narrative one

What I will tell you is that for the life of me, I cannot remember how we got to the corner of Western Avenue and Two Rivers Drive. Did we start walking from 148 Quenera Drive, my childhood home or did someone offer us a lift along the way? There are three routes in total from East London to Ugie. However, my mother firmly states that we took the N6 and R410, yet this is the longest route, I believe we walked the N2 and R61, which is the shortest distance of the three routes. I can recall two towns, Idutya and Maclear, but I do not know where they fit into the overall narrative. These two towns lie nowhere near Ugie, Idutya being the first on foot and Maclear past Ugie⁶.

(Natasha Bezuidenhout, 2019)

The above recollection is part of my own attempt to restage, re-imagine, remember and re-visualise an unexpected walk. In doing so, I discover the inherent paradox of a live act. Attempting the impossible by hinging time, between the now, before it slips my mind. This is similar to how Amelia Jones (2011: 34), author of *Performance, Live or Dead*, notes how “the evanescent nature of a live act reminds us that we cannot fully know or codify the past...”

This elaborative act was to perceive memory, as an unconfined transaction between not knowing truth from fiction. A laborious act of configuring the past between the present. Elucidating how the act of trying to write into the present was to proceed without a pause. To an on-going fictional, yet true narrative of recalling how my brother and I sat tightly on those rectangular couches of Spur, not knowing at the time that we would walk an estimate of three hundred kilometers, spanning over three days from East London to the town called Ugie.

⁶ Refer to the Appendix page for an illustration of the roads and towns, I mention in my recollection of a peculiar walk.

This preoccupation lead me to interrogate my own past by exploring similar motifs to the British Indian novelist Rusdie Salman (2017), who in his novel *The Golden House*, expresses issues of identity and notions of selfhood. Through engaging with the fictitious account told by René, a would-be filmmaker who through “the Gardens”, an enclosed estate in New York’s Greenwich Village, I discovered “for there to be a way forward, first there must be a journey backwards” (Salman 2017: 227). Meaning for me to find relevance in the present, I was to return to a specific incident from my own childhood. An unforeseen event, in particular a walk, which occurred during my parents separation. I negotiated between my own recollections of past dialogs and re-interpret fictions by building on Freeman (1993: 30), stating:

That virtually *all* interpretations are fictions: to make sense of a text, whether it is the text of one’s past or some other one, is precisely a process of creating a framework, an interpretive context, within which the relevant information may be placed; it is, again, a going beyond this information, an attempt to confer a measure of order and coherence upon it.

The aforementioned framing by Freeman (1993), informed how I was to contextualise *Notes on a peculiar walk* by engaging between the factual and fictional notations attached to *home*. I considered how my research was anchored by conceptual and practical connotations relating to past narratives. Freeman (1993: 30), concurs with a similar stance by stating:

When considering autobiographical text, text for which the interpreter is at once reader and writer, subject and object, it becomes even more clear that the meanings one arrives at are in some sense as much *made as found*, the process of autobiographical reflection being a fundamentally metaphorical one: a new relationship is being created between the past and present, a new poetic configuration, designed to give greater form to one’s previous - and present – experience.

The above statement by Freeman (1993), points to how an experience of recollecting abstracts from my own past were to negotiate a depiction of my external self. This further manifested into questioning the odds, truths and mere decoys that formed part of this

research. In other words, the narratives from my own childhood were to act as short snippets, clues or cues to address how the peculiarity of an unforeseen event were to frame the question, 'What is a home?'. In the same discussion, I extend on Mark Freeman citing Paul Ricoeur⁷ (1938), who refers to 'the true stories of the past', as 'exposing the potentialities of the present'. Through engaging between the past and present, I have found autobiographical reflection to contrast with the certainty of telling a narrative, as should I reveal the entirety of my childhood, I would lie waste to the present. This idea is built upon by Bachelard (1994: 13), who suggest "all we communicate to others is an orientation towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively".

Notes on a peculiar walk, explores how "the history one tells, via memory, assumes the form of a narrative of the past that charts the trajectory of how one's self came to be" (Freeman 1993: 32). This meant that the stories from my own childhood, were to shape past and present, narratives and experiences in an attempt to locate oneself. However, to elucidate the self is to question narrative from fiction, as Freeman (1993: 115), reiterates "is it possible to live one's life *without* fictions and myths?"

A similar opinion regarding narrative enquiry is held by Binyavanga Wainaina (2003: 9), author of *Discovering Home*, who states:

Flights to distant places always arouse in me a peculiar awareness: that the substance we refer to as reality is really a strand as temporary as the puffy white lines that planes leave behind as they fly.

This fleeting moment Wainaina (2003), refers to is similar to how the sense and depiction of *home* was to be seen as 'a strand of temporary', offering only glimpses of experiences and objects of *home*. This notion aligns with Biernat-Webster's discussion between the notion of *home* and belonging by drawing on Naficy (1998: 3), suggesting "it is possible to return and to find that one's house is not the home that one had hoped for, that it is not the structure that memory built" (2010: 4). More precisely, since I was to return to a

⁷ A French philosopher, who combined the study of phenomenology with the theory and methodology of interpretation such as expanding on the study of textual interpretation by including a close examination of mythology, biblical exegesis, psychoanalysis, theory of metaphor, and narrative theory.

house, a so-called home, still finding myself longing for a place to call home. Meanwhile, I found myself standing in front a four-wall structure. Where the rooms of the house was no longer a home, but elusive occupied spaces filled with childhood memories. Finally, to my own disbelief, I realised my home was somewhere, anywhere but here. This fragmentation between *home* and memory plays a crucial role in determining a house from a home. As Bachelard (1994: 4), confirms humans attach themselves to both objects and feelings of *home* by stating “our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word”.

This longing to belong finds sentiment in the work of the South African artist and painter, Marlene Dumas. In particular, the portrait titled *Genetiese Heimwee* (1984), (Fig. 1), where a sitting female figure with folded arms stares with contemplation into somewhere. What weighed so heavily on her shoulders? Where and for whom was she waiting for? These analytic threads do not only question but examine how curator and writer Emma Bedford (2008: 37), draws attention to “the Afrikaans title, which can be translated as ‘genetic longing’ but may also be understood as ‘genetic homesickness’, alluding to the artist’s displacement in her adopted country⁸ and to her longing for familial or relational connectedness”. What drew me to this portrait is the description by Dumas (2008: 66), where she states:

Someone told me that especially people from warm countries seem to have a longing not for a specific country, but a place that does not exist or has no name, as if it comes from their genes.

⁸ The ‘adopted country’ Bedford refers to is The Netherlands, where Dumas accepted a bursary to study at Ateliers ‘63 in Haarlem.



Fig. 1: Dumas, Marlene *Genetiese Heimwee*, (1984), Oil on canvas, 130,4 x 110,6 x 2,5 cm, Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven: Netherlands.

The above account identifies with notions of belonging and unseen spaces, which I further contextualise through Bachelard's (1994: 15) account of how the concept of *home* functions as a pivotal space to the self, when he states: "the house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams". This is to say, that the physicality of inhabiting a space was visible to the factuality of a given place. More so, was the unpalpable nature of this research, as the notion of *home* stemmed from a philosophical point of view, where memory and imagination collides to represent fragmented connotations of home. This further illustrates how the concept of *home* is an illusory notion of the self, which concurs with Bachelard's (1994: 5), theory to how the imagination functions, where he states:

Whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build "walls" of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection-or, just the contrary tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts.

1.1: A wall and a hidden space

Walls find impetus in both Bachelard (1994) and Diana Festa-McCormicks (1979: 48) works, in particular 'Rilke's Notebooks: Paris and the Phantoms of the Past', which referring to Malte Laurids Brigge, as Reiner Maria Rilke, who refers to a structure, where all the walls had been knocked down except the last. He refers to a specific wall. A metaphoric wall that confronts his past. Identifiable, yet out of reach, as he steps back to look onto the wall. He no longer sees a wall, but an unseen structure that captivates and holds his stare, recognising that the feeling or state of being at home is in actuality within himself.

These summarised version of events were to encapsulate how the notion of home was to resonate with Rilke's past by his "personal quest that extends beyond the self and reaches for the eternal" (Festa-McCormick 1979: 72). These experiences were to reflect an internal and external search for oneself by drawing on Festa-McCormicks (1979: 83), interpretation to how the artist's seeks to seize a momentary glimpse of reality by fixing it into a lasting language. This incentive is driven by the urge of past experiences seen in the light of the present.

Through engaging with Festa McCormicks (1979), text I drew parallel connotations to my own practice, in particular the *Wall Text* series, consisting of the representation of three different narrations from a compilation of conversations between myself and my mother. This series attempts to expose the traces of a subject that surrounds people, a subject that they interact with, yet never see. The walls of my immediate studio, more precisely, the exposed brick offered a springboard where recorded dialogs between my mother and I translate onto canvas. These informal conversations in my mother tongue (Afrikaans), involved jotting down the most regularly expressed statements. This transpired into

exchanges of fragmented text, relating to my own attempt or inability to narrate a sequence of dialogues between myself and my mother. Thus, these conversation reflect similarities to Salman Rushdie (2017: 112), text where he states: "transition is like translation. You're moving across from one language into another". That's to say, I was to reflect the changing versions of an unexpected walk to the factual and fictional recollections of my mother. These descriptions were to act as possible clues as to why we walked from East London to the town called Ugie.

I have chosen to compile the *Wall Text* series into three different narrations to work as part of a series or individual artwork. These works portray factual and misconstrue statements by my mother, which I in return incorporate through the titles of my work. The referred statements are as follows: *Laat die here met jou wees my kind*⁹ (Fig. 2.1 and 2.2), *Ek belowe vir een woord*¹⁰ (Fig. 3.1 and 3.2), *Jy kan niemand trust nie*¹¹ (Fig. 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3).

⁹ Translation of Afrikaans into English: "Let God be with you my child", summarised from the Bible verse, Isaiah 41:10: So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous hand.

¹⁰ Translation of Afrikaans into English: "So true as the word of God"

¹¹ Translation of Afrikaans into English: "You can trust no one"



Fig 2.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *Laat die here met jou wees my kind* (2019), Ash, beetroot, clay and chalk pastel on canvas, 140 × 189 cm, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig 2.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Laat die here met jou wees my kind* (2019), Ash, beetroot, clay and chalk pastel on canvas, 140 × 189 cm, photography by Aaron Adriaan.

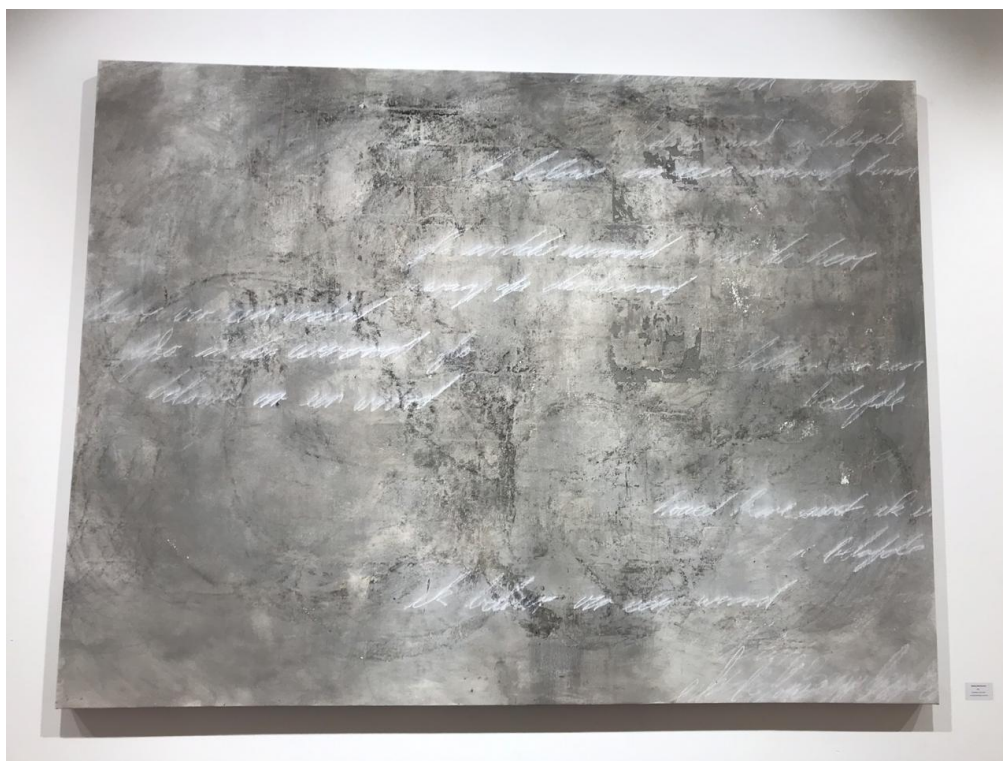


Fig. 3.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *Ek belowe vir een woord* (2019), Ash and chalk pastel on canvas, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig. 3.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Ek belowe vir een woord* (2019), Ash and chalk pastel on canvas, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig. 4.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *Jy kan niemand trust nie* (2019), Clay, beetroot and chalk pastel on canvas, 140 × 189 cm, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig. 4.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Jy kan niemand trust nie* (2019), Clay, beetroot and chalk pastel on canvas, 140 × 189 cm, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig. 4.3: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Jy kan niemand trust nie* (2018), Clay, beetroot and chalk pastel on canvas, 140 × 189 cm, photography by Stary Mwaba.

This series is predominantly text based and engages between canvas and surface, acting as a bandage to the ghostly apparitions of the past. In both cases, the application and removal of the canvas is likened to a band-aid, where the canvas imbues the evocative task of covering or masking the truth. These reflected marks and textures from the wall onto the canvas depicts layers of bricks and raised nibble-like piercings bearing traces from lived human existence. Blunt nails, hardened drips of paint or an unfilled hole act as signifiers of memory. This process is further reflective between change and improvisation by drawing on the German photographer Deidi von Schaewen's (1977: viii), theory to how walls are reflective of the "object trouve's of the unintended artwork, the short-lived monuments, accidental and popular statues, memories". This series not only captures glimpses of the past within the present but illustrates how the continuous engagement with my studio space lead to 'the unintended artwork', negotiated between fleeting memories and narratives between myself and my mother. Through writing onto the canvas with white chalk pastel and washing off the previous text, only to write the same words again, until the canvas reflects the underwriting from previous conversations. This

method alludes to a palimpsest act of transferring written material over preceding dialogues, allowing for factual and fictional slippages to occur within this series. These interactions extends on the ideals of Bachelard (1994: 33), where he states: “great images have both a history and a prehistory; they are always a blend of memory and legend, with the result that we never experience an image directly”.

Prior to creating the aforementioned series, I drew inspiration from the American artist, Richard Serra’s earliest works, in particular the work titled *Splashing*, (Fig. 5), (1968), where he threw molten lead onto the walls of Leo Castelli’s¹² warehouse. This work was derived from the “Verb List” of 1967 to 1968, where Serra went through a compilation of processes by engaging with the materialistic quality of lead. This disposable material was manipulated by rolling, creasing and folding the sheets of lead. Such, engagement lead to his exploration of liquifying the lead and splashing it along the base of the warehouse. Once, dry he peeled it back into rows or made the slabs of steel stacked or kept in position (Foster 1998: 15). Serra’s engaged process with molten lead reflects experimental stages between liquid and solid matter by transforming the lead into liquid. This engagement between physically splashing or casting the material onto the wall transpires into a piece that is self-evident, an exposed manifestation of both matter and process. The cooling of the thrown molten lead imitates both wall and space allowing for the area to be encapsulated by the material. The bareness of the wall sparked an interest between Serra and my own work by the use of layered bricks to convey a sense of displacement or emptiness.

¹² The late Italian-American art dealer, who through his affiliation with the artist Robert Morris, showcased the exhibition titled *9 at Leo Castelli*. The warehouse, on the upper, west side of New York, which previously functioned as a storage unit became an improvised space for the creation of in-process works.



Fig. 5: Serra, Richard *Splashing*, (1968), Thrown molten lead on wall, Dimensions variable, Leo Castelli Warehouse, New York.

This manifested into suspending canvas onto the immediate walls of my studio, engaging materially with the tactile process of smearing recycled clay onto canvas. Subsequently, using a broom, as a tool to sweep the dry clay away. I further complicate this process by applying multiple layers of beetroot juice to the surface. This is achieved with a roller brush that seeps into the multifaceted surface, appearing at first in a vivid permanent rose colour that alters over-time embodying an almost flesh, dusty pink appearance. Through several applications the colour intensifies and resembles terracotta bricks. This process allows for a stained bloodlike appearance to occur, hence the title *Ons bloed is dikker as die waarheid*, originating from the idiom 'blood is thicker than water', altered to 'our blood is thicker than the truth', reflects how the blood or bond between relatives are

'thicker' than telling me why we walked from East London to Ugie. This notion builds on Salman Rushdie's (2007: 35), writing where the character René states:

These are the times we live in, in which men hide their truths, perhaps even from themselves, and live in lies, until the lies reveal those truths in ways impossible to foretell. And now that so much is hidden, now that we live in surfaces, in presentations and falsifications of ourselves, the seeker after truth must pick up his shovel, break the surface and look for the blood beneath.

1.2: Calling home

Narrative Two

There, before me, below the staircase, just before you exit to enter the parking lot. Tucked away in the corner, hinged against a wall was a tiekie boks...

(Natasha Bezuidenhout, 2019)

The above recollection describes my discovery of an old fashioned telephone call box, wedged between two unfolding walls in my University residence. This discovery brought about nostalgia for a time when I was able to openly speak with my father. The act of making *‘n kolleteeroproep huistoe*¹³, was both an illicit and illusive means to contact an idea of home, as speaking to my father brought me closer to him, yet he remained out of reach, until eventually, metaphorically speaking 'I pressed one for an operator', listening to the infamous panpipe music¹⁴ Telkom played while one was placed on hold, waiting, until someone (in this case my father) collected the call on the other side.

¹³ Translation of Afrikaans into English: "A collect call home"

¹⁴ "you fill up my senses", sung by Jon Denver



Fig. 6.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *Tok-tiekie* (2018), Clay, 91 × 38,5 cm, RAW SPOT GALLERY, Makhanda, photography by Lifang Zhang.

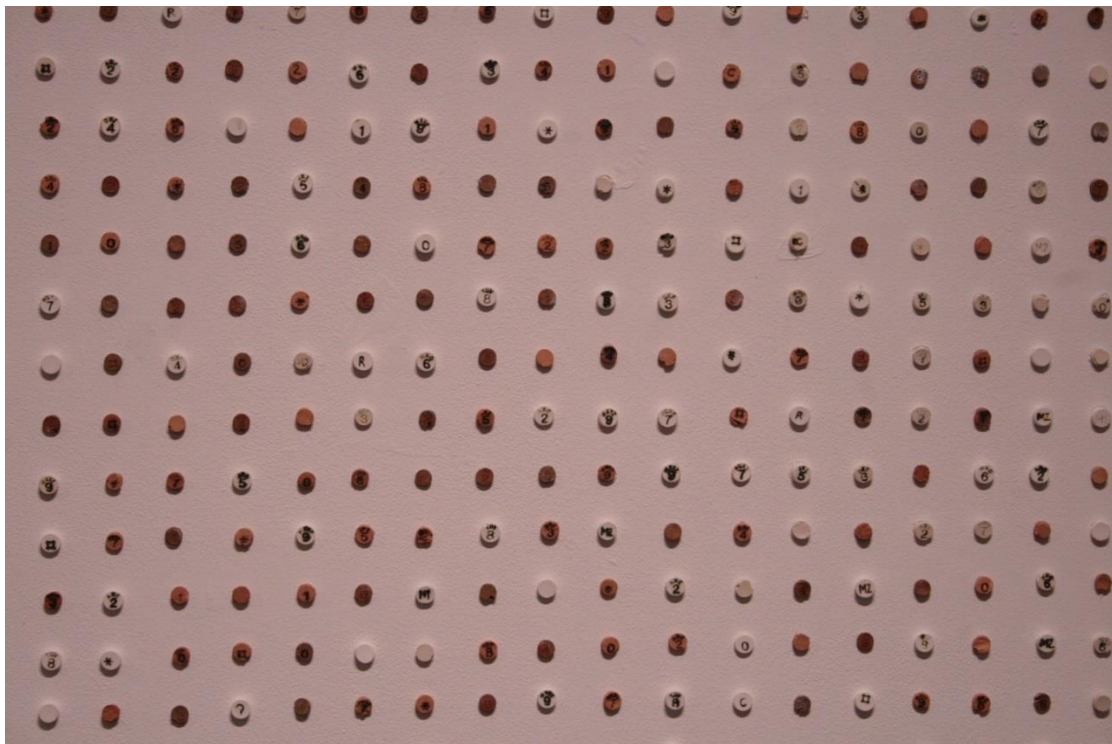


Fig. 6.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Tok-tiekie* (2019), Clay, photography by Aaron Adriaan.

The work *Tok-tiekie* (Fig. 6.1 and 6.2) is a play on Afrikaans words, combined together to form a single word. The made-up Afrikaans word has two main descriptions, taken from the word tok-tokkie, a children's game, where all the neighborhood children would come together and separate into smaller groups, one of us children would be nominated or tricked into knocking on the door of a stranger's house immediately running away before it could be opened. The second description is the word 'tiekie' referring to a *tiekie boks*, a colloquial name for a public phone in South Africa. The work explores varied uses of language to a single word and how conversation or the touch of numerous buttons can transpire into an attempt to contact home. These keys allude to a memory I have of an attempted dialogue with my father. In this memory I am making a reverse call to my father while my parents were in the process of separating from one another. During this time, the reverse call was the only method I could use to communicate with my father without my mother's consent. I recall the telephone number as 1025, sometimes I doubt myself and wonder if the number was actually 1023.

The keypad, a row of silver buttons with black engraved numbers were to symbolise the transition between spaces, the verge between home and contacting home. Through creating numerous sets of keys from recycled clay. I aimed to examine how forms of communication and the intertextuality between memory and narrative are key factors to exploring notions of home.

1.3: Chasing the notion of home

Narrative Three

I recall how we walked alongside the yellow-line, hand in hand, my younger brother's hand cold and barely clutching mine, seemingly not knowing, yet we prevailed onwards, always in search...

(Natasha Bezuidenhout, 2019)

The above recollection is my own account of how my mother, brother and I possibly went in search for our own place to call home. Charles Merewether (2008: 98), examines how “The landscape becomes a site, a provisional space in-between. Existing between past and future, this space is a void both physically and as the motionless time of the present”. That is to say, the landscape we were to walk through was to function as a temporary site, existing between past and present narratives, both factual and fictional. These landscapes were to metaphorically represent not only the in-between-ness of towns we walked through but the attempt of finding our own sense of home.

it is within every artist to bring to life what has been thrown away, to enliven and revive what most people see as nothing... (Koloane, 2003)

The above statement by the late South African artist David Koloane is precisely how I aimed to convey the way in which objects hold and convey history and memory. The use of everyday found objects within my artistic practice can be traced back to the Dada or anti-art movement of 1916 to 1922, manifesting well into the 20th century with the proposition of ridicule to the meaninglessness of the modern world.

I draw attention to the series, *’n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels*¹⁵. In this artwork the found objects (namely bread tabs, can tabs and keys) become symbols of pedestrians, who

¹⁵ Translation of Afrikaans into English: A can tab and spare keys

predominantly travel by foot. In a recent article titled *Walking: Pace, Protest and Artistic Practice*, Ruth Simbao (2017: 1) notes:

A pedestrian act that while tedious and mindless in some regards, is one of the most profound acts that can draw together mind and body; the spiritual and the corporeal, the mundane and the politically charged, the individual and the group.

This work draws from my own experience, where a walk becomes not only an act of travelling to and from a destination, but a conceptual journey into finding a source or material to draw inspiration from. In working with these objects I interrogate the notion of how one would “commute with intuitive instinct” as articulated by Portia Malatjie (2014: 7) who states:

The idea of communing conveys the sense of becoming one with the environment; being aware of one’s surroundings and conjoining the physical and mental spaces that we inhabit.

This process can be read in relation to the words of Portia Malatjie (2014: 14), who states:

Commuting through and between spaces characterises the transitions that people take while moving through them – we change the characteristics of the spaces we inhabit as they simultaneously change and characterise us.



Fig. 7: Adams, Igshaan *Jou ma se poes*, (2009), Installation, dimensions variable, Blank Projects, Woodstock: Cape Town.

A similar method of engaging with one's immediate environment is explored by the artist, Igshaan Adams in selected works from 2009 to 2015, (Fig. 7). In conversation with Jennifer Ball (2017: 14), Adams describes how circumstances or the space one finds oneself in is something that he finds interesting. According to Adams, he is intrigued by "how environments shape us, how we absorb whatever the environment has to offer and how it eventually becomes part of us" (Ball and Adams 2015: 14). The series *in Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels*, (Fig. 8.1 to 10), engages with my own environment and symbolic found objects, collected while moving between my University residence and my fine practice studio space. This process or act of walking as a method of moving from one place to another as well as one idea to another, determines my interactions between memories and narratives that are both factual and fictional. This physical act is observed by Simbao (2017: 1), as "a moment that is simultaneously made up of stepping into the future and stepping out of the past, as the ball of one foot presses down onto the ground, the other peels away from the earth".

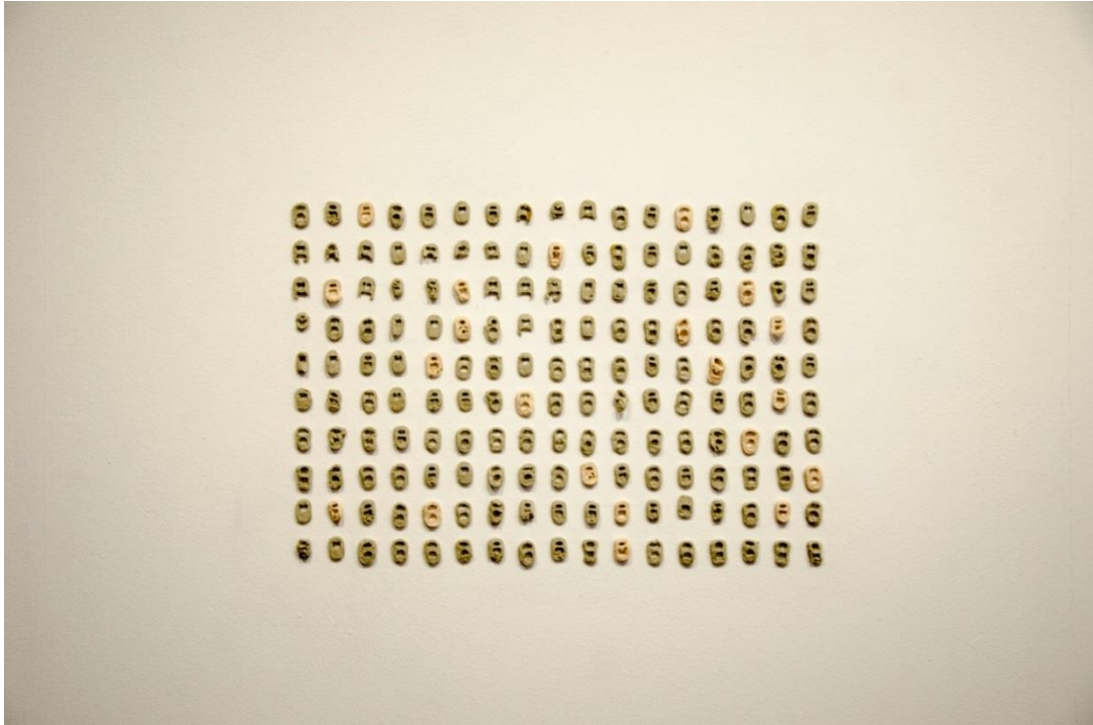


Fig 8.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels* (Can tabs) in the *Wet Paint* postgraduate exhibition (2017), clay, photography by Rachel Baasch.

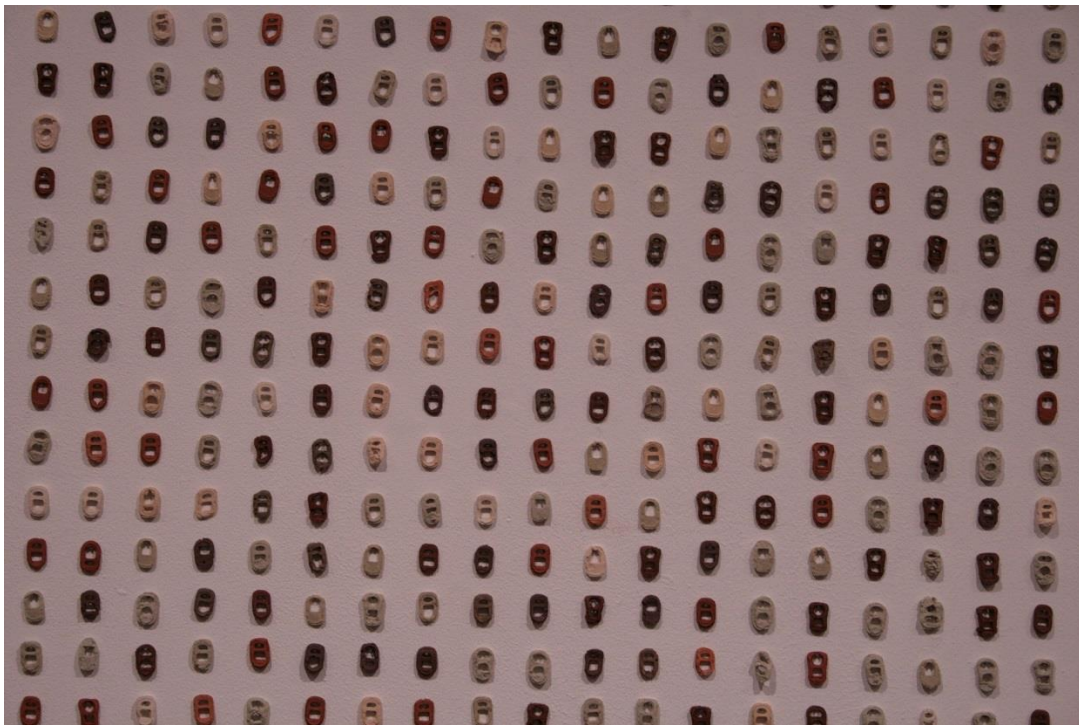


Fig 8.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels* (Can tabs) (2019), clay, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig 8.3: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *’n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels* (Can tabs) (2019), clay, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig 9.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *’n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels* (Keys) in the *Wet Paint* postgraduate exhibition (2017), clay, photography by Stary Mwaba.



Fig 9.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *’n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels* (Keys) (2019), clay, photography by Aaron Adriaan.

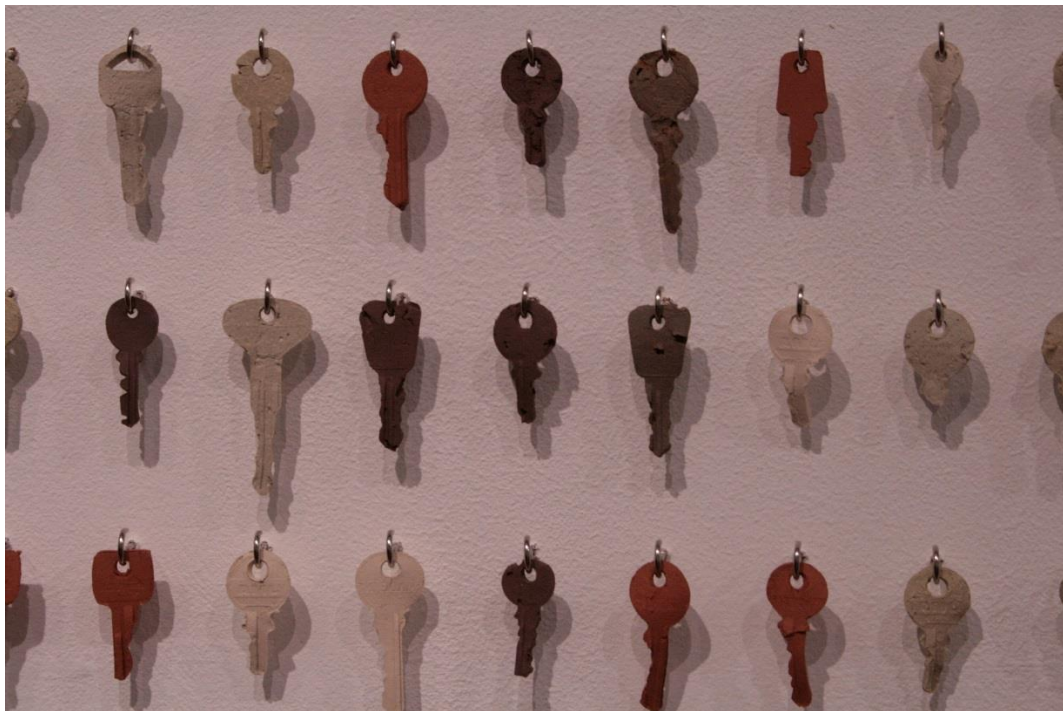


Fig 9.3: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *’n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels* (Keys) (2019), clay, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig 10: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *'n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels* (Bread tabs) (2018), Clay, 31,5 × 31,5 cm, RAW Spot Gallery, Makhanda, photography by Lifang Zhang.

Initially, this series was inspired by the interaction between myself and a door, where I attempt to open a door with a key that does not fit. I try to wiggle it from side to side but the key won't budge. Tugging at the door, grasping tightly at the door handle, until frustration overwhelms me. In this artwork I use the key as a metaphor and examine how a thousand keys can potentially represent my own attempt to open a single door.

These objects (bread tabs, can tabs and keys) are initially seen as a valuable commodity when purchased. Afterwards, these items lose their worth and can be found scattered on walkways, roads and occupying an almost unnoticeable presence. It is through finding these discarded items, that I create multiple precious commodities that are individually made, as an impression of what has come before. This process engages with found objects and the translation of space, who occupies or leaves traces, questioning further "when and at what point does "everyday life" segue into "art" (O'Rourke 2016: 30). I make these mundane objects by pushing the items into the clay, cutting around the

object with a needle and pulling both clay and object away from one another. I repeat this process until eventually the careful and delicate repetition of the every-day are seen as symbols that are aestheticised and highlighted. This series has developed and expanded over time into an on-going search for meticulously selected, yet ever-present objects.

These objects resonate with the Durban-based artist Doung Anwar Janhangeer in performance works such as *The Other Side (City Walk)*, (2012) (Fig. 11), which ran alongside the National Arts Festival and the *Making Way* exhibition. Janhangeer leads his audience by foot from the privileged spheres of the town centre towards the rural outskirts of Grahamstown now known as Makhanda. The physicality of walking through varied places and spaces are pivotal in Janhangeer's practice. The winding of offbeat pathways or faded painted lines, seep from sidewalk to tarred road exposing surfaces and their surroundings. He focuses the participants' attention on the ground by encouraging them to engage with the road in a corporeal manner.



Fig. 11: Jahangeer, Doung Anwar *The Other Side (City Walk)*, (2012), Performance, Makhanda, Photography by Ruth Simbao.

1.4: Breaking a bittersweet tale

*Om brood te breek met 293 kms*¹⁶ (Fig. 12.1 and 12.2), engages with the fictional, physical, yet true event of a peculiar walk from East London to Ugie. The idea for the artwork came to me while preparing bobotie¹⁷, where the act of immersing one thick slice of bread (brown or white) in a milk egg custard inspired me to do the same with clay. I decided to experiment with dipping bread into clay before drying and firing the final product. In doing this one is left with the shell of the bread slice after the bread burns away leaving behind a type of 'bread-skin'.

I selected mostly stale slices of bread which I then soaked overnight in recycled clay. An interesting mold presented itself on the surface of the bread and I observed the chemical interactions between the clay and yeast that resulted in particular patterns present on the clay bread pieces. The formation of minute fungi (Fig. 13), on the uppermost layer of bread allows for markings of fungal growth after firing. This process is developed further by firing the moldy bread, which immediately leaves no physical presence, what remains is a trace of the sculpted bread, a shell, almost fossil-like in appearance.

*Elke Snyttjie brood*¹⁸, represents my efforts towards making amends with my own past, as each individual slice comes to represent earlier experiences from my childhood. The notion of incorporating bread by the metaphorical connotations attached to the phrase 'to break bread'. This idiom pays homage to two parts of a narrative: the shared meal on arrival in the town Ugie and forgiving my mother for allowing us to walk almost three hundred kilometers.

¹⁶ Translation of Afrikaans into English: To break bread for 293 kms

¹⁷ A widely known South African dish consisting of spiced minced meat baked with an egg-based custard topping.

¹⁸ Translation of Afrikaans into English: Each slice of bread



Fig. 12.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Om brood te breek met 293 kms* (2019) Various kinds of clay, Approximately 10.5 cm × 7 cm, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig. 12.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *Om brood te breek met 293 kms* (2019) Various kinds of clay, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig. 13: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Om brood te breek met 293 kms* (2018) Various kinds of clay, Approximately 10.5 cm × 7 cm each, photography by Brün Kramer.

The Cape Town-based artist Randolph Hartzenberg's site-specific performance titled *Three Days*¹⁹ (2012), engages between the corporeal mobility of space to the idea of transience and the metaphoric nuances of objects. These overlapping subjects explore similar motifs to my own practice and the elusive or unattainable notion of *home*. Hartzenberg's conceptual underpinning to the usage of everyday objects to the site-specificity of a fort that once operated as a military base and provided a safe haven for civilians in time of war.

Hartzenberg's prominent use of the suitcase, or suitcase-like structures, which appear in works such as *Unplugged* (1993) from the *Domestic Baggage* series, the *Salt Theatre* installation (1996), *Salt and Time* (1997) and *Road Zero* (1997) (Simbao 2012: 1). These

¹⁹ Forms part of the *Making Way* exhibition at Fort Selwyn in Grahamstown. Hartzenberg concluded with discussion of his work at the Arts Lounge organized by the Visual and Performing Arts of Africa (ViPAA) team as part of the National Arts Festival. The aforementioned team has since been renamed to the *Arts of Africa Research Programme* (AART) and runs concurrently with the NRF SARCHI Chair in 'Arts of Africa and the Global Souths'.

box-like containers are open on one side, which indicates an empty vessel that alludes to the impossibility of arrival and the denial of a settled destination.



Fig. 14: Hartzenberg, Randolph *Three days*, (2012), Detail from Performance, Dimensions variable, Fort Selwyn, Makhanda, Photography by Ruth Simbao.



Fig. 15: Randolph Hartzenberg, *Three days*, (2012), Detail from Performance, Dimensions variable, Fort Selwyn, Makhanda, Photography by Ruth Simbao.



Fig. 16: Randolph Hartzenberg, *Three days*, (2012), Detail from Performance, Dimensions variable, Fort Selwyn, Makhanda, Photography by Ruth Simbao.

The aforementioned images displays Hartzenberg's use of the fort by incorporating the doorway, floor and walls to offer an unusual insight to the use of space, as he drags a white pillow-case filled with a loaf of bread along the surface of the wall. A makeshift cupboard with a vertical divider separates a tightly bandaged metal tap (Fig. 14) and a burning light bulb. Both these objects hang from rope with the exception of the tap being secured with a brick on the floor. Hartzenberg also breaks an everyday loaf of bread (Fig. 15) between his head and shoulders, which he places a glass bottle appearing to intercept time. Written dates and numbers, such as 26 June 2012 and 20.4.02, are secured on musical stands (Fig. 16). These pages depict various encrypted words, underlined sentences and words which are written in cursive handwriting. Fragments of text attached to music stands are taken from a poem by the 20th Century Greek Poet Yannis Ritsos, who titled a collection of his long monologue poems, 'The New Oresteia'.

Extract of text 'The New Oresteia' in Randolph Hartzenberg's installation:

Already three days have passed since we've come home. The trip's over. The adventure came to and end. So? – was that it? Was that all there was to it? You're not smiling at all. Me neither. Certainly it's not what we lack, what we've not found – besides, we didn't to find anything. Maybe we're the ones who are missing. We've returned, we say, and we barely recognize where we've come from and what we've come to. We're moving between two unknown points. Don't hang your head. We'll both leave. One won't hold the other back. You're already sitting on the edge of your chair. Our friend is gone, too. No sooner did we meet than we split up again. Oh, surely, someday or other what's fated happens. We've been released into a new slavery – it doesn't abandon us, it sits and waits, it waits by the gate outside, by the dry grass, the nettles, the thistles and the fallen keys.

There are similar motifs to Hartzenberg's use of objects and text that I incorporate within my own practice. The use of bread as a symbolic object finds slippages in works such as, *'n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels*, where numerous clay bread tabs mimics the plastic throw-away items of pedestrians, who travel by foot.

Chapter Two

Reimagining home in italics

This chapter considers the connection between language and memory in relation to the metaphor of italicising words from one's own language in order to differentiate these words from the English text in the rest of the document. My first language is Afrikaans. I think, speak and remember in Afrikaans. In writing this document, I translated words from my home language into English which I then italicised to set them apart from the rest of the mini-thesis.. In this chapter, I liken this process of changing a word from its normal 'straight' font style into 'slanted' italics, to the challenge of translating multi-sensory memories that exist in different visual, verbal, textural and aural forms into formal written English. I argue that in both instances, meaning and understanding is lost, slipping through the slanted letters of each translated word.

Extending on this theme of memory as translation I explore how envisioning home can be likened to the act of changing text into italics. The process of changing the direction of words such that they, that it appears slanted can be viewed as a metaphor for the way in which I visualise my fragmented memories of home. This metaphor is influenced by my own attempts at translating memories and narratives from my mother tongue (Afrikaans) into English. The act of translating memories and narratives from Afrikaans into English means that I am moving between these two languages constantly, resulting in linguistic slippages and the creation of mixed words. In my practice, I explore the ways that my understanding of home is 'remembered' in Afrikaans, and thus characterised by the nuances and subtleties of the language. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1994: 8), "academic language is....no one's mother tongue", nor is the act of changing one's mother tongue into italics. In this chapter I engage with the theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986: 11), who states that "language [is] not a mere string of words". This quotation resonates with my own challenges in trying to string fractured memories together to form some sort of coherent narrative. Thus part of my search for home involved a frustration

with memory and language and the realisation that I could not relate my own understanding of home with anything familiar or comforting. The re-interpretation of home within *Bittersoet* is represented by the fragmented interplay of words, memories, objects and the imagination.

According to Thiong'o (1986: 12), "language and literature [are] taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds". This quotation suggests that literature and language can transport one to whole other worlds by activating the memory and the imagination simultaneously. This relates further to the work of novelist Salman Rushdie (2007: 71), who draws attention to the way that language has the power to hold secrets when he confirms: "the alphabet is where all our secrets begin". This metaphor relates to my families well-kept hidden behind my mother's stories and our fragmented conversations about why we walked from East London to the town of Ugie (as previously discussed in Chapter 1: *Notes on a peculiar walk*).

Thiong'o (1986: 13), examines "the relationship of language to human experience, human culture, and the human perception of reality". I align this quotation with my own act of writing and communicating through a *mengelmoes*²⁰ of muddled thoughts that occur by both Afrikaans and English. This idea can be interpreted in relation to the way that Thiong'o (1986: 15) characterises the subject when he states: "language is culture. [It] is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history". I consider this theory while attempting to create my own makeshift archive to house the history of past and present dialogues that have taken place between my mother and myself. This statement by Thiong'o engages with the manner in which memory becomes one's own source of endless fiction, occupying one's thoughts and processes, including the process of making art. This written and spoken account reflects the notion of home by repeating an assertion by Thiong'o (1986: 13), that "language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture". In the sections that follow, I explore my own artworks including *Kom-kommer* that speak about this process of

²⁰ Translation of Afrikaans into English: Mish mash

stringing together fragments of memory in the effort to uncover and order my own experiences and conceptualisation of home.

2.1: A string of 'worry beads'

Narrative four

I recall sitting cross legged on the mat, while the tv was blaring in the background. I found myself beading with nylon and every so often I would look-up, where my mother was busy with strykwerk²¹, until she eventually asked: 'nou hoekom is jy so bekommered?'

(Natasha Bezuidenhout, 2019)

The above recollection is connected to the work *Kom-kommer* (Fig. 17.1, 7.2 and 17.3) which speaks to the idea of 'a thousand worries', in which a single clay bead stands in for a single 'worry'. Each and every 'worry' is related to a fractured unclear memory. The repetitive process of making each and every single bead by hand before stringing them individually alludes to my own unresolved attempt to reconnect with a foggy past. These beads represent a dialogue between: *myself en mamma se presiese woorde waar sy my vra nou hoekom is jy so bekommered?* The question 'why now am I so worried', implies a conversation on a loop, as should one have one worry, it would surely accumulate into many worries like a long, string of 'worry beads'.

The title of the work *Kom-kommer* (Fig. 17.1, 7.2 and 17.3), stems from my interaction with a blackboard in my studio space where I play with words such as *bekommer*²² or *bekommerd*²³ by breaking the word up into sections like this: be-kom-mer. I explore the onomatopoeic characteristics of the word converting *be-kom-mer* into the title of my artwork *Kom-kommer*.

²¹ Translation of Afrikaans into English: The chore of ironing clothes.

²² Translation of Afrikaans into English: To worry or find oneself feeling anxious.

²³ Translation of Afrikaans into English: An uneasy or concerned emotion.

Stokkiesdraai (1980), (Fig. 18) by Willem Boshoff (citing Siebrits 2007: 58), is a work that engages with 'rosaries and Greek worry beads', which assist with relieving stress and anxiety through the action of feeling them and/or counting them as a form of ritual or cathartic practice. I have identified parallels between my own work and that of Boshoff's when it comes to the act of counting and making the 'worry beads'. This process developed therapeutically by initially collecting seeds and flattening a small amount of clay in the palm of my hand. After this I place a single seed in the center, which is wrapped with clay and rolled in a circular movement until a ball is formed. Thereafter, I use a needle to pierce a small hole on either side, removing clay from the punctured area. The bead is wiped with a soft sponge and set aside until bone dry. I repeat this process relentlessly until moving onto another object and engaging in the same repetitive process.

Boshoff's *Stokkiesdraai* interrogates similar motifs to the work *Kom-kommer*, such as his integration of Afrikaans in a playful way within his work interpreting and playing with the Afrikaans language. I apply a similar approach in my own work by creating and mixing Afrikaans and English idioms and phrases. The word 'stokkiesdraai', means to twist the truth or to tell a white lie. The act of interpreting my mother's numerous dialogs are an attempt to locate the truth underneath and in-between what is said and what is left out. *Kom-kommer*, like other artworks in the exhibition employs the same method of burning away the found objects (such as seeds and slices of bread) from inside their clay coating. This means that the final object holds the traces and memory of the object.

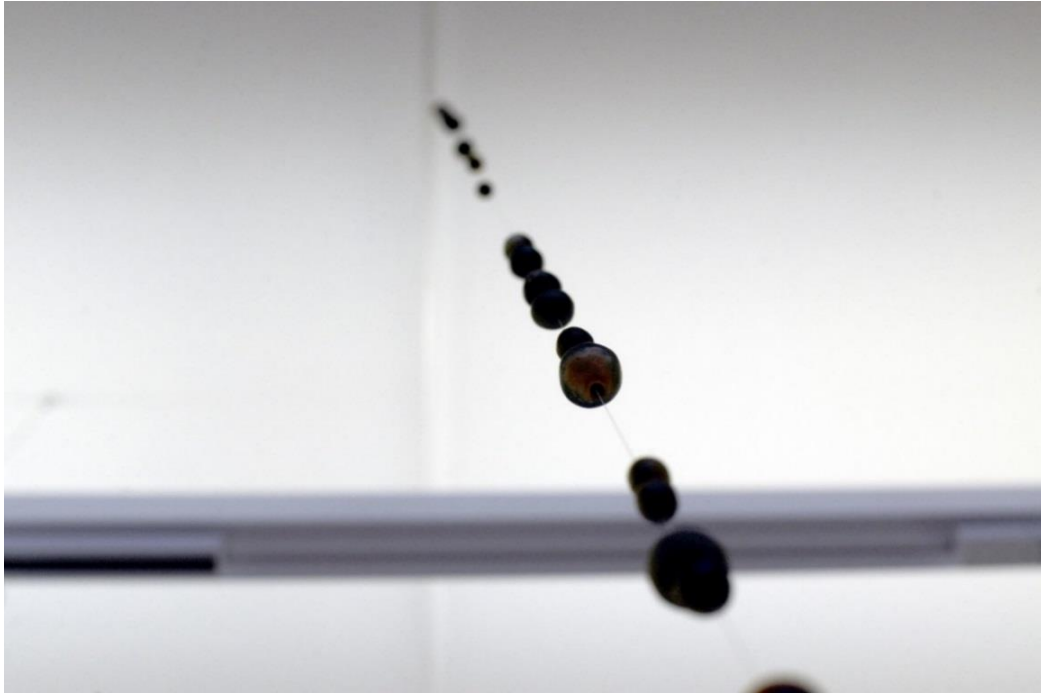


Fig. 17.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Kom-kommer* in the *Wet Paint* postgraduate exhibition (2017), clay, dimensions variable, photography by Stary Mwaba.



Fig. 17.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Kom-kommer* (2019), clay, dimensions variable, photography by Aaron Adriaan.

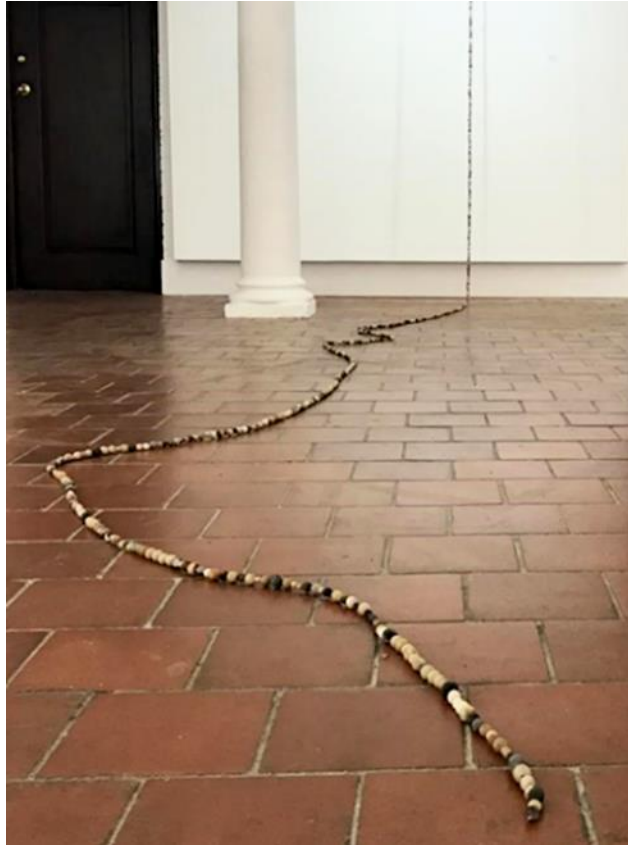


Fig. 17.3: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Kom-kommer* (2019), clay, dimensions variable, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig 18: Willem Boshoff, *Stokkiesdraai*, (1980), polished wood, dimensions variable, private collection.

2.2: Koljander, koljander

Koljander, koljander (Fig. 19.1 and 19.2), is a work engaging with three memories. These are merged and have impacted the direction of my search for the answer to my own narrative of finding *home*. The first memory is a conversation between my brother and I, where he claims that we took a shortcut via a gravel road that led us to meeting a man with a white Toyota bakkie. I think it was a 1996 model. He was busy changing his car tyre on the side of the road and offered us a lift. The saying “we did not know him from a bar of soap” connects the memory and the artwork titled *koljander, koljander*.

The second memory is a lullaby sung by both my parents, each with their own version. My mother’s version went as follows:

Koljander, koljander, loop deur die bos,

my ma en pa kook lekker kos,

die kinders verstuk aan ’n druiwedros

die laaste een se kop word afgekap.

Pappa’s version went like this:

Siembamba, mamma se kleintjie,

Siembamba, mamma se kleintjie

draai haar nek om en gooi haar in die pot,

drap op sy kop en dan is sy dood.

Theunissen (1938), citing du Toit, S.J. 1924, remarks on how variations of the song differed from district to district and provides what could be considered as one of the earliest versions of this well-known folk-song ‘Aljander, aljander al deur die bos’:

(a) *Aljander, Aljander al deur die bos,*

My Mama en Papa kook lekker kos.

(b) *Al jare, al jare, al deur die bos,*

My ma kook sulke lekker kos.

(Stellenbosch)

(c) *Dadel, dadel deur die bos,*

Anderkant is lekker kos.

(Amersfoort)

(d) *Koljander, Koljander, deur die bos,*

Ketting steek in die druiwedros.

(Worcester)

(e) *Anderjana, Jana deur die bos,*

My Pa en Ma kook lekker kos.

(f) *Aderjana, Jana lui die klok,*

My liewe Ma is 'n goeie kok.

The third key memory is one my mother is rinsing my hair using a yellow stained *Tupperware*. I recall seeing out the corner of my eye, numerous worn soaps stacked on-top of one another. Not thrown away but, used excessively until they had turned into thin oblong shapes with softened sides. The worn soaps are not easy to grasp, as their excessive use has led to them becoming both fragile and thin in appearance.

These three pivotal memories influenced my creation of 'already-used soaps', as markers of memory, identifiable through traces of foam, loose hair or tiny scratch marks on the surface of the soaps. These soaps (objects) overlap in concept and meaning, deriving from memory and narrative while, expanding into the use of language that was to narrate these objects.



Fig. 19.1: Natasha Bezuidenhout, *Koljander, koljander* (2019), porcelain, photography by Aaron Adriaan.



Fig. 19.2: Natasha Bezuidenhout, detail of *Koljander, koljander* (2019), porcelain, photography by Aaron Adriaan.

Conclusion:

In this practice of Fine Art submission, I have presented fragments of a narrative that has mapped my attempt to piecing together a particular journey from my childhood. This incomplete story is told through found objects and their clay replicas as well as written text. Objects are repositories of memory. They hold history and narrative in a manner that is specific to the individual experiences and emotions associated with each object. Everyone's associations with an object differ and in fact, even within myself, these objects evoke slightly different emotions and trigger slightly different versions of the same memory every time I look at them. I have observed the way in which my efforts to remember the story of our trip from East London to Ugie is deeply embedded in the desire or yearning to understand 'What is a home?' For, if one has never experienced the safety, security and comfort of a home, how is one to recognise home, when or if one finally 'locates' it? My understanding of home is an unstable one. I have moved between parents and guardians and foster care all my life. This has continued into adulthood, which has developed into a fragmented sense of where I belong.

My own yearning for information and the anxiety that accompanies a position of relative instability is also embedded in the individual replicas of clay bread tabs, can tabs and keys and other objects in *Bittersoet*. The obsessive relentless pressing and pulling-away, manipulating and tweaking of primarily clay and found objects, wherever I went by foot or whenever I had 'idle' hands mirrors my approach to most practicalities within this exhibitions. These acts include my pivotal attempt in remembering exactly why we walked from East London to Ugie. A similar parallel exists between the process of making hundreds of worry beads and the similar process of compulsively probing at my own memory.

The "walk" as a concept and as a practice is essential in my interrogations. In Chapter One, *Notes on a peculiar walk*, I introduced the narrative of a walk taken by my mother, brother and I, and the found object, as key intersecting themes within my practice. I discussed the *Wall Text* series in relation to one of Richard Serra's earliest works

Splashing, (1968), highlighting the similarities and differences in our choice of medium, such as the difference between the fragility of clay versus the fluidity of molten lead. I drew further connections between the way in which he works with improvisation and the intimacy of a wall to create his works and my own Wall Text series, based on the narrated statements by my mother. In chapter one, I discussed the artwork *Tok-tiekie* that links the numerous sets of buttons from a tiekie boks with my own experience of attempting to contact home. In this same chapter, I examined the ongoing series *’n Ring-oortjie en spaar sleutels* in relation to the performance by Doung Anwar Janhangeer, *The Other Side (City Walk)*, (2012) (Fig 11), underlining similarities between our practice of walking and finding objects squashed into surfaces. The notion of walking as practice is further interrogated by the artwork *Om brood te breek met 293 kms* (Fig 12.1 and 12.2) in relation to the site-specific performance and installation by Randolph Hartzenberg’s *Three days*, (2012) (Fig 14), in which the notion of transience and the attempt of making amends with the past is examined.

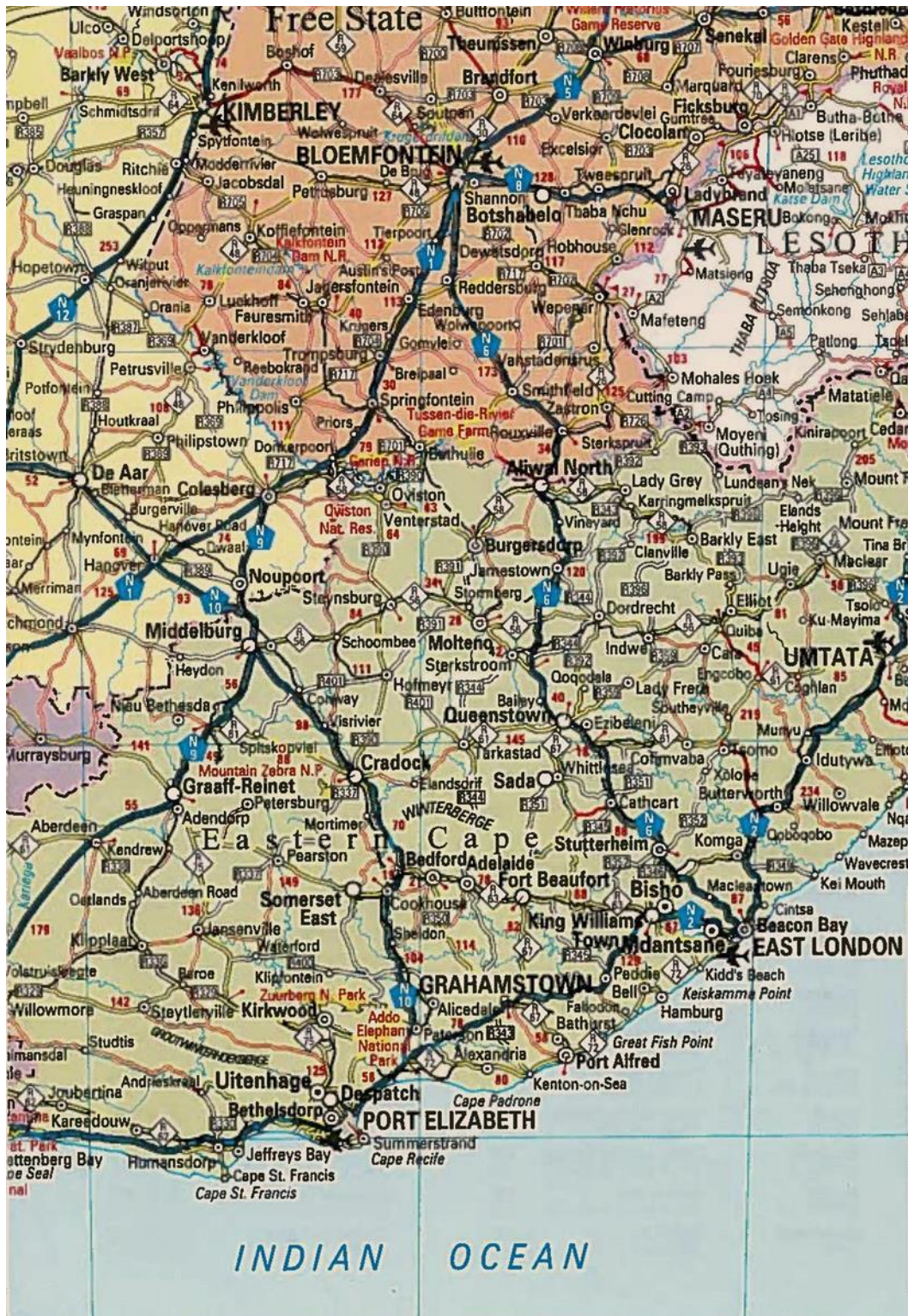
In Chapter Two, *Reimagining home in italics*, I framed the notion of home through the metaphoric act of italicising text. I likened this metaphor to act the way that the relationship between home and language is framed through memory and narrative. The discussion addresses how difficult it was to translate from English into my mother tongue and vice versa. I extended this discussion to include the artwork *Kom-kommer* (Fig 16) in relation to the work of Willem Boshoff’s *Stokkiesdraai* (1980) (Fig 18), drawing parallels between his creation of multiple twisted or warped objects and my own process of incorporating the concept of multiple ‘worry beads’ within my practice.

This practice as research submission can be extended by expanding the developing the archive of dialogues between my mother and my myself in relation to the *Wall Text* series *Hêmel of Hollywood* and *Ons bloed is dikker as die waarheid*. I aim to continue my practical interrogations into the meaning of home and my experimentation with clay on canvas by introducing other organic substances, such as pumpkin puree, recycled ground coffee or tea. I anticipate that the series *’n Ring oortjie en spaar sleutels* will develop into further molded found objects by including zips to the sequence of objects. Finally, I intend

to experiment further with the casting of used teabags in porcelain, which has developed into an uncompleted series entitled *Teëpraat* (Back chat).

In the realisation of this Masters in Fine Art submission, I have learnt that the question “what is a home?” can never be answered, but the journey to find it can open up interesting questions of belonging and place. This thesis contributes to a small but growing selection of literature written by South African art historians, such as Portia Malatjie (2014) and Ruth Simbao (2017, 2012, 2011), who are exploring the nature of walking as both a medium and a concept. Aspects of this thesis could be refined and published in journals, such as *Image and Text* or *African Arts* for example, increasing the number of South African artists writing on their own artwork from the continent, specifically artists focused on the significance of walking as an artistic practice.

Appendix



Reg. No. 04/02555/07. Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa Dealer Location Map.

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