

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

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Joani Groenewald

23 February 2015

Date

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Abstract

This thesis interrogates my own memory in order to illustrate its fragmented and unstable nature. I revisit a specific childhood memory and attempt to recreate it visually through the creation of jewellery pieces. However, the unattainability of a consistent memory becomes increasingly evident in the process of its externalization. My work thus speaks of the unravelling of memory, as well as the piecing together and imagining of a new memory. This thesis and my practical work are an exploration of this ambivalent nature of memory. Even though memory is concerned with the past, it is also about the present as our memories can also be manipulated by present prejudices.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek my eie geheue met die doel om die onstabiele en gefragmenteerde aard daarvan uit te wys. Ek verwys na 'n spesifieke herinnering van my kinderdae en poog om dit visueel uit te beeld deur die maak van juweelstukke. Die onbekombaarheid van 'n konstante geheue word egter al hoe duideliker wanneer ek my herinneringe visueel probeer uitbeeld. My werk demonstreer die ontrafeling van my herinnering en die konstruksie en verbeelding van 'n nuwe herinnering. Hierdie tesis en my praktiese werk dui op die ondersoek van die wispilturige aard van die geheue. Hoewel herinneringe en die geheue te make het met die verlede, het dit egter ook te make met die hede, aangesien die hede ons herinneringe van die verlede kan manipuleer om aktuele behoeftes te bevredig.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Opsomming.....	iv
List of figures	i
Introduction	1
0.1 My memory.....	1
0.2 Topic and motivation	2
0.3 Research question and aims	7
0.4 Research methodology	8
0.5 Practical research.....	9
0.6 Chapter outline, core literature and key theorists	10
0.7 Theoretical framework.....	12
0.7.1 An overview of postmodernism	13
0.7.2 Contemporary jewellery as part of a postmodern tradition	14
Chapter 1: Memory.....	18
1.1 Introduction.....	18
1.2 The relevance of memory	18
1.3 A brief introduction to the hermeneutics of memory	20
1.4 The subject of memory (how does memory relate to identity)	26
1.5 Conclusion.....	28
Chapter 2: The instability of memory	30
2.1 Introduction	30
2.2 Fragmentation and reconstruction	30
2.3 Imagined and selective memory.....	34

2.4 Social memory.....	37
2.5 Conclusion	40
Chapter 3: The object of memory.....	42
3.1 Introduction	42
3.2 External mnemonics: an introduction	42
3.3 Recollection and symbolism in jewellery.....	46
3.4 Phenomenology	50
3.5 Conclusion	54
Conclusion:.....	56
Figures:	58
Bibliography:	96
Addendum:	103

List of figures

Figure 1. Mah Rana. *The Zodiac* (1996-2000). Pendants: Found objects and 18ct gold. (Klimt02 [Online]).

Figure 2. Joani Groenewald, Brooch (2014). Silver, paper and plastic. Digital photograph.

Figure 3. Joani Groenewald, Brooch (2012). Silver, 9ct rose gold, paper and plastic. Digital photograph.

Figure 4. Joani Groenewald, Teesiffie #1 (2013). Brooch: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainer, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 5. Joani Groenewald, Teesiffie #2 (2013). Brooch: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainer, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 6. Joani Groenewald, Teesiffie #3 (2013). Brooch: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainer, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 7. Joani Groenewald, Teesakkie #1 (2013). Pendant: Antique napkin, silver, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 8. Joani Groenewald, Teesakkie #1 (2013). Pendant: Antique napkin, silver, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 9. Joani Groenewald, Teesakkie #1 (2013). Brooch: Antique napkin, silver, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 10. Joani Groenewald, Teesakkie #1 (2013). Brooch: Antique napkin, silver, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 11. Joani Groenewald, Borslappie #1 (2013). Brooch/neckpiece: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainers. Digital photograph.

Figure 12. Joani Groenewald, Borslappie #2 (2013). Neckpiece: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainers. Digital photograph.

Figure 13. Joani Groenewald, Object (2013). Linen, paper and silver. Digital photograph.

Figure 14. Joani Groenewald, Rings (2013). Silver and brass. Digital photograph.

Figure 15. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Brass and lamp work glass. Digital photograph.

Figure 16. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Brass and lamp work glass. Digital photograph.

Figure 17. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Brass and lamp work glass. Digital photograph.

Figure 18. Joani Groenewald. Rooibos #1 (2014). Glass Rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 19. Joani Groenewald. Rooibos #2 (2014). Glass Rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 20. Joani Groenewald. Rooibos #3 (2014). Glass Rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 21. Joani Groenewald. Rooibos #4 (2014). Glass Rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 22. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Enamel, silver, copper, linen and rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 23. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Linen and rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 24. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Lace, tea strainers, thread and rooibos tea. Digital photograph.

Figure 25. Carine Terreblanche, *Die Kappie* (1999). Brooch: Silver, photographic image. (Burger 2013).

Figure 26. Sue Williamson. Busi (portrait: the artist, wall: Adam Welz) (2000). Dibond print 90 x 200 cm. (Goodman Gallery [Online]).

Figure 27. Nini van der Merwe, *Blue and white #2* (2011). Neckpiece: Cotton, upholstery foam, wood, sterling silver, silk thread. (Van der Merwe 2013).

Figure 28. Nini van der Merwe, *Blue and white #1* (2011). Neckpiece: Cotton, silk thread, upholstery foam, wood. (Van der Merwe 2013).

Figure 29. Nini van der Merwe, *Blue and white #3* (2012). Cotton, silk thread, sterling silver. (Van der Merwe 2013).

Figure 30: Jess Dare. *Conceptual flowering plant series* (2013). Object: Lampwork Glass. (Jess Dare [Online]). Photographer: Grant Hancock.

Figure 31: Jess Dare. *Conceptual flowering plant series* (2013). Object: Lampwork Glass. (Jess Dare [Online]). Photographer: Grant Hancock.

Figure 32: Jess Dare. *Conceptual flowering plant series* (2013). Object: Lampwork Glass. (Jess Dare [Online]). Photographer: Grant Hancock.

Figure 33. Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka. *Lymonorea Trieda*. Object: lampwork glass. (Guido Mocafico [Online]).

Figure 34. Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka. *Calliactis Decorata*. Object: lampwork glass. (Guido Mocafico [Online]).

Figure 35. *Xylem* (2013) Neckpieces: Powder coated brass and copper chenier vary. (Jess Dare [Online]). Photographer: Grant Hancock.

Figure 36. *Xylem* (2013) Neckpiece: Powder coated brass and copper chenier vary. (Jess Dare [Online]). Photography: Grant Hancock.

Figure 37. *Xylem* (2013). Brooches: Powder coated brass and copper chenier vary. (Jess Dare [Online]). Photography: Grant Hancock.

Figure 38. Jess Dare. *Epicormic series* (2013). Brooches: Powder coated brass and copper, sterling silver, lampwork glass, stainless steel vary. (Jess Dare [Online]). Photographer: Grant Hancock.

Introduction

0.1 My memory

Woken up by the loud organ music, I lift my head from my mother's lap. The church service has come to an end and it is time to go home. My brother pokes me, tells me to get up and starts pushing me towards the aisle. I complain. My mother tells us to keep quiet. We make our way to the exit of the church with shuffling movements. My mother gives both my brother and me a coin each to put into the collection plate held by the deacon at the door. The deacon nods his head and smiles at us as we drop the coins into the plate.

My feet and legs are cold in the white knitted stockings and baby-doll shoes that my mother made me wear. My dress is beautiful – my mother made it herself – but the embroidery in the front makes it stiff and rather uncomfortable. All I can think about is getting back into my corduroy pants and warm jersey. Unfortunately I know that is not going to happen. We are on our way to my grandparent's farm where we will have tea followed by Sunday lunch. I will be taking these clothes off only when we get back home, just in time for my bath.

After church we drive directly to my grandparents' farm. The dirt road is windy and bumpy and it takes us about thirty minutes to get there. We arrive there moments after my grandparents, who left the church service just before us. My grandparents are warm and kind people. The farm house is a beautiful white Cape Dutch-style home. As we walk up the stairs to the front porch, the front door opens and a lively little Pomeranian comes up to greet us. My grandmother loves this little dog like her own child. Opening the door is a lady called Evelina. Evelina politely greets us and walks back to the kitchen, where she is busy preparing the food for lunch.

We walk to the lounge, where tea is served. We all sit down for tea. My grandmother has the most beautiful tea set. The cups are white with a gold line running around the rim. Matching golden spoons lie in the saucers. Inside the tray the most beautiful crochet cloth lines the base. The sugar bowl is covered by a matching doily with little blue beads sewn onto the edges. My grandmother crochets very well and she made the doily and cloth herself. Of all the objects on the tray I love the sugar bowl the most. It has the most beautiful curves, like a flower, and inside it has blue and white and pink sugar crystals. Nestled in the sugar is a golden

spoon with the most intricate detail pierced out of it. All these beautiful objects keep me fascinated for a short while.

My brother, on the other hand, completely uninterested in the grown-up conversation, is teasing the dog. My grandmother distracts him by offering him a biscuit, which keeps him out of mischief for a while. My brother and I both know that we have to be on our best behaviour when we visit our grandparents on a Sunday. We have both already gotten to know the wooden spoon all too well and if we do not behave threats of fetching it are likely to follow. My grandmother, however, has a ritual that my brother and I are very fond of; every once in a while, when we visit, she gives us a spoon full of cool-drink syrup, which she stores in an old medicine bottle. When she gives it to us she always says “hierdie medisyne is om julle soet te maak”.¹

After tea we walk through to the dining room where lunch is ready and the table is set with the finest silver ware. For lunch we have roast chicken, roast potatoes, roast lamb, rice and pumpkin pie. What a feast! We all dish up and sit down for lunch. After lunch my grandmother rings the brass bell that is on the table in front of her and Evelina appears from the kitchen to clear the table.

A memory from 1990, I was four years old.

0.2 Topic and motivation

In contemporary political and intellectual databases, memory is a constant reference point. From databases about traumatic memory or nationalist accounts of the past, memory is invoked to justify, explain or challenge familiar histories. Bridging the gap between public and private, between scholarly and popular uses of history, it has become a key term in our culture’s engagement with the past (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003: n.p).

¹ This is a humorous comment and has two possible English translations; “This medicine will make you sweet” and “This medicine is to make you behave”.

In this thesis I investigate the complex relationship between the present and the past as depicted in the contemporary jewellery² objects that I create. I examine how contemporary jewellery can be regarded as a medium through which one can explore a concept such as memory. I also investigate the relationship between memory and identity. I specifically focus on the role that memory has played in shaping my own personal identity. I believe that identities are partly constructed through memory and therefore I employ this study to comment on my own disposition as post-apartheid 'Afrikaner'³ woman. In this sense I explore how jewellery objects function mnemonically in order to seemingly construct a personal account of my identity. The memory mentioned in section 0.1 is the specific memory from my childhood which I reflect back upon and interrogate throughout this dissertation as an example to illustrate the hermeneutics of memory.

My argument is that memory is fragmented and therefore the externalization of memory is fragmented. This argument centres on the discussion of memory and identity in relation to contemporary jewellery as a possible vehicle through which such concepts can be externalized.

It is important to note that this thesis serves as the theoretical companion to a series of contemporary jewellery pieces that I have created. This study thus consists of both a practical as well as theoretical component, which are mutually informative. My art therefore becomes a visual utterance of the research conducted in this thesis. Through my art practice (and in this thesis) I investigate how contemporary jewellery can to a large extent challenge the meanings that we have constructed of the past. To use Radstone and Hodgkin's words on memory: I explore within my own thesis how memory can not only "reinvent", but also "disguise" and "subvert dominant accounts of history" (2003: n.p.). In this regard I believe that memory can become a tool that can both disguise and reveal (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003: n.p.). Furthermore I investigate how identity can possibly be visualised through the use of contemporary jewellery. I view the jewellery objects that I make as pieces that collectively

² The term 'contemporary jewellery' refers to jewellery that is the product of an avant-garde movement in jewellery design and practice (Astfalck 2005: 19). Contemporary jewellery questions the formal, aesthetic and functional standards of jewellery in general (Dormer and Turner 1985: 14).

³ This study is conducted from a postmodernist perspective and therefore I do not believe in the notion of one pure and stable national identity. In this regard the term 'Afrikaner' is in my opinion problematic as I believe, in congruence with the views of Benedict Anderson, that nationalism and national communities are imagined constructs. See Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

construct a personal account of my past. It is my conviction that through an analysis of these pieces, the inconsistent narratives of self that destabilize my memory can be exposed or renegotiated.

My interest in the topic of memory was triggered by an article entitled “Mah Rana: Between Remembering and Forgetting” written by August Casely-Hayford, curator and cultural historian. In this article Casely-Hayford describes (with reference to the work of Mah Rana⁴) an encounter with a Northern Ghanaian diviner (see Figure 1). He relates how the diviner told him that “everything remembers” and “that if we knew how, we could draw memories from deep within the fabric of objects” (2002 [Online]). He goes on to say that the diviner

... had built his highly successful divining practice upon the conviction that we charge everything we touch with memory. He argued that every object emanates fading echoes of its past; 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 record stays frozen, forever (2002 [Online]).

This extract made me re-evaluate my relationship with my environment and the objects that surround me. It made me curious about how contemporary jewellery could become a vehicle through which memory can be translated. This extract thus summarises the point of the departure for this study.

Primarily I am concerned with the way in which memory manifests itself visually through objects. I am interested in the relationships that most humans form with the objects that they come into contact with. Therefore I examine how objects⁵ – jewellery objects included – acquire meaning through discursive practices. I investigate the ways in which these objects function mnemonically and can be arranged and manipulated in order to create narrative. Furthermore, I specifically investigate what happens when internalities⁶ are externalized⁷ into

⁴ Mah Rana is a contemporary jeweller who reworks everyday objects into contemporary jewellery pieces.

⁵ I specifically refer to the functional objects that we encounter and interact with on a daily basis. These objects become part of our daily routine and frame of reference.

⁶ The term ‘internality’ is a loaded term which I use to refer to the affective and intellectual subjectivities of the human subject; the emotions, memories and learnt information that are stored within the conscious/subconscious mind of the subject.

⁷ The words externalize/externalization are again loaded terms used with reference to the process of articulating affective and subjective concerns (internalities) and transforming them into a physical form which can be read by other subjects.

objects such as contemporary jewellery pieces and how these objects can then function autobiographically.

The significance of the relationship between objects and humans becomes evident in material culture studies.⁸ Christopher Tilley, British anthropologist and archaeologist, describes in his book *Handbook of Material Culture* (2006) that the object is a gateway to understanding the individuals and cultures of ancient societies (2006: 61). In Casely-Hayford's article he refers to Mah Rana as an "archaeologist of memory" in the sense that she manages to unearth "everyday objects that have been elevated from the ephemeral by the way in which they seem to have become engorged with powerful personal history and meaning" (2002 [Online]). In congruence to Casely-Heyford's view, I consider the jewellery object to be a powerful communicative tool that transcends personal history. In this sense the object becomes a vessel for containing cultural and personal memory. The object thus becomes the point where present and past intersect. This is a very important point that forms the basis of my argument.

According to Christopher Tilley, "The object world is ... absolutely central to the understanding of identities of individuals and society"; he also says that "material forms, as objectifications of social relations and gender identities, often 'talk' silently about these relationships in ways impossible to speech or formal discourses" (2006: 61-63). In agreement with Tilley's views I believe that objects - jewellery objects included – demonstrate our social interactions and how we relate to the world. Idané Burger states in her thesis "Contemporary Jewellery Practices and the Dialogic Interpretation of African Material Culture" that "Things and/or objects are multifaceted and complex in the meanings that they acquire within a certain society; they attain symbolic, political, economic and social meanings, while they also encapsulate memory" (2013: 4). Objects are therefore deeply integrated into society. Objects can relay meaning, as meaning has been culturally ascribed to them.

In this respect Edwina Taborsky, professor of anthropology at Bishop's University in Canada (BITagora [Online]), describes in her text *The discursive object* (1990) how an object acquires meaning through the process of signification (1990: 52). Taborsky believes that meaning is

⁸ Material culture studies refer to the study of the material world, which is a broad study field that will be elaborated on and explained in detail throughout this study.

social and it relies on language to become comprehensible; therefore the sign can be understood as the social meaning of the object (1990: 52). In this regard Heidegger further suggests that “whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception” (cited in Taborsky 1990: 52). Our reading of an object, then, is done through a process of memory because “[w]e do not gather meaning directly from the object, but we create it using our own ‘fore-knowledge’ about society” (Taborsky 1990: 52).

I believe that objects are loaded with social and cultural meaning and therefore objects can become visual documentations of histories. Personally, the objects that I create become metaphors for the tension I experience when looking back at my own history. Through my art practice I attempt to highlight these tensions in an attempt to make sense of the past. My work is a self-reflexive study of my own history. I investigate the strenuous relationship between the present and the past within the context of a post-apartheid South Africa. I draw from personal experience and memory in reconstructing my own interpretation of the past through the jewellery objects I make. In this sense my work functions as an expression of my personal memories. Because of the subjective nature of this study, it is important to note my personal and cultural background in order to place my research into context. These factors inescapably shape my own personal views, memories and perceptions, and therefore will consciously and subconsciously be translated into the practical work I produce.

In this thesis I investigate how memory manifests in both the subject as well as the object. In terms of the subject, I look at how the interdependent relationship between the present and the past shapes the subject’s perception of self. In terms of the object, I investigate how the object can become both the product as well as the producer of personal and cultural memory. I argue that memory and identity are unstable and fragmented constructs, and that because of this ambivalent nature the externalization of memory and identity (through objects such as contemporary jewellery objects in this specific case) will also be ambivalent. This discussion touches on the following subjects:

1. How identities are established through memory;
2. The influence of ideology and discourse on both personal as well as cultural memory;

3. The complexities in the interdependent relationship between the past and the present;
4. What happens when inconsistent narratives of self are externalized through contemporary jewellery practices?

In this respect I will discuss subjects such as identity, memory, autobiography, ideology, 'truth'⁹ and fictional memory from a current 'Afrikaner' perspective.

The purpose of this study is not merely to research the topic of memory and its relation to identity politics and material culture, but also to make an academic contribution to the field of contemporary jewellery, specifically in relation to South Africa. Hopefully this study will further inform other artists and contemporary jewellers about the complexities of their practice in order to assist them in making informed art. Game and Goring describe in their book entitled *Jewellery Moves* why jewellery is such an appropriate medium for discussing issues around identity:

Feelings of personal, cultural and social identity can be destabilised by dramatic social change, as experienced in the late 20th century ... Jewellery is in many ways the ideal art form in which to consider anxieties about identity. People acquire and wear jewellery to illustrate identity (1998: 52).

0.3 Research question and aims

Research question:

Is it possible for contemporary jewellery to function as a medium that can reflect the fragmented and constructed nature of memory?

The following aims are to be met in order to answer this question:

⁹ The word 'truth' is here referred to in an ironic manner and is therefore placed in quotation marks. As I will explain later on in this chapter, I conduct this study from a postmodernist perspective and therefore I do not believe in the notion of one pure, absolute and stable truth. Postmodernists question the notion of single and centralized meaning (Hutcheon 1988: 127). Therefore whenever I refer to the word 'truth' in this thesis I question its stability and suggest that meaning is plural rather than consistent.

- To investigate the relationship between the object and the subject in relation to memory;
- To investigate how memory and the recollection thereof influence visual expression in contemporary jewellery and vice versa;
- To investigate how memory is employed to shape individual and cultural identities.

0.4 Research methodology

As discussed, this thesis serves as the theoretical companion to a series of contemporary jewellery pieces I have created. Therefore this study consists of both a practical component as well as a theoretical component in terms of the research I conduct. The practical research (in terms of visual experiments) as well as the academic research (in terms of the reading, understanding and application of complex theories) are mutually informative. This type of research can be described as practice-based research. Linda Candy defines practice-based research as follows in her article “Practice Based Research: A guide”:

Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice ... claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes (2006).

Therefore it is important to acknowledge the jewellery pieces and objects I make as crucial in their contribution to the meaning of this study.

In addition to my own work I also discuss related works of selected contemporary South African jewellers and artists. These discussions function as examples that illustrates how their/my art works/jewellery pieces can possibly be regarded as material reflections of the theories that I am investigating and discussing.

The research I conduct is best described as qualitative research, as I conduct my study through researching and analysing the meanings and values attached to human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 278).

0.5 Practical research

The practical component of this study is a self-reflexive study of my own history as can be seen in Figures 2 - 23. Inspired by the activity of drinking tea, I reflect back to times spent on our family farm in the Eastern Cape, where I remember how we (as a family) use to spend our Sunday afternoons dining and drinking tea with my grandmother. This activity is not only one of personal significance, but to me it becomes symbolic of a larger dominant cultural mindset of the time. I use rooibos tea and other objects associated with the making and drinking of tea in the jewellery pieces that I create. Rooibos tea becomes a metaphor for my own identity. I combine rooibos tea with objects such as tea strainers, antique napkins and hand embroidery to reference my 'Afrikaner' heritage as well as specific memories I have of my grandmother and the farm where I spent the first years of my childhood. Through the process of staining and burning these objects and reworking them into jewellery pieces I aim to create a form of visual tension that mimics the tension I experience when reflecting back on the past. The work is an idiosyncratic representation of how memory can become a tool that can reinvent, disguise and subvert. In this sense the work touches on subjects such as imagination, trauma and 'truth'.

Through the jewellery pieces that I create I explore how in South Africa the past and present are in a continuous dialogical relationship with one another, the one continuously informing and reinventing the other.¹⁰ It is my conviction that the past is never simply in the past, but is continuously used to inform and justify present needs.

I view the jewellery pieces that I create as a form of visual narrative that relates a story about my personal past. In this sense my work becomes a form of visual autobiography. In my art practice the jewellery object becomes the visual portrayal of the place where memory and autobiography overlap. The combination and mixture of diverse materials becomes a

¹⁰ These are complex ideas which will be elaborated on in Chapter 1 section 1.3 and Chapter 2, section 2.2.

reflection of a fragmented mixture of memories that is encapsulated in the jewellery object. The jewellery objects I create function as metaphorical photographs in the sense that they hold together the different materials that contain my story and my memories. In this regard the jewellery pieces that I create become a self-generated visual extension of the self, functioning as a fragmented and disjointed narrative of self.

0.6 Chapter outline, core literature and key theorists

In this study I apply different theories in order to motivate my own work as well as my discussions about other artists' work. Most of these theories fall under the broad framework of postmodernism.¹¹ I therefore approach this study (as well as my own art) from a postmodernist perspective.

As this study is conducted from a postmodern perspective, I rely on postmodern theorist to motivate my argument throughout this study. In this regard I depend greatly on the theories of French philosophers Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and also the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure on how meaning, value and 'truth' are established in language and in nonverbal texts (Payne 1997: vi). Foucault and Barthes are very well known and influential twentieth-century theorists (Payne 1997: 1). Foucault is considered one of the most important thinkers of his time as is Barthes in the field of literary criticism and semiotics (Payne 1997: 1-12), De Saussure also became famous for his work on semiotics (Slater 1997: 137).

In terms of contemporary jewellery, I rely mainly on the writing of Liesbeth Den Besten in her book entitled *On Jewellery: A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery* (2011).

In Chapters 1 and 2 I explore the hermeneutics of memory. I specifically discuss why memory is such a relevant topic, particularly in relation to South Africa's past. In order to contextualize this study, I start Chapter 1 by relaying the specific memory from my childhood which I reflect back upon and interrogate throughout this study. I interrogate this specific memory as an example to illustrate how memory works. Through my art practice I also reflect on this specific

¹¹ For an account of postmodernism see section 0.7.

memory in order to explore how memory can be externalized. Through the retelling of my childhood memory I explore how memory can serve as a platform for confronting and dealing with issues around South Africa's conflicted past. In this chapter I specifically reference the writings of Paul Ricoeur, Sarah Nuttall, and Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin to investigate the notion of memory in South Africa. Paul Ricoeur is a very influential philosopher of the twentieth century. His work demonstrates a particular interest in philosophical anthropology (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2002 [Online]). In this thesis I specifically refer to his book *Memory, History Forgetting* (2004) to inform my study on memory. In this discussion I also refer to texts written by Sarah Nuttall on the post-apartheid condition. Nuttall is a Professor in English and the director of the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research in Johannesburg (Slip [Online]). I specifically refer to Nuttall's text *Private lives and public cultures in South Africa* (2013), which she wrote in conjunction with Kerry Bystrom, and her book *Negotiating the past: the making of memory in South Africa* (1998), which she co-edited with Carli Coetzee. Susannah Radstone is a professor in cultural studies and memory studies at the University of Port Elizabeth. She wrote two books entitled *Regimes of memory* (2003) and *Contested pasts: politics of memory* (2003) in conjunction with Katharine Hodgkin, a doctor in cultural history at the University of East London. I also greatly rely on these two books to inform this study. In addition to the theoretical discussion on memory, I also discuss the work of Sue Williamson and Catherina van der Merwe as examples of how such theories can possibly be translated into artworks or more specifically jewellery pieces.

From a postmodern perspective, memory is seen as ambivalent. Chapter 2 is a continuation of my investigation of memory with specific focus on this ambivalent nature of memory. In the chapter I investigate why memory can be described as constructed, fragmented, imagined, selective and social, and therefore why memory can be seen as unstable. In this regard, I discuss how the contemporary jewellery artist Jess Dare interprets these aspects of memory and translates them into the jewellery pieces that she creates. In the chapter I again refer to the writing of Paul Ricoeur in terms of the fragmented, constructed and imagined aspects of memory. I also refer to the writing of Barbara A. Misztal, a professor in sociology at the University of Leicester's (University of Leicester [Online]), on social memory. In the

chapter I specifically refer to her book entitled *Theories of Social Remembering* (2003), which is particularly relevant in terms of discussing the social and collective aspects of memory.

In Chapter 3 I investigate how memory can be externalized (specifically in the form of contemporary jewellery) in order to function as a personal narrative. I refer to the writing of Kurt Danziger, Professor Emeritus in psychology at York University, who wrote *Marking the Mind: A History of Memory* (2008) as well as to Ernst Van der Wal's¹² (2013) doctoral thesis entitled "An elusive archive: Three Trans Men and Photographic Recollection" in order to motivate and explore how the externalization of memory functions. In the chapter I also look at Barthes's text *Mythologies* (1973) and de Saussure's work on semiotics in discussing the 'mythologies' that surround jewellery objects. In relation I also briefly discuss Heidegger's theory of 'hermeneutic phenomenology'.¹³ I view the cultural objects I investigate as visual text and analyse them in terms of these theories. In this regard, the chapter relates to material culture studies in the sense that is a study of the material world through the scope of memory (Buchli 2002: 1-3).

To conclude, I draw on all the previous chapters in order to motivate the view that memory is an unstable construct and that the externalization of memory can assist in exposing it as such.

0.7 Theoretical framework

This study is concerned with the jewellery object as mnemonic device. In this regard it investigates how the jewellery object can possibly articulate issues related to my own personal memory. Such an investigation requires a critical inquiry into contemporary jewellery as a medium in/through which meaning can be encapsulated and/or conveyed. As I

¹² Even though Van der Wal's (2013) study is focused on the archive and photography as means of archival documentation, I find the way he discusses memory and the externalization of memory through photography particularly relevant to my study of contemporary jewellery. I also find his discussions of memory in South Africa very relevant in relation to this study.

¹³ This study is, however, also a phenomenological one since it is concerned with the human experience of "things" (Thomas 2006: 43). I investigate how we as humans experience and understand worldly things (Thomas 2006: 43). I reference to phenomenology and material culture I largely rely on J. Thomas's text "Phenomenology and Material Culture" in *The Handbook of Material Culture* (2006: 43).

conduct this study mainly from a postmodernist perspective, I find it necessary to briefly elaborate on what postmodernism entails in order to clarify the nature of my research.

0.7.1 An overview of postmodernism

This study is largely concerned with the externalisation of memory and identity through contemporary jewellery objects. For this reason I will provide a general definition of postmodernism with particular reference to postmodern views on memory and identity. I do not wish to provide a revolutionary (re)definition of the term, but rather aim to discuss its relevance in relation to this study.

Susan Elizabeth Hart refers to the writings of Jean-Francois Lyotard and Fredric Jameson in her Master's thesis entitled "Traditional War Memorials and Postmodern Memory" (2000) in order to provide a very general definition of postmodernism as that which "refers to the calling into question ... the unified and universalist metanarratives¹⁴ of Western culture", which challenges modernist ideas of discourses such as identity, memory, and history as stable constructs (2000: 8). Furthermore, literary and social critic Stuart Sim writes in *Postmodernism and Art* (2006) that "[o]ne of the best ways of describing postmodernism as a philosophical movement would be as a form of scepticism – scepticism about authority, received wisdom, cultural and political norms etc." (2006: 3).

Christopher Reed states in his article "Postmodernism and the Art of Identity" that "issues of identity are crucial to postmodernism, so much so that some theorists propose a new awareness of certain identities to be the defining characteristic of the postmodern age" (1993: 274). What postmodernism does is critique hierarchies based on race, class, nationality, gender, sexuality and other forms of identity (Reed 1993: 274). It is such hierarchies that theorists such as Foucault aim to break down. The postmodernists view

¹⁴ Metanarratives are also referred to as "master narratives" or "grand narratives" – a term coined by the philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard. In short, they can be described as the universal theories of Western culture (Sim 2005: 3). The *Dictionary of Critical Theory* describes the term as follows: "narratives which make forms of knowledge legitimate by supplying them with a validating philosophy of history" (Macey 2000: Sv. 'grand narratives'). Postmodernism is characterised by its rejection of grand narratives through calling into question their credibility (Sim 2005: 3). Lyotard doesn't believe in the existence of one grand narrative but rather in a multitude of small narratives (Hutcheon 2006: 119).

identity as incoherent and unstable. They challenge the modernist perspective of the individual as being coherent, rational and autonomous (Hutcheon 2006: 120).

According to Eric Berlatsky, “the postmodern aesthetic places the truth-value of memory, history, and identity into question, never claiming historical accuracy of truth telling that might allow for ... essentialist constructions of history” (2003: 126). In this regard Marieke le Roux states in her thesis “Narrating an unstable memory: a postmodern study of fictional pasts in the (auto/bio)graphic novel” that “[p]ostmodernism regards memory, like other metanarratives, with much caution in terms of one ultimate ‘truth’, and tends to reject the claims of real representations of the past” (2013: 11). In this regard I believe that a discussion of postmodernism is vital in a discussion about contemporary jewellery as a form of externalization of my memories of the past, particularly because “[w]hat postmodernism does ... is confront and contest any modernist discarding or recuperating of the past in the name of the future. It suggests no search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present” (Hutcheon 1988: 19). This suggests that reality (as we experience it) is an obscure interplay between present and past, where meaning is fluid and unstable (Hutcheon 1988: 19). Le Roux states that “discussing the discourse of memory within a postmodern framework enables us to question the stability and value of memory, specifically in terms of autobiographical narrative” (2013: 12). Memory, particularly autobiographical memory, is viewed by postmodernists as fragmented and unstable. This perspective enables critical thinkers to question its stability and allows them to question the authenticity of one’s memories.

0.7.2 Contemporary jewellery as part of a postmodern tradition

In a study that is conducted from a postmodern perspective and which is concerned with contemporary jewellery, it is essential to discuss how contemporary jewellery can function within the framework of postmodernism. In this section I will contextualize why contemporary jewellery can be regarded as an extension of the postmodern tradition of thought.

The earliest versions of contemporary jewellery may be dated to the late 1960s and was a reflection of the mindset of the time, which advocated radical change and challenged traditional social, political and cultural structures (Den Besten 2011: 7). This mindset led to experimentation and a sense of freedom in terms of form and material (Den Besten 2011: 7). In this regard contemporary jewellery does not confine itself strictly to the use of precious metals and gemstones, nor does it restrict itself in terms of size or even methods of production (Den Besten 2011: 8). The contemporary jewellery that originated in the 1960s signals a break from traditional jewellery and moves towards freedom of form, material and function. In this regard Paul Derrez, the owner of contemporary jewellery gallery, Galerie Ra, states in his article "Jewellery? What Type of Jewellery are We Actually Talking About?" (2005) that contemporary jewellery has ascribed a whole set of new meanings to jewellery and that "[j]ewellery could be a statement, a mass-produced product, an accessory, a DIY kit, a clothing addition, a photographic prop, wearable sculpture, a costume or a stage piece" (2005: 12-13). This approach to jewellery encouraged the spectator to look critically at the object. In contemporary jewellery the line between jewellery as craft, on the one hand, or as a form of art, on the other hand, becomes blurred (Derrez 2005: 12-13). This type of jewellery can be seen as a reflection of the postmodern tradition of breaking down boundaries and questioning assumptions, specifically because it does not wish to confine jewellery to a clear set of rules in terms of form and function.

Contemporary jewellery transformed conventional jewellery from a craft into a fine art practice. This transformation allowed postmodern trends, visible in terms of fine arts,¹⁵ to also emerge in contemporary jewellery (Derrez 2005: 12-13). The contemporary jeweller can move around freely between art and craft; he/she is no longer restricted to comply with specific expectations of what jewellery should look like or how it should be worn (Den Besten 2003 [Online]). In this respect contemporary jewellery interrupts the purely decorative nature of the jewellery object (Den Besten 2003 [Online]).

¹⁵ Postmodern art is a combination of formal and critical concerns (Trodd 2006: 82). Linda Hutcheon describes postmodern art and theory as having "overlapping concerns" and as having "one common method of operation: that is, looking for and then exposing contradictions in what appeared at first to be a totally unproblematic, coherent whole" (Hutcheon 2006: 115-116). Postmodern art reflects and illustrates postmodern theory and I believe it also illustrates most of what I have written about postmodern theory/discourse up until now (Hutcheon 2006: 115-116) unusual reference here. The conflation of postmodern art and postmodern theory can partly be ascribed to the number of postmodern artists who doubled as theorists (Hutcheon 2006: 115-116).

It is evident that contemporary jewellery disrupts the traditional constraints which define what jewellery is and how it should function. Contemporary jewellery questions the value associated with precious metals and gemstones by using an array of different materials from which to manufacture jewellery. Contemporary jewellery be regarded as a critical form of art that is self-reflexive in nature, because it can be viewed as a medium that can question the general assumptions of the craft that it originated from.

Because contemporary jewellery functions in the realm of fine art, it becomes a medium through which jewellery artists can critically address other social, political and cultural issues. As an example of how contemporary jewellery can address such issues, I would like to refer to the work of South African contemporary jeweller, Carine Terreblanche. Terreblanche demonstrates in her work *Die Kappie* (1999) (Figure 25), how contemporary jewellery can be used to make a statement about 'Afrikaner' national identity. In this brooch, shaped like an 'Afrikaner' Voortrekker bonnet, Terreblanche addresses issues surrounding rigid 'Afrikaner' nationalist sentiment that is generally associated with the apartheid era (Burger 2013). She critically challenges the viewer to confront issues surrounding cultural identity and oppression, which was a particularly controversial topic at the time (Burger 2013). By juxtaposing a Voortrekker bonnet with the image of a black man Terreblanche parodies 'Afrikaner' symbols with black oppression (Burger 2013). The piece depicts the interracial desire of an 'Afrikaner' girl for a black man, which was considered totally taboo at the time (Burger 2013). In this piece Terreblanche implements postmodern techniques such as intertextuality, parody and contradiction (Burger 2013).

This work is based on Terreblanche's own experience as 'Afrikaner' woman. She relies on the viewer to understand the original context (therefore her work relies on cultural memory to help make sense of it) of the cultural symbols that she references in order to grasp the parody in the work. She simultaneously satirizes as well as emphasizes the fall of 'Afrikaner' symbols and icons. Through the use of intertextuality and parody she questions and contradicts 'Afrikaner' authoritarianism and therefore I believe that her work is a good demonstration of how various postmodern concepts can come together in contemporary jewellery.

This discussion of postmodernism and contemporary jewellery makes it evident how contemporary jewellery forms part of the postmodern tradition of thought. It is within this

combined framework of postmodernism and contemporary jewellery that I make my own art. Postmodernism challenges received authority and norms; it doesn't accept the stability of meaning but rather its plurality and complexity. It is exactly this plurality and complexity of meaning that I investigate in this study.

Chapter 1: Memory

1.1 Introduction

This study is mainly concerned with the externalization of memory through the use of contemporary jewellery. I specifically use my own memories and attempt to externalize them in my own art practice as contemporary jeweller. In such an investigation it is necessary to elaborate on memory and the politics that concern such a topic. This will give further insight into how the jewellery object can function mnemonically as an external manifestation of memory. In my art practice I look at the specific memory from my childhood mentioned in section 0.1. This memory functions as an example which I interrogate in order to illustrate the hermeneutics of memory.

This chapter is dedicated to explaining the relevance of memory on a personal and political level in the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

1.2 The relevance of memory

In order to contextualize this study I find it necessary to elaborate on the relevance of memory specifically in relation to the current South African context. This section is dedicated to exploring the relevance of memory specifically in relation to South Africa's past. In this regard I investigate how the politics of memory has been addressed by some contemporary South African artists. This discussion informs my own art practice and indicates the relevance of this study.

[M]emory needs to be interrogated at a time when, in spite of the surfeit of information in the age of the internet and digital forms of memorization or archiving 'actuality', the same trace of what Foucault calls counter-memory is being lost amongst the rubble of living history, and the 'forgetting' of the uncomfortable truths of oppression and exploitations that should gnaw at consciences. (Clark 2010: 4)

In the past memory was studied mainly in the field of the neurosciences, but in recent years there has been a growing interest in memory studies, particularly in the field of humanities and social sciences (Kansteiner 2002: 180). Memory relates to many fields in the academy

and “because of its interdisciplinary breadth, memory as a concept throws light on the unquestioned assumptions and the internal workings of the various disciplines in which it comes to be positioned” (Radstone & Hodgkin 2003: xiv). To adopt the words of Radstone and Hodgkin, I find the way in which memory “seem[s] to make possible an engagement with both personal and intellectual concerns” very relevant to this study (2003: xiv).

Memory has come to play a central part in the way we view and engage with the past. Memory relates to our personal, historical and political relationship with the past. In Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone’s book *Contested pasts: The politics of memory* they raise the question of what it means to contest the past – a question that is particularly relevant in a current South African context. In contesting the past, Radstone and Hodgkin suggest, there is some dispute about the ‘truthfulness’ of the past particularly in relation to privileged narratives. (2003: 1). This is reflected in the mission of the South African Truth and Reconciliation commission to restore the missing “shards of memory” in order to promote “a common sense of nation” (Christie 2002: 8). In this regard Ernst van der Wal states:

The theme of picking up shards of memory frequently surfaces in writings that deal with South Africa’s fragmented mnemonic relation to its colonial and apartheid past – be it in suggestions to use memory as a means of countering silence and amnesia and as a tool for opposing apartheid’s grand narratives; to disclose personal memories to the public in order to be held accountable for them; or trying to find shared memories amidst divergent and conflicting histories. These ideas show a concern with memory as a vehicle for collectively and publically rethinking South African identities within a democratic framework (2013: 18).¹⁶

Voicing the memories of those excluded (be it because of their sexual, racial or cultural identity) is one way of rethinking memory (Van der Wal 2013: 18). This concept is of particular relevance in a South African context and indicates the growing need for re-remembering or even just remembering the ‘other’ within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, where certain marginalized identities are distorted or neglected in our country’s cultural memory¹⁷

¹⁶ See also Brink (1998), Lewis (2000), Cassin (2001), Nuttall and Coetzee (1998).

¹⁷ I align my own views on cultural memory with those of Mike Bal in her description of the term as signifying that “memory can be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual or social one” and that “cultural memorization [is] an activity [that] occur[s] in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future” (1999: vii). Cultural memory is “the product of collective agency” and it is something which is performed, even though such acts, often, are not contrived deliberately or consciously (Bal 1999: vii).

(Van der Wal 2013: 18). Through voicing my memory of the past I, to a lesser extent, attempt to admit accountability for past wrong doing. At the same time I question the perception of innocence that accompanies my childhood.

The topic of memory is very relevant to our current South African context and many South African artists address issues surrounding memory in their work. As an example, the South African artist Sue Williamson's¹⁸ work actively challenges the country's institutions, social issues and history particularly through referencing personal histories (SAHO [Online]). In Williamson's series of works that she created in 2000 entitled *From the inside* (Figure 26) she confronts the narratives that came to the fore in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after the end of apartheid and in the process she addresses the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Goodman Gallery [Online]). Williamson states that:

We're in the process of coming to terms with the past. I think that, before we can move on, we have to reach a point where we can find our way to a solution and say: OK, we've confronted our past as intensively as possible (cited in SAHO [Online]).

Memory does not only allow me to investigate what it means to engage with the past on a cultural level, but it also helps me to gain a better understanding of my personal memories and understanding of the past. It is, however, also important to keep in mind that "contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward" as Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 1) point out. Perhaps the recent growing interest in memory is triggered by a need to make sense of the present through revisiting the past.

1.3 A brief introduction to the hermeneutics of memory

[M]emory is active and it is situated in the present (Bal 1999: viii).

James Olney¹⁹ provides a very general definition of the purpose of memory when he states that "the function of memory [is to] recall [that which] once happened" (1998: 296). This is a

¹⁸ Williamson is well known for her printmaking, but she also works in constructed objects, installation, video and photographic images (SAHO [Online]).

¹⁹ James Olney is a Professor of English, French and Italian at Louisiana State University (The University of Chicago Press Books [Online]).

very simple definition used to describe a very complex concept. In this chapter I will investigate the inner workings of memory and the complexities that accompany it. This discussion on the hermeneutics of memory is important in order to give a better understanding of how memory works. This discussion is essential in establishing the foundation for my argument that memory is fragmented. In later chapters I will build on this discussion in order to demonstrate my view that memory is fragmented and that its externalization will in turn also reflect its unstable and fragmented nature.

Memory has traditionally been associated with storing and retrieving information (Schmidt 2008: 191). In the classical period pictorial devices were used to record and store memories (Whitehead 2009: 43). Even today visual interpretation is influenced by memory, as can be seen in the visual media (through programmes such as true-life dramas or documentaries); in the print media (such as newspapers and magazines), in museums; in national archives; and in memorials (Le Roux 2013: 21). All of these elements are archived as visual props that assist us in remembering the past (Le Roux 2013: 21). Memory, however, should not be interpreted purely as a place in the brain where information is stored; it should rather be seen as the establishment of understanding which creates order in the brain and determines human behaviour (Schmidt 2008: 192). Barbara A. Misztal summarizes this disposition well when she states that “we rely on memory for the provision of symbolic representations and frames which can influence and organize both our actions and our conception of ourselves. Thus ‘memory at once reflects, programs, and frames the present’” (Schwartz 2000 cited in Misztal 2003: 13). I agree with Misztal that memory is just as involved with the present as it is with the past. In this regard Anne Whitehead states in her book, *Memory: the New Critical Idiom*, that “[m]emory is, crucially, concerned with holding up for comparison present and past experiences; far from simply reproducing an image of one’s past, remembering represents a process of reflection upon it” (2009: 52). This process of reflecting suggests an action that is done in the present. Werner Bohleber believes that memory cannot be understood outside of the context in which it is emerged, which emphasizes the influence that the present has on recollection (2007: 334). Memory, then, is not purely involved with reproducing images of the past; memory rather functions as a channel of communication between the present and the past in the process of recalling past events or experiences. This leads to my interpretation of memory as something that is actively involved in the present and which establishes the

foundation upon which human understanding is grounded and which constitutes human behaviour.

The British philosopher John Locke makes an interesting point about the relationship between the present and the past when he suggests that memory would not exist if it were not for present recollection. Locke states that “our ideas are said to be in our memories, when indeed, they are actually nowhere, but only there is an ability in the mind, when it will, to retrieve them again; and as it were paint them anew on itself”, which suggests that ideas are stored as memories, which cease to be anything if they are not recollected (cited in Whitehead 1999:55). Whitehead further elaborates that only upon the recollection of an idea can it come to life again. Memories (or ideas which are stored as memories) depend on recollection in the present in order to exist once more (1999:55). Paul Ricoeur reinforces this argument when he states that “we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place” (2004: 21).

It is evident that the past relies on the present for its continued existence, but Alan Megil suggests that “[m]emory is an image of the past constructed by a subjectivity in the present. It is thus by definition subjective; it may also be irrational and inconsistent” (2011: 196). Migil questions the reliability of recollection as he believes that it is subjective and fickle. The cognitive researcher, Daniel Schacter, explains how our memories can become emotionally charged through the process of reflection: “[w]e extract key elements from our experiences and store them. We recreate and reconstruct our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them. Sometimes, in the process of reconstructing we add on feelings, beliefs, or even knowledge we obtained after the experience. In other words, we bias our memories of the past by attributing to them emotion or knowledge we acquired after the event” (cited in Bohleber 2007: 335). Birgit Neumann states that “our memories are highly selective and... the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer’s present, his/her desire and denial, than about the actual past events” (cited in Le Roux 2013: 24). This process of attributing emotive properties to memories indicates how the present is involved with manipulating past memories. In my opinion, memory can be seen as unstable because it does not provide us with an exact copy of the past experience, but rather with an altered or recreated version of it.

When referring back to my childhood memory I become increasingly aware of how some elements of my memory have been altered or informed by subjectivities in the present. To use the simplest example, some information about that specific memory was only acquired after the event, such as the contents of the medicine bottle. At the time my brother and I were not aware of what the contents of the medicine bottle were; we only knew that the syrup which it contained was sweet. Only at a later stage did my grandmother reveal to us that it was in fact cool-drink syrup (or did we make that assumption ourselves as we grew older” ... I cannot remember...). Furthermore, only upon reflecting back do some customs which were considered normal at the time start to appear unnatural, such as the pretence of dressing up for Sunday lunch or tea, or ringing a bell and someone appears to clear the table. In fact the latter phenomenon, which was seen as culturally acceptable at the time, has become a symbol of the racial discrimination and oppression experienced during that period. I now reflect on the fact that there was someone waiting for us at home with tea ready, who made lunch and who cleared the table was probably not memorable at all at the time, but because of the dramatic shift in my consciousness, prompted by the end of apartheid, the relevance of this memory has resurfaced and is now underscored with feelings of guilt and discomfort (from a personal perspective). It becomes evident that the way we understand the past is continuously informed and altered by subjectivities in the present. These subjectivities become increasingly evident when a shift in consciousness takes place (such as the shift from the old apartheid regime to that of the so-called rainbow nation). Memory, then, does not only rely on recollection in the present in order to carry on existing, but it is also in the hands of present subjectivities, which can distort or alter it – which makes it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to determine the authenticity of memory.

Portuguese-American neuroscientist/neurobiologist and Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Southern California (Wikipedia [Online]: Sv. ‘Antonio Damasio’), Antonio Damasio, further investigates the relationship between the present and the past observes that the “[p]resent continuously becomes past, and by the time we take stock of it we are in another present, consumed with planning the future ... The present is never here. We are hopelessly late for consciousness” (cited in Olney 1998: 339). According to Damasio, the present always eludes our grasp because by the time we interpret the present, that moment has past and we are already in a new present. If this is true, then perhaps one can only

interpret the world through memory. Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti supports this argument when he talks about painting from life; to Giacometti there is no distinction to be made between painting from memory and painting from life: “the one immediately, automatically becomes the other”, because the moment when he looks away from the subject or the face of the canvass it becomes distant and all he has left in his mind’s eye is a perception of it and therefore it becomes a memory (cited in Olney 1998: 339). Perhaps this is what Samuel Beckett meant when he stated that “I suppose all is reminiscence from womb to tomb”; in other words, perhaps memory alters the way we understand or perceive the world (cited in Olney 1998: 339).

This presents us with what I would like to call the ambiguity of memory: memory cannot exist without recollection in the present, but the present can only be interpreted through memory. Consciousness, in my opinion, is then an endless cycle of present and past experiences which continuously inform each other. The present only makes sense to us because of memory and memory depends on recollection in the present in order to carry on existing. In this regard Olney states that “[m]emories and present reality bear a continuing, reciprocal relationship, influencing and determining one another ceaselessly: memories are shaped by the present moment ... just as the present moment is shaped by memories” (Olney 1980: 224). The relationship between present and past in my opinion becomes increasingly intertwined.

In order to give a better understanding on the different ways in which memory can function, Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal, distinguishes between three types of memory, namely habitual memory, narrative memory, and traumatic memory (1999: viii). Bal describes habitual memory as those memories that to an extent determine how we behave; these memories are “learnt in childhood, enforced by discipline, and carried along later in life” (Bal 1999: viii). For example “if you do not wipe your feet, the house gets dirty, your parents get angry and so the trouble begins” (Bal 1999: viii). Or if you misbehave at Sunday tea, your parents will get cross, and you might get a hiding. Such memories become part of daily routine. These habitual memories are to be distinguished from narrative memories which are affective in nature and embedded in emotion, which makes them memorable. Habitual memories can become narrative when the subject has an emotional response to those

memories. The third type of memory which Bal lists is traumatic memory,²⁰ which refers to “the painful resurfacing of events of a traumatic nature” (Bal 1999: viii). Traumatic memory is particularly relevant in a post-apartheid South African context, where we are currently confronted with resurfacing memories of past political wrong doing.

The work of contemporary South African jeweller Catherina van der Merwe explores the interesting play between habitual, narrative and traumatic memory when she appropriates used dishtowels into contemporary jewellery pieces (see Figures 27, 28, 29).²¹ Her work illustrates how habitual memory becomes affectively coloured when she draws associations between traditional dishtowels and the sense of stability and belonging that she experienced in her childhood home. The dishtowels, which to most of us form part of our daily routine of washing dishes, become embedded in narrative when they become emotively charged. But when that stability of home gets disrupted (as a result of multiple factors, but the separation of her parents was the main one), these dishtowels become representative of a traumatic memory and loss of stability. Van der Merwe’s work emphasises how an object can function as an external prosthesis for memory when she transforms these used dishtowels into jewellery pieces²².

In a similar way the objects present during our Sunday tea, to me personally, have become coloured with mixed emotions; of longing (for my grandparents), of pride, of physical discomfort and of guilt. When I transform these objects into jewellery pieces, I reflect on these mixed feelings that I experience, while at the same time questioning the ‘truthfulness’ of my memories and the influence that present underlying subjectivities might have on my memories. All these factors ultimately question the ‘truthfulness’ and reliability of memory.

²⁰ I will elaborate on traumatic memory further on in this chapter in section 1.6.1. This type of memory has a complicated relationship with narrative memory; some like Shobashana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) believe that traumatic memories need to become legitimized and narratively integrated in order free the subject from the hold that the past traumatizing event has over him/her (cited in Bal 1999:viii). Mike Bal argues that traumatic memory is somewhat contradictory, because it either “remain[s] present for the subject with particular vividness and/or totally resist[s] integration. In both cases, they cannot become narratives, either because the traumatizing events are mechanically re-enacted as drama rather than synthetically narrated by the memorizing agent who “masters” them, or because they remain “outside” the subject” (Bal 1999: viii).

²¹ For further reading on this particular series of works see Van der Merwe, C. 2013. “Recollections of home: a study of the use of domestic objects and needle work in contemporary jewellery and my art practice” (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Stellenbosch).

²² See Chapter 3, section 3.4.

Memory, as I have mentioned, is also a cultural phenomenon and is not something that is restricted purely to the individual. American Sociologist, Professor Michael Schudson, states that “[m]emory is not a property of individual minds, but a diverse and shifting collection of material artefacts and social practices” (cited in Klein 2000: 130), which suggests that ephemeral experiences, objects and customs we encounter or practice on a daily basis inform and shape our memories. Furthermore American sociologist, Jeffrey K. Olick believes that “[m]emories are as much the products of the symbols and narratives available publicly – and of the social means for storing and transmitting them – as they are the possessions of individuals” (1999: 335). Former South African president, Nelson Mandela, for example states that his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) is based on “a ‘memory’ which is not exclusively his” (cited in Nuttal 1998: 75). I concur with Olick’s views on publically shared memory, in that I believe that memory is just as much a cultural and public phenomenon as it is personal and private, and that the two are mutually informative. I believe that public memory influences private (individual) memory and vice versa.

1.4 The subject of memory (how does memory relate to identity)

This study is based on the premise that memory is partly connected to our perception of self. For this reason it is crucial to elaborate on the relationship between memory and identity. In this section I will discuss exactly this relationship. This will inform my inquiry into how the jewellery object can possibly function as an external manifestation of memory and a reflection of identity.

Memory forms the fabric of human life ... [as] it establishes life’s continuity; it gives meaning to the present ... [and] [it] provides the very core of identity (Marita Struken cited in Jacobs 2007: 10).

From my previous discussions it becomes increasingly evident that memory is bound up in the human subject. In this study the relationship between memory and identity is crucial since (as I state in the introduction) I believe that identity is partly constructed through memory. These views go as far back as the 17th century British philosopher John Locke who believed that memory plays a crucial part in “anchoring a sense of individual continuity over time” and that “the persistence of memory, rather than a consistency of actions, behaviours, or

appearances, mark[s] the individual identity” (Whitehead 2009: 51). Lecturer in human geography at Ulster University (England), Sarah McDowell (Ulster University [Online]: Sv. ‘Sarah McDowell’), further supports this argument when she suggests that, “[w]ithout memory a sense of self, identity, culture and heritage is lost” (2008: 42). Axmacher et al. state in their article “Natural Memory beyond the storage model: repression, trauma, and the construction of a personal past” that “memor[y] serves the creation of a continuous identity” (2010: 6). It is then safe to assume that there is a direct link between memory and identity. To emphasise this link, Lyotard argues that our perception of ourselves, “the singular knowledge of being here [in the present]”, is based purely on memory: “the fact of remembering oneself”. Paul Ricoeur puts it simply when he states that “to remember something is at the same time to remember oneself” (2004: 3).

John Locke expresses this concept in reverse when he explores the loss of memory in subjects (cited in Whitehead 2009: 56-58). Locke equates this loss of memory to the loss of “person” (cited in Whitehead 2009: 56-58). To Locke there is a distinction to be made between the “man” and the “person” (cited in Whitehead 2009: 56-58). The “man” refers to the physical human being, but the “person” refers to the identity of the human being (Whitehead 2009: 56-58). The loss of memory would indicate the loss of identity (“person”) (Whitehead 2009: 56-58). In this regard Locke states that:

In this [the continuity of consciousness] alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now as it was then (cited in Whitehead 2009: 56).

This argument is supported by Nussbaum’s statement that “a really successful dissociation of the self from memory would be a total loss of the self – and thus all the activities to which a sense of one’s identity is important” (cited in Misztal 2003: 2). Misztal believes that a sense of identity is constructed through the preservation (memory) of different selves that we gather throughout our lives (2003: 2).

Furthermore, James Olney believes that to establish the limits of memory is to explore “the rich terrain of memory with all its wondrous recollections and imaginings, its errors and confusions, its failures and overcompensations for failure, its capacity for transformation, distortion, ordering and reordering. *This* is where memory does what it does, and what it does

is to constitute nothing less than what we – each of us – are” (Olney 1998: 340). In this extract Olney touches on a couple of very important topics related to memory. Firstly, Olney points out the characteristics of memory as recollections and imaginings which immediately challenge the ‘truthfulness’ of one’s memories; how ‘truthful’ can one’s memories be if they are imagined? And to what extent can memories be imagined? Furthermore, he points out that memory can be incorrect; it can cause confusion; it can fail us and it often tries to overcompensate for its failure; it can transform; it can distort; it can order and reorder; but above all he states that our memories constitute what we are. I argue, in Olney’s terms, that memory and all its imaginings, its confusions, its errors, its failures, its overcompensations, its transformations, its distortions and its ordering and reordering is what makes us what we are.

From a postmodern perspective, both memory and identity are unstable constructs. Identities are informed by and based on memory and for this reason an investigation into the nature of memory would also imply an investigation into the nature of identity. Similarly the fragility and instability of memory relates closely to the politics of identity.

1.5 Conclusion

In order to explore how memory and identity can be externalized in the form of contemporary jewellery, it is firstly necessary to understand how memory functions particularly in relation to identity. This chapter is dedicated to contextualizing memory within the framework of contemporary post-apartheid South-Africa. Through interrogating my own childhood memory, I explore the hermeneutics of memory, which exposes memory as an unstable construct. Because of the instability of memory, I believe it cannot be trusted to provide us with a ‘truthful’ account of past experiences.

Memory, however, is not only about the past; it is also about the present. The past can provide us with insights into present subjectivities as the present employs the past as a tool (among numerous other tools) that can promote current prejudices. Memory, in this regard, can be perceived as manipulatable and is open to reinterpretation in the present.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the complexity of memory and how it relates to the human subject. Humans are mnemonic beings, and as such they are

confronted with the complexity of memory (consciously or subconsciously); memory is alive in the present; it dictates human behaviour; it is just as much a public phenomenon as it is private; it is visual and sensory; and it forms a part of human consciousness.

The following chapter elaborates on memory as an unstable, fragmented and imagined construct as seen from a postmodern perspective.

Chapter 2: The instability of memory

2.1 Introduction

Thus far this investigation into the hermeneutics of memory has raised questions concerning the stability of memory as a truthful way of recollecting the past. It has also become evident that memory is an intricate and wide subject matter which touches on many fields in the academy. This chapter is dedicated to an exploration of the characteristics of memory from a postmodern perspective. Consequently I will discuss the fragmented and ambivalent nature of memory, particularly in connection with the imagination and forgetting. Simultaneously I use my art practice to investigate this very same field of interest.

My art practice explores the unstable and fragmented nature of memory as visually expressed through contemporary jewellery. In addition to my own work, I also investigate how the Australian jewellery artist Jess Dare explores these concepts in her art practice (as seen in figures 30-32 and 35-38). The main reason for this exploration is to investigate the effects that the instability of memory has on humans.

2.2 Fragmentation and reconstruction

[M]emory is layered in differently structured strata, fragmented and collaged together like mosaics in consciousness and in unconscious manoeuvrings. In this regard (Fischer 1994: 80)

In this section I explore how/why memory can be regarded as fragmented and constructed in order to motivate that memory is unstable and therefore an unreliable source of accessing the past. It is also this fragmented and constructed nature that I specifically explore and aim to reflect in my own art practice.

Firstly, I would like to elaborate on the suggestion that the instability of memory is in part the product of fragmentation. Birgit Neumann states that “divergent, perspectively refracted memories mark the undeniable plurality of memory creation” (2008: 337, 339). This indicates the fragmented nature of memory and points toward the “partial” nature of one’s memories (Whitehead 2009: 126). Freud proposes that most of human memory consist of “but a few

unintelligible and fragmentary recollections” (cited in Freeman 1993: 50). Postmodernism considers fragmentation to be a common feature “of the human condition”. Particularly in postmodernism’s rejection of “grand narratives” (such as history and memorization), some postmodern theorists such as Lyotard emphasize the fragmented nature of “language games, of time, of the human subject, [and] of society itself” (Sarup 1988:135). Kenneth Christie²³ remarks on the fragmented nature of memory within a South African context when he argues that “South Africa is a country where the notion of ‘fractured’ memory is given new meaning. Memory is not fractured here; rather it is splintered, rent apart, torn into a multitude of pieces” (2000: 8).

In addition to Christie’s views on the fragmented nature of memory (specifically in relation to South Africa), Paul Ricoeur states that “[t]he first feature characterizing the domain of memories are their multiplicity and their various degrees of distinctness”, which points to the plurality of memory (2004: 22). He also remarks that some memories are more prominent or “distinct” than others and perhaps for that reason we are able to recall some memories with more accuracy than others.²⁴ The multiplicity of memory and the various degrees of distinctness with which we remember also adds to the fragmentary nature of memory. But humans have different ways of making sense of memory and St. Augustine²⁵ suggests that memories can present “themselves [to us as] one by one or in bunches according to the complex relations of their themes or circumstances, or in sequences more or less amenable to being put into narrative form” (cited in Ricoeur 2004: 22). Jeffrey K. Olick states that neurological studies have established that “memories are not unitary entities, stored away as coherent units to be called up for wholesale at a later date. Neural networks channel bits and pieces called “engrams” to different places in the brain and store them there in different ways. The process of remembering does not involve the “reappearance” or “reproduction” of an experience in its original form, but the cobbling together of a “new memory” (1999: 340).

²³ Dr Kenneth Christie is a Professor in Humanitarian studies at Royal Roads University in the United States of America. He also spent some time teaching in South Africa. I am particularly interested in the book he wrote about South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (Royal Roads University [Online]: Sv. ‘Kenneth Christie’).

²⁴ The work of contemporary jeweller Jess Dare addresses how some memories are more distinct than others in her two opposing series of work, called *Xylem* and *Epicormic* (see Figures 35, 36,37, 38), concerning the nature of memory. See section 2.3 in relation to these two series of works.

²⁵ St. Augustine of Hippo was an early Christian theologian and philosopher (Wikipedia [Online]: Sv. ‘St Augustine’).

In this regard I consider memory to be bits and pieces of information about the past that are reassembled arbitrarily in order to create new meaning. Perhaps our brains function rather like an archive,²⁶ where random pieces of memories are stored and organized in order to create narrative. A “[m]ontage of fragments thus creates the illusion of totality and continuity” through the process of “assemble[ing] fragments of life to be placed in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end” (Mbembe 2002: 21). In line with Mbembe’s views I believe that humans construct the impression of a coherent and stable memory and identity through the piecing together of bits and pieces of memories. For example; the retelling of my childhood memory comes across as a sound and linear narrative, but in fact it is the piecing together of bits and pieces of information and memories that creates the illusion of a coherent storyline. “In this regard, memories can be treated as discrete forms with more or less discernible borders, set off against what could be called a memorial backdrop” (Ricoeur 2004: 22), which explains how narrative memories are juxtaposed against a multitude of memories assembled through a lifetime of experience.

Memory brings the past into the present through reconstruction (Schmidt 2008: 129). Whitehead states that “memory is no longer a recovery or repetition of physical traces, but a construction of the past under conditions determined by the present” (2009: 49).

If memory can be regarded as the reconstruction of the remains of experiences in a manner which makes sense to us, it suggests that some form of alteration²⁷ of memory or manipulation of it could happen in the process. In fact “the past is manipulated to serve the interests of the present” (McCarthy cited in Eakin 1985: 28). MacDowell states in this regard

²⁶ The Oxford Dictionary defines the term archive as “[a] collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people” (Oxford Dictionaries [Online]: Sv. ‘archive’) and Geoffrey C. Bowker defines it in his article entitled *The Archive* as a “set of all events which can be recalled across time and space” (2010:). Archives, then, can generally be understood as places that provide “the stuff from which histories are constructed” (Ferreira-Buckly 1999: 578). State-sanctioned archives traditionally served as a space where evidence of the past could be collected, documented and recorded in order to manufacture ‘truths’ about a society, person or place (Van der Wal 2013: 16). In this regard Thomas Richards describes the archive in his text “Archive and utopia” as a space of “projected total knowledge” (1992: 104). During the nineteenth century the Western archive played a pivotal role in the imagination of order and rationality (Van der Wal 2013: 16). The archive was used to order “the world and its knowledges into a unified field moved explicitly into the register of representation, where, most successfully of all, the archive often took the imagined form of an utopian state” (Richards 1992: 104).

²⁷ See also section 1.4 on the involvement of the present with the past.

that “[m]emories are seen as selective and partial and used to fulfil individual [or] group requirements of identity at a particular time and a particular place” (2008: 42). “[The] past is [therefore] open to modifications, such as re-creations and re-interpretations, when it is placed in collective/individual memory” (Le roux 2013: 31). Foucault argues that “one must give up the whole pretence of knowing the past”, because it is not possible to do so without altering it (cited in Le Roux 2013: 27; see also Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1993: 49). I believe what Foucault suggest is that what we remember is a manipulated/partial version of the past, which is presented to us in the form of a new memory. Furthermore Mieke Bal believes that memory “can be manipulated by others” (1999: vii), which suggests that not only do individuals alter the way in which they recollect their own memories, but so too society can alter the way they remember themselves. What is being challenged here is memory’s reliability as a truthful way of accessing the past. Because memory can be reinterpreted or altered (by the individual or by society), it cannot provide us with a precise account of the past. Saunders reinforces this argument when she states that humans cannot “know the full stories of themselves”, because they “no longer have access to their full subjectivities” (cited in Le Roux 2013:30). When applying the above-mentioned theorists’ notions on memory to my own recollection of my childhood, it becomes apparent that it is not an accurate account of past events, but that it is rather a distorted reconstruction of them, subconsciously influenced by present individual and cultural subjectivities.

My discussion on memory thus far has lead me to the conclusion that memory is concerned with recalling past events and reconstructing them in the present in a way which makes logical sense to us (Freeman 1993:149). Olney suggests that “[t]ime carries us away from all of our earlier states of being [and] memory recalls those earlier states” and that “[i]n the act of remembering the past in the present, the autobiographer imagines into existence another person, another world, and surely it is not the same, in any real sense, as the past world that does not ... now exist” (1980: 241). Olney suggests that time removes us from previous subjectivities and that the way we reconstruct or past experiences or states of being do not stay consistent over time. Memory, in my opinion, can be perceived as an inconsistent and partly imagined reconstruction of past events/experiences.

2.3 Imagined and selective memory

In a study that is concerned with exposing the instability of memory, it is essential to discuss the relationship between memory and the imagination, as well as the relationship between remembering and forgetting. I find this discussion particularly relevant in connection with my own art practice, which is the manifestation of my own memory in an external form. This section elaborates on the part that the imagination can play in distorting memories and also how the imagination can fill in the missing gaps between memories in order to compensate for those memories that are forgotten. The relationship between memory and the imagination becomes particularly relevant when making art from and/or based on memory.

Paul Ricoeur states that “to imagine it is to evoke the other – to remember it. Memory, reduced to recall, thus operates in the wake of imagination” (2004: 5). Alon Confino²⁸ believes that memory is involved with representing to us an imagined version of the past rather than an actual account of a past event (2008: 80).

The way in which the past becomes present appears to be through an image, be it a mental image, auditory image or physical image (Ricoeur 2004: 5). Whitehead states that “from the very outset, then, memory is intimately bound to figures of writing and inscription” (2009: 15). Memory is essentially representational and it is exactly in the representation of memory or the so-called “memory-image” where the relationship between memory and imagination becomes problematized (Ricoeur 2004: 7). How can one “truthfully” represent that which is no longer there? This relationship between memory and imagination is captured by the “the Platonic theme of the presence of the absent” (Ricoeur 2004: 6). Both memory and imagination are haunted by this enigma, because it essentially has to do with bringing to the present something which is no longer there. De Kok states that “[T]he imagination operates most powerfully within the spaces of absence, loss, and figuration” (cited in Le Roux 2013: 36), which also hints at the relation between the imagination and forgetting. We try to compensate for forgetting by using our imagination to fill in the missing gaps between memories (Le Roux 2013: 35-36). In this regard I believe that the imagination connects the bits and pieces of information that we can remember in order to make our memories appear

²⁸ Alon Confino is an Israeli Professor in History (Corcoran Department of History [Online]: Sv. ‘Alon Confino’). I will be referring to his article *Memory and the History of Mentalities* which has particular bearing on this study.

more coherent. Sigmund Freud suggests the concept of “screen memories”, which he describes as memories “in which fragments of both the real and the imagined become fused together into the deceptive guise of history” (cited in Freeman 1993: 87).

Memory becomes ever elusive because of its fragmentary nature and because of the role the imagination plays in the reconstruction of memories. Memory has to do with how we imagine the past (Confino 2008:80) as it is “not only a reconstruction, but also a fragmentary and imaginary construction” (Jacobs 2007: 50).

Contemporary Australian jeweller Jess Dare addresses the ephemeral and fragile nature of memory, while at the same time illustrating how the imagination can distort our memories. Dare’s work is inspired by the journal of her late grandfather, an avid gardener. Furthermore her work is a reaction to the work of German craftsmen, Leopold Blaschka (1822-1895) and Rudolf Blaschka (1857-1939), who created lifelike glass replicas of small invertebrates for the natural history museum in London, between 1887 and 1936, as seen in Figures 33 and 34 (Cousins 2013 [Online]). In her series *Conceptual flowering plan series* (see Figure 30, 31, 32), Dare creates plant like objects and jewellery pieces from glass using the same lamp work glass technique as Leopold and Rudolf Blascha (Figures 33, 34). Her work reflects “a common human need to hang on to memories and moments by creating physical manifestations”²⁹ (Tuffin 2013 [Online]), yet her use of glass speaks of the fragility of memory, as physical manifestations of memories can also deteriorate, break and shatter (Tuffin 2013 [Online]).

By creating glass-like objects from memory, Dare illustrates how the imagination can distort memories. In doing so she also questions the stability of memory. It is evident that the pieces she creates stem from plants, yet she does not attempt to replicate any known plant species exactly as they are in nature. In this sense Dare’s work questions the work of Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka as accurate representations of reality and as a form of preservation.

In Dare’s necklace and brooch series entitle *Xylem* she reflects upon the complexity of memory (see Figures 35, 36, 37). In this this series of necklaces and brooches, made from powder-coated brass pipe, Dare uses her work/materials to comment on the notion that memory can become distorted when it is externalized. These works speak of the difficulties

²⁹ See External mnemonics; Chapter 3 section 3.2.

involved in trying to use material (something physical and exterior to the body) to represent memory (which is present in the mind). Secondly the way in which the white powder-coated pieces almost disappear against the wall once displayed speaks of forgetting and the fading away of memories. This series is juxtaposed against her other series of work entitled *Epicormic* (see Figure 38). This series of works is made from black powder-coated brass pipes and stand out when displayed against a white wall. These works stand out like vivid memories. In this sense these works address the instability of memory through pointing out that some memories are more distinct than others (Tuffin 2013 [Online]).

The instability of memory and the part that the imagination plays in the distortion of memory becomes particularly evident when it is externalized into a physical medium. In my own art practice I explore how the imagination can alter memory and distort it into something new through recreating old tea strainers into jewellery pieces (see Figures 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 21, 24). In these pieces I combine different materials and in doing so I investigate the extent to which the imagination plays a part in creating links between fragments of information. Figures 4, 5 and 6 form a three-part series of brooches. All three these pieces were at one stage used as tea strainers for making Rooibos tea. The process of making the tea stained the pieces and created a new imprint on them. Furthermore, as they are worn and handled, the tea leaves fall through the steel mesh leaving only the stains as a trace. To use Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teegar's words, these works address the fragmented and fragile nature of memory and relate to "forgetting [as] an inescapable element in remembering" (2010: 1107).

The relationship between memory and the imagination highlights how memory is not only concerned with remembering, but also with forgetting. Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teegar mention in their article "Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting" that "certain elements [of memory] are always highlighted, [and others] are ignored" (2010: 1107). According to Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teegar's ideas on memory, it becomes evident how we choose to remember some things rather than others. Forgetting is particularly significant in connection to traumatic memories, where memories are sometimes deliberately repressed (Axmacher 2010: 3). This adds to the instability of memory. We rely on memory to provide us with an accurate account of the past; however, it becomes evident that a consistent retelling of the past cannot occur if some memories of the past are repressed (Le Roux 2013: 37).

Schudson further supports this argument when he states that “[m]emory is distortion since memory is invariably and inevitably selective” (1997: 348).

2.4 Social memory

This section is dedicated to elaborating on the social aspects of memory and how the social aspects of memory can possibly distort or/and inform memory. In this study and in my art practice I not only focus on the intimacy of my own memory, but I also investigate the influence that other cultural dispositions could have had on my memory. Furthermore, I investigate how a shift in social consciousness could have influenced the way in which I reflect back upon my memories. For this reason it is crucial to discuss the influence that social memory can have on personal memory. I believe that memory can be perceived as unstable because it can be influenced by others.

Memory is not only intimate and private; it is also public and becomes a part of our cultural interaction and the way in which we experience the world. Jens Brockmeier states that memories are “interlaced with broader ‘cultural texts’ and situated within ‘symbolic spaces’, and that they are always incomplete in isolation. And because they are discursively negotiated (instead of just given or ‘retrieved’), they appear as subject to orders of power and struggle” (2010: 13). Brockmeier’s views are further supported by Kurt Danziger, who states that the “mnemonic values” of human recollection are “culturally grounded assumptions about what is most worth remembering, what ought not be or need not be remembered, how the shards of memory should fit together, [and] what kinds of tasks memory should be expected to serve” (2008: 20). It is evident that both Brockmeier and Danziger believe that memory is discursively and culturally embedded and I align my own views with these views in my investigation of memory in its relation to contemporary jewellery as mnemonic device and an expression of identity.

Memory, on the one hand, is a private and intimate occurrence to the extent that it can only be accessed through individual manifestations (Kansteiner 2002:185), yet memory cannot be removed from its social or cultural context. Olick claims that “[t]here is no individual memory without social experience nor is there any collective memory without individuals participating

in communal life” (1999 cited in Le Roux 2013:38). In this regard it becomes evident to me that memory, in its essence, is both public and private.

McCarthy uses the family unit as an example to illustrate how memory can be influenced by socializing factors when he states that “[i]t is our parents, normally, who not only teach us our family history but who set us straight on our own childhood recollections” (cited in Eakin 1985: 39). I concur with McCarthy’s statement in that I believe that the elders of a society have the power to alter or manipulate the memory of the younger generations. In this regard social memory can influence and alter individual memory. Misztal reinforces this argument when she states that “[c]ollective memory is not only what people really remember through their own experience; it also incorporates the constructed past which is constitutive of the collectivity” (2003: 13).

The power of collective memory becomes particularly relevant in relation to discursive practices. Barbara A. Misztal states that “[r]emembering is more than just a personal act and the nature of political power can influence the content of our memories” (Misztal 2002:12) and that:

Social memory refers not so much to living memory but to organized cultural practices supplying ways of understanding the world and providing people with beliefs and opinions that guide their actions. As modern societies suffer from amnesia, we witness the transformation of living memory into institutionally shaped and sustained memory (Misztal 2003:12).

In this regard collective memory in particular can become a tool that can determine what is remembered and what is forgotten amongst the members of specific groups. This process leads to the establishment and conservation of certain beliefs and value systems. This argument is supported by Misztal’s statement that “[c]ollective memory not only reflects the past but also shapes the present reality by providing people with understanding and symbolic frameworks that enable them to make sense of the world” (2003: 13).

Social memory, then, is concerned with the establishment of mnemonic communities, which Barbara A. Misztal defines as “groups that socialize us to what should be remembered and what should be forgotten” (2003: 15). The nation and the family are examples of such mnemonic communities and “[t]hey affect the ‘depth’ of our memory; they regulate how far

back we should remember, which part of the past should be remembered, which events mark the beginning and which should be forced out of our story” (Misztal 2003: 15). Our memory then is to a large extent influenced by our national and familial relations. Funkenstein states that “[i]n many languages ‘memory stands, originally, not only for the mental act of remembering but also for the objective continuity of one’s name – the name of a person, a family, a tribe, or a nation” (cited in Misztal 2003: 15)

It is important to keep in mind that the collective memory is “quite different from the sum of the personal recollections of its various individual members [of a nation/social group], as it includes only those that are commonly shared by all of them” (Zerubavel cited in Misztal 2003: 11). Zerubavel’s thoughts on collective memory in this regard place the emphasis on the exclusive nature of collective memory, because collective memory cannot account for all the individual memories of the members of a group. This exclusivity of memory relates to repression and trauma often on a national and political level. In South Africa the “pre-1994 cultural and socio-political history... has been described as a collective trauma” mainly due to racial prejudices and the exclusion of groups from our country’s collective national memory (Van den Berg n.d.: 1). But since 1994 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has greatly been responsible for the creation of a “new master narrative” where the memories of our past reflect trauma and racial prejudice (Van den Berg cited in Le Roux 2013: 80). Le Roux states that “In South Africa, then, the memories of the past came to shape that of the present, for example through the truth and Reconciliation Commission, that specifically focused on repressed traumatic events that happened during the apartheid years (2013: 20; see also Nuttall 1998: 73). The TRC is, however, not the only platform for voicing South African memories; the expression of personal autobiographical acts are also a way of voicing and exploring our country’s past (Le Roux 2013:20). Personally through voicing my own childhood memory, the acts of racial discrimination become evident and perhaps create a platform for confronting my own feelings of guilt about the past (from the perspective of the privileged).

In the retelling of my childhood memory the almost unrecognized presence of Evilina³⁰, a young black woman, becomes a symbol of the dis-ease I often sense when topics of racial

³⁰ See Introduction section 0.1.

prejudice are discussed. It is such feelings of dis-ease that I personally often attempt to suppress or ignore. However, these attempts are futile as there is no way of denying these feelings. It is this sense of dis-ease that I attempt to reflect when I use rooibos tea to stain the jewellery pieces and objects that I create. My use of rooibos tea becomes a medium that I use to represent and comment on my 'Afrikaner' heritage. I use rooibos stains in my jewellery pieces to comment on the scars that the apartheid regime imprinted on South Africa's collective memory. However, I also see beauty in the patterns created by these stains and this to me represents the beauty in the way that South Africans are now confronting and dealing their past. A landscape of destruction above all represents to me new beginnings and possibilities. South Africans are in the process of constructing a new memory out of the debris left by the previous regime. In order to illustrate this concept, I use bits and pieces of found materials and reconstruct/rearrange them in order for them to be viewed differently (see Figures 4-13 & 19-24).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter explores the instability of memory through discussing the fragmented, reconstructed, imagined and selective nature of memory, and how these terms can be incorporated to comment on my work. However, it is important to note that the instability of memory does not deny the existence of the past. Hutcheon warns in this regard that the instability of memory "does not deny that the past 'real[ity] existed; it only conditions our mode of knowledge of that past" (Hutcheon n.d.: 119 cited in Le Roux 2013: 37).

In the retelling of my childhood memory, I attempt to give an 'truthful' account of the past, but memory has its own limitations and from a postmodern perspective it is important to acknowledge these limits (Le Roux 2013: 37). It becomes increasingly evident that the retelling of my childhood memory is not an accurate account of the past. In fact it is fragments of information that are reconstructed in the present and informed by present subjectivities. They are also in part imagined, as the imagination tries to create coherence from selective bits and pieces of information that is remembered. I draw on the above ideas and incorporate them throughout my thesis and also my practical body of work.

The instability of memory makes it an unreliable source in terms of searching for 'truth'. In fact, Barrett Mandel suggested that because of the instability of memory, the "past ... never really existed" (cited in Olney 1980: 237). However, Hutcheon believes that one cannot state that there is no such thing as 'truth' simply because there are no universal claims to 'truth' (n.d.: 307); "[t]he past really did exist [but] [t]he question is: how can we know that past today – and what can we know of it?" (Hutcheon 1988: 92 cited in Le Roux 2013: 42). "All we have are memories of memories of memories; and the longer we live, it would seem, the more fictional our pasts...will have to be" (Freeman 1993: 90).

In my art practice I explore how the fragmented, reconstructed, imagined and forgotten aspects of memory destabilize my own childhood memory. When externalizing memories into a physical medium, the instability of memory becomes increasingly evident.

Memory, however, is also social and collective, which also contributes to the instability of memory.

Chapter 3: The object of memory

3.1 Introduction

The fact that memories are often organized around places and objects suggests that remembering is something that occurs in the world of things and involves our senses. (Misztal 2003:16)

Memory is social because it exists through its relation with what has been shared with others: language symbols, events, and social and cultural context. (Misztal 2003: 11)

[Memory] can be social only if it is capable of being transmitted and to be transmitted, a memory must first be articulated. (Fentress and Wickham 1992:47 cited in Misztal 2003: 11)

My study is concerned with the jewellery object as a mnemonic device and is based on how memory is transformed from the internal realm of the private to the external realm of the public. This investigation aims to shed some light on the production of memory, that is, how memory is externalized in order to function mnemonically. This chapter takes a look at external mnemonics specifically in relation to the jewellery object.

I specifically look into how objects can lose or shift their meaning when placed in a different context. This means that this study is predominantly concerned with material things and the viewer's perception and experience of them. I investigate the social and cultural aspects of material objects and this will entail a detailed discussion of material culture studies.

3.2 External mnemonics: an introduction

This study is largely a reflection of my interpretation of the ways in which memory is externalized and can take on physical form through the appropriation of mnemonic objects into jewellery pieces (which can function mnemonically in their own capacity). For this reason I find it crucial to discuss the concept of external mnemonics in relation to the jewellery object.

The externalization on memory is essentially concerned with “the purposeful modification of a physical medium by means of specifically designed tools and skills” (Danziger 2008: 3). Danziger stresses the importance of external memory, because only once materials “outside an individual’s body” are used for representational purposes can memory and history be documented in a more permanent form (2008: 3). External memory allows memory to be recollected “not only by the immediate presence of other individuals ... but also by previously constructed symbols preserved by means of an external medium” (Danziger 2008: 3). Ernst van der Wal states that:

[t]he externalisation of memory is crucial as an act of remembrance, and it plays a significant part in the Western conception of the human being – be it as a social organism, and/or a subject in its own right. External memory ... has played an integral role in the ability of a subject to conceive of and recollect his/her part in a complex system of conflicting and changing historical narratives. (2013:60)

Like Van der Wal and Danziger, I believe that the externalization of memory is linked to the subject’s understanding of him/herself as well as their understanding of their own position in society and history.³¹ The uncertain nature of memory, specifically in connection to the

³¹ Memory has historically often been linked to identity. In the early modern period memory was seen as the “seat of identity” (West 2003: 62). William West writes that: “[f]or the thinkers of the Renaissance and earlier ... reason made one human, [but] it was memory that made one a particular individual Memory was the refuge of the individual - one’s own memories as well as others’ were the mysterious sources from which identity issues, tantalizingly almost present, frustratingly elusive, and above all thoroughly and irreducibly private” (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003: 62). Memory was seen as the substance that constituted the self, identifying the subject a container for memories (West 2003: 62). Memory and its objects (the devices that capture and store it) were perceived as inescapably bound up in the subject. Such an approach to the subject is still endorsed by more recent thinkers like Edward Casey, who states that “we are made of our memories”, and Fentress and Wickham, who believes that “a study of the way we remember is a study of the way we are” (cited in Hodgkin & Radstone 2003: 2; see also Van der Wal 2013: 60). Until the sixteenth century memory was linked to coherent identity and a stable subject; however, the notion of the subject as a coherent entity is fraught with contradiction and one of the first to destabilize this notion of a coherent and bounded self was Plato with his myth of the cave, in which he raised concerns about the “truth-value of images, representations and mimesis” (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003: 4). The prior perception of memory as the foundation of a stable and coherent identity proved to be problematic because it was bound up in the subject, which meant that the interpretation of memories was dependent on the continued presence of the subject, even after death. Hodgkin and Radstone state in this regard that “in the absence of such a subject memory begins to appear as that which can dismantle, rather than support, that self-possessed individual” (2003: 4). The instability and fragmented nature of memory lead to modernism’s rejection of it, favouring rationality and empiricism instead, as they perceived the latter to be a more reliable way of representing reality (Van der Wal 2013: 60; see also Danziger 2008; Reiss 1996). Interestingly, while empiricism rejected memory as a reliable way of representing reality, it perceived objects of memory (for example, photographs) to be ‘truthful’ representations of reality (Van der Wal 2013: 61). The approach towards memory shifted from being very personal, private and self-reflective to becoming an increasingly public, visual and reproducible object that “could be collected and ordered in a seemingly rational and scientific way” (Van der Wal 2013: 61). In this regard more legitimacy was given to the objects of memory than to personal memory.

human subject, is emphasised when it is externalized into a physical form. The transition of memories into something tangible, a form of 'prosthesis', marks the transition of the internal and inherently personal and private, to a public domain (Van der Wal 2013: 61). Van der Wal states that "[t]he relationship between the self and the social pivots on a contradiction that posits memory as a private, affective trace and a trace that becomes readable, visible and interpretable via its transference to the public domain" (2013: 61). Van der Wal further emphasise that "by making memory public, it assumes a representational, media-based dimension that, in turn, lends itself to archival modes of recollection" (2013: 61).

In order for private memory to become publically accessible, it requires some form of supplementary representational system or language (Danziger 2008: 4). Personal memory, according to my interpretation of Danziger's view, relies on external memory props, or as William West³² describes it "artificial memory" (2003: 62), to make it accessible to other people. Such memory props have essentially been visual, possibly because Western society has historically privileged sight as means to gain access to the external world (Jenks 1995: 1-2); for this reason I believe visually based media have played an integral part in the public life of memories (Van der Wal 2013: 62). Van Dijck states that as "mediated memories", images/objects³³ are a "formative part of our autobiographical and cultural identities" (2005: 262). In this regard the object can be regarded as the place that visually marks where the social, the personal and the mnemonic meet (Van der Wal 2013: 62).

For any form of language or representational system to make sense depends on the subject to be able to interpret these systems. For instance, in order for the subject to accurately interpret a text, the reader must possess the ability to read. The same then applies to writing; in order for an author to communicate with his audience he/she must be able to write (Danziger 2008: 4). This suggests a form of communication that depends on signs and their interpretation as a means to convey meaning. External memory then functions

³² William West is an Associate Professor in English & Comparative Literary Studies at Northwestern University (Northwestern University Department of English [Online]: Sv. 'William West'); in this thesis I will specifically be referring to his article "'No Endlesse Monument': Artificial Memory and Memorial Artifact in Early Modern England In this regard" (2003).

³³ In terms of memory studies I do not distinguish between objects and/or images because of the way in which these entities communicate visually in their own capacity.

metaphorically in the sense that it represents something that has been, but which is no longer there (Danziger 2008: 4).

The famous Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure created model of semiotics to provide an explanation for how objects can function symbolically within culture. Semiotics analyses all elements of culture in terms of language systems and texts (Slater 1997: 137). Don Slater explains in his book *Consumer culture and modernity* that “[e]lements of culture”, including objects, “are treated metaphorically as texts that can be read” (1997: 137). Slater further states that “[w]e can read these texts by understanding them as a particular organisation of signs drawn from language-like systems and codes of signs (Slater 1997: 137). Cultures organise things in order to create meaning. For this reason I believe that meaning is determined by the system of signs and not by the object. Saussure’s model of semiotics has three components, namely the signifier (object), the signified (the meaning of the object), and the referent (that which the sign refers to). In semiotics the relation between the signifier and the referent is arbitrarily assigned and is therefore unstable. It is important to note that semiotics is largely concerned with culture-specific ways of producing meaning, that is to say that the same object can have different meanings in different cultural contexts. Perhaps the most important concept that Saussure’s model of semiotics provides in relation to this study is that meaning is not inherent in the object, but that “meanings and things are socially organized” and therefore forms of external memory (because it too relies on forms of signification in order to convey meaning) are socially organized. (Slater 1997: 137-138).

The French philosopher Roland Barthes builds on Saussure’s model of semiotics in his book *Mythologies* (1973). In *Mythologies* Barthes “examines the wider universe of meanings that everyday objects ... can invoke as well as the way meanings can be ideologically restricted” (Slater 1997: 139). Barthes describes myth in terms of semiology as follows: “Whether it deals with alphabetical or pictorial writing, myth wants to see in them only the sum of signs, a global sign, the final term of a first sociological chain” (1973: 114). For example, a string of pearls refers to a particular type of jewellery, in relation to other types of jewellery such as rings or bracelets. But it is also capable of signifying broader meanings such as femininity, for instance. Barthes reinterprets Saussure’s distinction between connotation and denotation to explain this. Denotation refers to what is signified, the object, in this case a string of pearls. However, a string of pearls can also function as a signifier in another context/level/system of

signification, for instance, that of gendered or national identity, in which case the string of pearls can signify femininity and eurocentrism. For Barthes “it is denotation that gives mythological power to the connotated values” (Slater 1997: 139).

Furthermore, *Mythologies* is concerned with the naturalising aspects of culture. Allen states that “[j]ust as bourgeois literature assimilates writing into its apparently timeless values, so culture generally ... constantly presents artificial, manufactured and above all, ideological objects and values as if they were indisputable, unquestionable and natural” (2003: 34). In this regard myth can be perceived as the transformation of cultural or historical objects into something that appears timeless, universal or natural (Van der Merwe 2012: 36). Slater states that “[c]onnotation turns cultural categories into seemingly natural elements of the material world” (1997:140). Barthes’s goal in *Mythologies* is to “demystify” myth and he believes that it is possible to do so by exposing/reminding us of the artificial and constructed nature of such objects/images (Allen 2003:38).

External mnemonics explains how memory can be transformed from the internal realm of the private and personal into the external realm of the public through the use of culturally constructed signs in order function as a comprehensible language. The following section builds on this discussion of external mnemonics, semiotics and myth specifically in relation to jewellery.

3.3 Recollection and symbolism in jewellery

In this section I will discuss the symbolic and mnemonic properties of the jewellery object, as its significance has particular bearing on how the jewellery object acquires and articulates personal, social and cultural meaning. Such a discussion is crucial in informing this study, which is concerned with the nature of memory. I believe that memory is unstable and therefore the externalisation of memory is unstable. In relation to the symbolic function of memory I will investigate how the unstable nature of memory can possibly be articulated through the jewellery object.

The symbolical and mythological properties of objects are of particular concern when investigating the notion of the artefact, predominantly in the field of material cultures studies. By definition the mnemonic and symbolic function of the object is embodied in the artefact, “a man-made being, typically one of historical or cultural interest” (Oxford dictionary [Online]: Sv. ‘artefact’). The jewellery object is the suitable artefact to investigate in order to gain better insight into human existence and identity, specifically because of its purely symbolic function:

A piece of jewellery is a sign on the body. The signalling function of jewellery is strengthened by its inherent uselessness and by the fact that it is worn on the body, whereby it makes its entrance to the world. Jewellery, whether fine, costly or avant-garde, can be read as a symbol, precisely because it is brought into a public domain ... Jewellery is a sign that can be read: an expression of one’s social situation and identity. (Den Besten 2011: 12)

The function of jewellery then is to add meaning to a person; it is an expression of identity and status and is loaded with symbolic associations (English & Dörmér 1995: 14). Den Besten states that:

Decorating, embellishing and signalling can in essence be seen as the main functions of jewellery. Jewellery is supplementary to humans; without man, jewellery only partly serves its function. To be more precise: the function of jewellery can be defined as the meaning it adds to the person wearing it and therefore to people in general who can recognise its meaning and who can use this for their own benefit or purpose. More than any other functional object, jewellery is related to people ... Function when talking about jewellery, should be understood as meaning. The function of jewellery is its meaning in the public and private realm. (2011: 11)

In this sense jewellery becomes an extension of the wearer’s identity and has come to add social and religious meaning (through, for example, wedding rings or religious charms such as crosses or rosaries); economic meaning (in the sense that jewellery often represents wealth or status); ornamental meaning (through the way in which jewellery is used to beautify the subject); memorial meaning (in the sense that some jewellery is worn to commemorate a person or event); and magical or healing meaning (as some might believe that some minerals or crystals carry healing properties) to humans. It is apparent that jewellery has an array of meanings attached to it, in both a public and/or private capacity (Den Besten 2011: 11-12; see also Barthes 2006: 59).

The way in which jewellery can come to embody personal symbols are of particular interest in this study. In this regard Den Besten states that it is not only the jewellery object that gives meaning to the person but also the person that ascribes meaning to the jewellery object. A person can charge a piece of jewellery with meaning by attributing to it their own memories and stories. (Den Besten 2011: 24). A jewellery object is “one of those small and intimate artefacts completely suited to remind one of a person or an important moment in life” (Den Besten 2011:13). To further emphasise how jewellery objects can function mnemonically, Tilmann Habermass (2011: 100) states in his article, “‘Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend’: The Psychology of Jewellery as Beloved Objects” that:

Jewellery, therefore, also recalls faraway places, trips, past experiences and successfully survived adventures. Hence jewellery basically also has a souvenir value. Pieces of jewellery are mnemonic symbols ... literally, recollections. Objects that recall specific people, objects that were once part of those people or used or worn by them, such as inherited pieces of jewellery.

A piece of jewellery then does not only have the ability to function as a public symbol; it can also function as a personal symbol (such jewellery pieces are often referred to as heirlooms). Jewellery to a large extent can be seen as a medium that gives meaning to humans just as much as humans give meaning to jewellery. Contemporary jewellery allows jewellery artists to explore this relationship between humans and jewellery objects.

It is apparent that jewellery is embedded in a framework of symbolism and myth. Roland Barthes was particularly interested in the mythologies that surround jewellery objects. He elaborates on these mythologies in his essay “From Gemstones To Jewellery” (2006: 59). Barthes explains how jewellery becomes a discourse with a symbolic language of its own. In his text he focuses on specific mythologies that surround certain aspects of jewellery, such as diamonds and gold:

As for the quintessential stone, the diamond ... it is incorporated into a new magical and poetic domain, that of the paradoxical substance, both lit up and stone cold: it is nothing but fire and yet nothing but ice. This cold fire, this sharp, shining object which is nevertheless silent, what a symbol for the whole world of vanities, of seductions devoid of content, of pleasure devoid of sincerity! And about gold ... gold is a substance more intellectual than symbolic ... But as a sign, what power it has! And it is precisely the sign par excellence, the sign of all the signs; it is absolute value, invested with all powers including those once held by magic ... here the gemstone becomes the

very concept of price; it is worn like an idea, that of a terrific power, for it is enough to be seen for this power to be demonstrated.

In this text Barthes addresses the mythologies surrounding jewellery during the 1950s in Europe. The relevance of this text does not lie so much in his discussion of the mythologies that surrounded jewellery at that time, but rather in what can be deduced from this discussion, namely that jewellery is embedded in a framework of mythologies and that these mythologies are inconsistent and culture specific. Acknowledging these mythologies allows the contemporary jeweller to analyse them and expose them as such.

Even though contemporary jewellery is considered an art practice, it has its roots in the traditional craft of gold- and silversmith work (Lignel 2006 [Online]). Contemporary jewellery is often far removed from traditional jewellery in its appearance, but it still carries within it the rich traditions of the craft it originated from. Contemporary jewellery often reflects and intensifies the various meanings that are associated with jewellery. Also, it often relies on the symbolic nature of jewellery as a means to make a statement or to challenge and/or question. In this regard Lena Vigna, curator and writer on contemporary jewellery, writes in her article entitled *Heirlooms: Navigating the Personal in Contemporary Jewelry* (2009 [Online]) that contemporary jewellery can “underscore the link, inherited or not, between past and present and establish a framework for investigating the role of jewelry as a conveyor of personal, social and cultural meaning”. It is exactly this function of jewellery, to convey personal, social and cultural meaning, which I investigate through my own art practice. Drutt English and Dormer elaborate on the symbolic meaning of jewellery when they state the following:

Jewellery has a rich and complex subject matter: It has a long history of being intertwined with people’s imaginations. Jewellery is present in familiar rituals and institutions: engagement, marriage, the church, the military (medals and ‘decorations’), coming of age, declarations of personal status and group identity. Jewellery is its own social anthropology and when one adds to the notion of ritual (with all the metaphor, symbolism and design vocabulary that each ritual generates) the further meaning and associations that are attendant upon materials, and different ways of working materials, then the contemporary jeweller has an embarrassment of riches. These riches are embedded in connections between people. All those Main-Street-store silver and gold crosses, engagement, wedding and eternity rings, christening gifts, signet rings may be banal in design, but the content of the ritual surrounding

each of these objects lifts them above most mass manufactured design (1995:14).

It is evident to me that jewellery objects can articulate social, personal and cultural meaning because of their rich history and their subject matter being intertwined in humanity. They function on a symbolic level as evidence, or perhaps documents, that can be collected and used to catalogue data of the past to be recollected in the present.

3.4 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is primarily interested in the human interpretation and experience of worldly 'things' and "ideas of the phenomenological tradition have been highly influential in the study of material culture" (Thomas 2006:43).

This investigation partly explores how everyday objects that are placed in a different context, namely that of contemporary jewellery, can seemingly evoke a critique of the mythologies that surround them. Through incorporating objects such as tea strainers, tea bags, antique napkins and hand embroidery in my practical work I reference certain aspects of 'Afrikaner' female identity (as seen in Figures 4 - 24). Phenomenology enables me to explore how these connotations of objects, culture and social events are established and also what happens when the objects in question are placed in a different context. I am therefore interested in how objects can acquire meaning, thereby allowing an artist to create a form of visual narrative through using or displacing these objects.

According to Julian Thomas in his article "Phenomenology and Material Culture" in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, phenomenological thinking questions the established presumptions that humans have about the world, what is often referred to as "common sense" (2006:44). Phenomenology can be interpreted as a disruption of the relationships that society has constructed between "substance and meaning or essence and manifestation" (Thomas 2006:44). Thomas explains that "phenomenological arguments are often 'counter-intuitive', but they are constructed under the understanding that our 'intuition' is the product of a contingent order of things"; this trend of thought relates to the postmodernist way of

thinking, which is concerned with questioning coherence, stability and master narratives (2006:44).

In this discussion I specifically look at Martin Heidegger's theory of hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger refers to functional material objects as "equipment" (1962:97). He argues that we rarely distinguish between the object and its purpose. He demonstrates his argument through his famous analogy of the hammer. He suggests that we do not concentrate on the hammer as an object but rather on its function, which is hammering in a nail. Thomas explains Heidegger's analogy of the hammer as follows:

When we use something as a piece of equipment ... it is always part of an 'equipmental totality', so that, as well as being submerged in the practice of use, the thing is also bound to a network of reference and connection. The hammer is in the first instance known as part of a constellation that includes the nail, the roof tile, the rafter, and so on. Our everyday understanding is of totalities, contexts, projects and relationships, rather than of isolated objects. Only when the hammer fails in use, malfunctioning or breaking down ... does it become present-at-hand, something that we just look at and contemplate in its uselessness. (2006: 46)

According to Thomas, Heidegger then suggests that only when a piece of equipment (or an object) fails to perform the function it was intended for does its physical nature become apparent. This awakening is encouraged by being confronted with the "uselessness" of the object. In connection to Heidegger's theory of hermeneutic phenomenology, Catrina van der Merwe states the following in her thesis "Recollections of home: a study of the use of domestic objects and needle work in contemporary jewellery and my art practice":

...only when an object or "equipment" loses its function, can we see it and experience it for what it truly is, a thing 'being' in the world. Only then can we completely view it for its beauty or our visual response to it. Also, once the functionality is no longer part of the equation, the object can appear to us in different contexts, depending on our relationship to it. (2013: 16)

In this regard the objects that Van der Merwe describes lose their functionality. As soon as the object's function is removed, we become more aware of its physicality and it becomes possible to read the object in a different context.

Julian Thomas (2006: 47) states that our understanding of material entities are determined by "background" or "horizon", which he defines as "composed of a variety of embodied skills

and means of coping, cultural traditions, a general conception of how the world is ordered, and a variety of human projects and requirements". Thomas further states that "[i]t is in the context of this network of entities and practices that things reveal themselves, not for the most part as puzzling or requiring explanation but as always-already understood" (cited in Van der Merwe 2013: 16). From this statement I deduce that the meaning of an object is socially and culturally determined. Furthermore, I deduce that the way in which objects are perceived are determined by a human need to make sense of the world. In line with Thomas's views I believe that the meaning of an object can be perceived as predetermined.

Catrina Van der Merwe appropriates these phenomenological concepts to her own practice as contemporary South African jeweller and states:

It is in a specific network or context, in this case my own, that the domestic objects and techniques that I choose to discuss can be considered to reference memory, nostalgia and trauma thematically. These objects have always been understood as pertaining to and therefore representing 'home', which is further evidence for my argument. (2013: 16)

In this extract she explains how her own 'horizon' or 'background' shaped her relationship with the objects that she used to create her jewellery; in this case the objects that she refers to are used dishtowels. She explains how she transforms used dishtowels into jewellery pieces, as can be seen in her range entitled *Blue and White* (Figures 27, 28, 29). In doing so she removes the object from its function, forcing the viewer to consider the object in a new way (Van der Merwe 2013: 16):

In my own artwork ... the dishtowels I adorn with metal and gemstones can no longer be used to dry dishes or clean up spills, but are now rather put in a position where the viewer/wearer can observe the object and the needlework techniques used in the making of the contemporary piece of jewellery. This leads to a re-evaluation of their own relationship to the object with which they (possibly) had a purely functional 'relationship' until they viewed the object in a different light.

Correspondingly, the jewellery pieces that I create are often made out of found objects (or are made to reference found objects) such as tea bags, tea strainers, antique napkins and other objects made through hand embroidery. These objects, for me, have over time come

to be associated with drinking tea, femininity and aspects of 'Afrikaner' culture³⁴ and history, because as Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology suggests "[w]orldly things are not just objects in consciousness: they are always embedded in a complex network of relations between people and things, and they are only comprehensible as such" (Frede cited in Thomas 2006:46). By converting these objects into jewellery pieces I immediately force the viewer to reconsider the object. The viewer is confronted with the object and forced to reconsider their prior connotations that they have with the object, often creating a sense of unease in the viewer. By burning and staining the objects (actions I associate with mess, dirt, destruction and pain) I add another set of connotations to the pieces that further forces the viewer to reconsider the meaning of the object (Figures 4 - 13). I therefore do not only address my own relationship with the objects in question, but I also confront the viewer with the object thereby making them aware of their own relationship with the object.

Van der Merwe elaborates that "The objects that people come into contact with cannot be removed from the way that the objects are experienced. The two cannot exist separately, and it is exactly when this conscious realisation happens that it becomes possible to use these objects to address other concerns or thoughts" (2013:17). In my art practice I explore the personal relationship that I have formed with the objects in question. Over time the tea strainers, antique napkins, hand embroidery and rooibos tea bags have come to represent memories of femininity and 'Afrikaner' female identity. Through the process of transforming these objects into jewellery pieces a shift in meaning occurs; my relationship with these objects evolves and allows me to view these objects in a new light. In other words, by removing their function the social and cultural connotations that I have formed around them become more apparent. The objects in question become visual documentations of these memories and connotations.

Heidegger's theory of hermeneutic phenomenology allows me to theorise about the complexity of meaning, specifically in terms of the object world in relation to humans. This theory explains how objects become charged with meaning through background or 'horizon',

³⁴ I do realize that 'Afrikaner' culture is not the only culture that could be associated with the custom of drinking tea. 'Afrikaner' culture has its roots in a variety of other cultures and because South Africa was also a British colony, it is a hybrid melting pot of cultures and traditions. In this section I aim simply to demonstrate what drinking tea represents to me in a personal capacity. I specifically use Rooibos tea because of its connotations with 'Afrikaner' culture and South Africa.

because an object is always submerged in a framework of reference (Thomas 2006: 46). It is evident to me from this discussion that jewellery can convey ideas of personal, social, political and cultural meaning, and because of these In this regard meanings I believe that there is no question that jewellery functions mnemonically. In order to be clear, I see the mnemonic function of jewellery as the ability of jewellery to trigger associations and meanings in the viewer/wearer/creator (jewellery artist). Contemporary jewellery can apply this mnemonic function of jewellery and use it to question, challenge or highlight. By incorporating objects such as antique napkins, hand embroidery, teabags and tea strainers in the jewellery pieces that I create, I further question and challenge meanings that have come to be associated with the objects in question as well as the preconceived ideas that we might have had about the meaning of jewellery.

Phenomenological thinking allows me to view an object as something that is deeply integrated into society and the meaning of which extends far beyond its functional purpose. In which case the jewellery that I create (from objects such as antique napkins, tea strainer and rooibos tea bags) are not merely objects used for bodily adornment (or the objects in question for making tea or dining purposes), but they can be read as visual autobiographies that can relate personal issues concerning memory and 'Afrikaner' identity.

3.5 Conclusion

Investigating external mnemonics in the light of postmodern theories such as myth and hermeneutic phenomenology undermines the seemingly obvious assumptions that we might have formed about things. Such an investigation shifts our attention from the being of the thing/object to the becoming of that thing/object, and breaks down the categories that society has created around things/objects³⁵ (Datson 2004: 20). In this regard Lorraine Datson states in the introductory chapter to her book *Things that Talk*:

All these banal certainties begin to unravel when the process by which things come into being are scrutinized more closely, especially when the things in question are talkative. Things that talk are often chimeras, composites of

³⁵ What is being questioned here is, for example, the distinction between art and nature, or the view that "everyday things belong by definition to the realm of the objective, as opposed to the subjective realm of the self" (Datson 2004:20).

different species. The difference in species must be stressed: the composites in question do not just weld together different elements of the same kind (for example, the wood, nails, glue and paint stuck together to make a chair); they straddle boundaries between kinds. Art and nature, persons and things, and the fusions result in considerable blurring of outlines. (2004:20-21)

Discussing contemporary jewellery in the light of external mnemonics and myth explores how boundaries and categories have been constructed around jewellery objects, that is to say, how jewellery objects function as myth. Following my discussion on myth it becomes evident that contemporary jewellery can demystify these constructed mythologies around jewellery by exposing them to the viewer as such.

A discussion of Heidegger's theory of hermeneutic phenomenology proposes a strategy for demystifying mythologies around jewellery objects (as well as some other culturally inscribed objects). Re-appropriating everyday objects into contemporary jewellery pieces does not only invite the viewer to question the boundaries/categories that we project onto objects (for instance, the defining properties that make something jewellery; that which distinguishes it from for instance cutlery or any other category of object), it also exposes/challenges other symbolic connotations that the objects in question might signify (in relation to Barth's mythologies).

Conclusion:

This dissertation is an exploration of the hermeneutics of memory, in theory and through my art practice. Through an analysis of my own memory I explore the unstable and fragmented nature of memory.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to memory and its particular relevance within the context of post-apartheid South Africa. This introduction to memory (as interpreted from a postmodern perspective) provides the reader with the general understanding that memory is ambivalent and that memory informs our basic understanding of the world. This chapter also explains that there is a link between memory and identity construction; humans are mnemonic beings that rely on memory in order to establish a sense of self. These are foundational concepts that informs the rest of this study.

Chapter 1, Chapter 2 contends that memory is ambivalent. Through discussing the fragmented and constructed nature of memory as well as its imagined, selective and social properties, this chapter explores the various reasons as to why memory can be regarded as unstable. I explore how contemporary jewellery can possibly become a vehicle that can convey the selective, fragmented, constructed and imagined aspects of memory, and in the process possibly emphasise the unstable nature of memory.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the jewellery object as an externalization of memory. I specifically interrogate the way in which memory manifests itself in material form. In this regard I challenge the assumptions that we might have formed about the objects that surround us and how these assumptions can be exposed through changing the context in which we interact with these objects.

Through this exploration I have come to the conclusion that memory is ambivalent, because it is selective, fragmented, imagined, constructed and socially influenced. In my material investigation of these concepts I have come to the conclusion that because memory is ambivalent, the externalization of memory will also be ambivalent. The material investigation that I conduct in my practical work becomes a reflection of the unstable nature of memory. It can also be interpreted as a visualization of my identity because of the inherent link between memory and identity construction. In this regard the jewellery pieces that I create

can also be interpreted as the reflection of an inconsistent identity. It is important to note, however, that I do not attempt to distinguish my art from the various discourses in question (memory and identity), but rather to function in a space that can provoke conversation about these discourses.

Figures:



Figure 1. Mah Rana. *The Zodiac* (1996-2000). Pendants: Found objects and 18 ct gold.
(Klimt02 [Online]).



Figure 2. Joani Groenewald, Brooch (2014). Silver, paper and plastic. Digital photograph.



Figure 3. Joani Groenewald, Brooch (2012). Silver, 9ct rose gold, paper and plastic. Digital photograph.



Figure 4. Joani Groenewald, *Teesiffie #1* (2013). Brooch: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainer, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 5. Joani Groenewald, *Teesiffie #2* (2013). Brooch: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainer, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 6. Joani Groenewald, *Teesiffie #3* (2013). Brooch: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainer, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 7. Joani Groenewald, Teesakkie #1 (2013). Pendant: Antique napkin, silver, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 8. Joani Groenewald, *Teesakkie #1* (2013). Pendant: Antique napkin, silver, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 9. Joani Groenewald, *Teesakkie #1* (2013). Brooch: Antique napkin, silver, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 10. Joani Groenewald, *Teesakkie #1* (2013). Brooch: Antique napkin, silver, rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 11. Joani Groenewald, *Borslappie #1* (2013). Brooch/neckpiece: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainers. Digital photograph.



Figure 12. Joani Groenewald, Borslappie #2 (2013). Neckpiece: Lace, thread, silver, tea strainers. Digital photograph.



Figure 13. Joani Groenewald, Object (2013). Linen, paper and silver. Digital photograph.



Figure 14. Joani Groenewald, Rings (2013). Silver and brass. Digital photograph.



Figure 15. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Brass and lamp work glass. Digital photograph.



Figure 16. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Brass and lamp work glass. Digital photograph.



Figure 17. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Silver, thread and lamp work glass. Digital photograph



Figure 18. Joani Groenewald. Rooibos #1 (2014). Glass Rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 19. Joani Groenewald. Rooibos #2 (2014). Glass Rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 20. Joani Groenewald. Rooibos #3 (2014). Glass Rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 21. Joani Groenewald. Object (2014). Lamp work glass and steel mesh. Digital photograph.



Figure 22. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Enamel, silver, copper, linen and rooibos tea.
Digital photograph.



Figure 23. Joani Groenewald, Object (2014). Linen and rooibos tea. Digital photograph.



Figure 24. Joani Groenewald, *Object* (2014). Lace, tea strainers, thread and rooibos tea.
Digital photograph.



Figure 25. Carine Terreblanche, *Die Kappie* (1999). Brooch: Silver, photographic image.
(Burger 2013).



Figure 26. Sue Williamson. *From the inside - Busi* (2000). Dibond print 90 x 200 cm.
(Goodman Gallery [Online]).



Figure 27. Nini van der Merwe, *Blue and white #2* (2011). Neckpiece: Cotton, upholstery foam, wood, sterling silver, silk thread. (Van der Merwe 2013).



Figure 28. Nini van der Merwe, *Blue and white #1* (2011). Neckpiece: Cotton, silk thread, upholstery foam, wood. (Van der Merwe 2013).



Figure 29. Nini van der Merwe, Blue and white #3 (2012). Cotton, silk thread, sterling silver.
(Van der Merwe 2013).



Figure 30: Jess Dare. *Conceptual flowering plant series* (2013). Object: Lampwork Glass.

Photography by Grant Hancock. (Jess Dare [Online]).



Figure 31: Jess Dare. *Conceptual flowering plant series* (2013). Object: Lampwork Glass.

Photography by Grant Hancock. (Jess Dare [Online]).



Figure 32: Jess Dare. *Conceptual flowering plant series* (2013). Object: Lampwork Glass.
Photography by Grant Hancock. (Jess Dare [Online]).



Figure 33. Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka. *Lymonorea Tieda*. Object: lampwork glass. (Guido Mocafo [Online]).



Figure 34. Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka. *Calliactis Decorata*. Object: lampwork glass. (Guido Mocafico [Online]).



Figure 35. *Xylem* (2013) Neckpieces: Powder coated brass and copper chenier vary.
Photography by Grant Hancock. (Jess Dare [Online]).



Figure 36. *Xylem* (2013) Neckpiece: Powder coated brass and copper chenier vary.
Photography by Grant Hancock. (Jess Dare [Online]).



Figure 37. *Xylem* (2013). Brooches: Powder coated brass and copper chenier vary.
Photography by Grant Hancock. (Jess Dare [Online]).



Figure 38. Jess Dare. *Epicormic series* (2013). Brooches: Powder coated brass and copper, sterling silver, lampwork glass, stainless steel vary. Photography by Grant Hancock. (Jess Dare [Online]).

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Addendum:

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