PERSONAL MEMORY AND THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY: A SELF PORTRAIT

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INTRODUCTION

I was born in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, and have spent the largest part of my life between a tobacco farm and boarding school. In 1992 I came to Cape Town, South Africa, in order to pursue a higher education. Since 1992 I have travelled back and forth between Harare and Cape Town every four to six months. My body of work is informed by these experiences and by an interest in the relationship between the memory of experience and the way these memories shape identity. I have been particularly interested in the way in which displacement or dislocation can destabilise one's own sense of identity.

My own relocation in South Africa and the resulting sense of dislocation over the past seven years has provoked a need to assess the way in which this has changed my own identity.

The title of this project encompasses the ostensibly personal motivation behind my research, and indicates the process of negotiation involved in the exploration of memory. These interests were generated by the personal desire to negotiate my own identity through the production of a series of memory-related images, and thus present or construct a visual or composite self portrait.

My research included reading a range of literature which explored memory and the ways in which remembrance occurs. I found the texts by Lowenthal (1985), Gergen (1991), Darian-Smith & Hamilton (1994), and Sarup (1994) to be most useful. Analyses of identity and concepts of the self were accessed, and the importance of place, environment and objects in relation to the self were also explored. Source material for my work was obtained from a variety of personal, collective and oral histories. Family photographs, documentary photographs of specific and related, known individuals, houses and

landscapes were collected and, together with a basic interest in the aesthetics of portraiture, a starting point was established.

The first section of this paper surveys the differing characteristics of memory, its fragmentary qualities, its constant negotiation within the present, its personalised form and its links to identity-formation and construction. Concepts of continuity, stabilising identity within the present, and their corresponding memory-related problems are discussed. Photographs are looked at in relation to memory as well as for their ability to inform or influence individual identity. References to the multi-faceted information that is unconsciously assimilated from multi-media sources in today's society, and the resultant identity related complexities introduce a more personal outlook on historically specific factors that appear to have destabilised identity. The Truth and Reconcilliation Commission is briefly introduced from the perspective of recreating one collective national memory and the implicit complexities involved on both a personal and collective level.

Section two of the paper establishes the importance of place in the formation of identity and then looks specifically at historical incidents that are relevant to my personal self-consciousness. Zimbabwean land reform issues, political racism and economic problems are presented as occurrences powerful enough to trigger the conscious scrutiny of identity and a personal sense of the past. Travel-related experiences are discussed with issues pertaining to the destabilisation felt when the individual is introduced to "other" discourses or cultures. Exposure to these occurrences, and conjecture surrounding their "ripple effect" on the individual provide the starting point from which to understand the motivation behind my body of practical work.

The third section of this paper looks closely at the problems, possibilities and variations involved in making a body of work around the concept of personal memory. The history

of etching is briefly discussed, and the method of etching is compared to the recollection process. Finally, the panel of work is presented as a "heritage site" to the viewer, and a form of re-evaluation of identity for the maker. A series of narrative texts are sourced as personal springs that triggered the production of each image, and serve to accompany or enrich the artworks themselves.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY: REASSESSING THE PAST, UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The importance given to the construction of the past as a vehicle to understand the present is a feature of the human need to anticipate the future. An understanding of history has always and will inform the many decisions that affect the future of communities, nations, governments, scientists, artists and other individuals. Awareness of surroundings, traditions, and techniques of survival could not exist without an intimate relationship with some aspect of the past. All forms of recognition, knowledge, education and skill are dependent on the human ability to experience, absorb, assimilate, and *remember.*

Western cultures only came to emphasize the importance of individuality and personal memory in the late eighteenth century. Identities were not so much considered unique, as belonging to a particular class, religion or profession (Gergen 1991). The *process* of how and why individual remembering occurs, and the triggers that cause recollections to appear, began at that time to be of critical interest in relation to the concept of the self, unique behaviour and reasoning faculties.

With the advent of psychoanalysis, the need to understand the links between recollection, behaviour and identity began to gather impetus, and the seed of the present-day obsession with the self was planted. In the face of today's increasingly alarming psychological conditions such as low self-esteem, [the tendency to] sadomasochism, identity-crisis, anorexia, post-traumatic stress disorder (Gergen 1991) and others, it is easy to forget that there was a

time when a person's physical and mental qualities were thought to be determined by the four humours: blood, melancholy, choler and phlegm..

> All these [psychoneurotic] terms have come into usage only within the present century…[and], they are all terms of mental deficit…This spiraling of deficit terminology can be attributed to the 'scientizing' of human behavior characteristic of the modern era. (Gergen 1991:14)"

It is from this point that the intellectual value of personal memory began to be reified, and people outside of the sciences began a new, more private form of analysis -- self-analysis. This inner assessment of the self began to serve as a form of existential "confirmation". "People began to take a walk to take a walk – not especially to get somewhere…Seeing became a confirmation of the self, rather than a process by which the outer world of nature was understood (Gergen 1991:11)."

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

The concept of identity as rooted within the psychology of the mind has become more and more central with time, and could today be considered to form the core of individuality. Twentieth century Western cultures and political structures place enormous importance on individuality and diversity of belief -- acceptance, respect and acquiescence of differing religions and life styles predominates in the discourses of politicians, religious leaders and academics.

The concept of identity is deeply "rooted" in memory and the ability to communicate with the past. Tonkin writes that "the past is myself, my own history, the seed of my present thoughts, the mould of my present disposition" (1992:1). Thus an analysis of the symbiotic relationship between identity and individual memory can be initiated.

Firstly, a belief in the existence of the self is wholly dependent on establishing a *sense* of continuity through time; a fluid, constant movement in one forward direction. It is memory of the past that allows the illusion of this continuity, and it is the ability to recall these memories that provides and retains access to the past. Secondly, one of the central components of memory as a form of self-awareness is its essential privacy. Recollection is an exclusively personal experience and consequently this unassailable form of knowledge, coupled with a sense of continuity, is what provides the feeling of security required to establish a sense of identity. The various private and collective capacities within memory will be discussed later in this section.

Memories are *segments* of past experiences, displaced and often *decontextualised* relics that are stored in a timeless realm and disempowered until the present generates their colonisation and they surface like ruins from a forgotten past. Without memory the individual would be reduced to an endlessly barren and fading present. Complete loss of memory would not only eliminate specific personality traits, but also eradicate all forms of knowledge and experience that caused those traits to begin to develop.

It is through memory that visual access to the past is located, and it is through recollection that the past comes to reside, albeit fragmentarily, within the individual. If the key component of the self can be tentatively agreed to be continuity, and that continuity is based on the belief that the past, history and memory provide a "truthful" linear pathway through time, it is essential to explore the evident paradox here. On the one hand, as Lowenthal puts it, the past is generally trusted to be "secure; people think of it as fixed, unalterable, indelibly recorded" (1985:4), and this is the precise reason that it holds such authority within the present. Whole families, communities and nations are able to be controlled by what they are told and *believe* happened in the past. However, in reality the past is completely inaccessible, one can never return to the past, it is gone

forever; the inherent power of the past in the form of history or memory is wholly dependent on the subjective ways in which it can be appropriated within the present.

The irony is that memories must be constantly selected and reconstructed in accordance with the ever-changing world around us; discarding what has become unuseful is equally as important as assimilating what is needed. "The past is what you remember, imagine you remember, convince yourself you remember, or pretend to remember" (Pinter in Lowenthal 1985:193).

Analysis of these issues requires the realisation that the self is as discontinuous as memory. The development of the self is dependent on maintaining a belief in continuous time, even though it is a series of different selves, constantly changing and shifting through time that actually exist or existed.

> These incessantly readjusted memories are rarely integrated into any consistent self-definition. Rather we stumble like drunkards over the sprawling canvas of our self-conception, throwing a little paint here, erasing some lines there, never really stopping to obtain a view of the likeness we have produced. The pace and scope of alteration preclude a consistent self-view in memory. Yet few can afford to become aware of this deficiency; it is too painful to recognize the decrepancies between one's present and past views. No one lives comfortably with the knowledge that he or she cannot recall a continuous past if one wants to. (Lowenthal 1985:198)

FORGETTING, DECEIVING AND IMAGINING

Proof of existence is validated, stabilised and nurtured through recollections of past occurrences. As social and domestic conditions, beliefs, value systems and laws change, different recollections are prioritised, some asserted as significant, others suppressed, re-establishing *continuity* with a past that will enable a sense of security in the future. The need to remember, then, exists alongside the necessity to *forget*. The two are interdependent.

> It becomes clear that the most constant element of recollection is forgetting, discarding the nonretained so that retention, rememoration can occur at all...Reduction is the essential precondition for representation. Loss is what makes memory of the past possible at all. (Terdiman 1994:21)

DeQuincey believed that memories are not so much *forgotten*, as stored back in the archive of the brain which holds an immense quantity of memories. These memories would thus remain unaccessed and unknown until at some time later an external spring would trigger re-remembering. Since most of this memory is untriggered, it is often considered to be lost.

> Because the past shaped everyone's present, no transient impression could be expunged from the mind; the storehouse of memory permanently preserved them all. The brain was 'a natural and mighty palimpsest', in De Quincey's view, that piled up 'everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished. (Lowenthal 1985:16)

There is an additional capacity to forgetting, one which is grounded in the process of *selectively* remoulding a personal history. The desire to remember is coupled with the power to expel everything that is incompatible within present circumstances. People remember selectively in order to aid their sense of self-continuity within the present, and to map a route toward their future. In some cases memory is involuntary -- things remembered and things forgotten are a direct function of present circumstances. Undoubtedly, that chartered map will be changed again and again with time, but it is essential for the individual to believe otherwise. It is at this point that elements of self-deception begin to fuse with and confuse the valued links between self, truth and continuity.

In addition, the desire to forget and remember is triggered by external circumstances; those circumstances can often promote values that are the antithesis of an individual's recollections – thus, in order to continue within the present, personal memories or beliefs must not so much be *forgotten*, as stripped of value. The individual must now deceive him/herself, often not consciously, by convincing themselves that previously important memories, memories on which beliefs were based, were never, in fact, of importance.

Coetzee and Nuttall in their recent book (1998) deal with just such problems in relation to this country's past apartheid structure and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) attempts to forge a new path for the young "rainbow nation". Through various methods of memory analysis, a new history needs to be written, but how will this be achieved, and just how much self-deception will be involved? A variety of individuals voice their opinions and fears.

Minkley and Rassool look at the TRC from the perspective that personal narratives from both victims and perpetrators indicate the new government's concern "to document these as part of the process of remaking collective memory of the past on an inclusive national

scale…The TRC,…is concerned with a politics of memory in which the past is uncovered for the purposes of political reconciliation in the present" (Minkley & Rassool 1998:89).

De Kok accepts the TRC's desire to *remake* the past, but asks how this can be done without "unwittingly encourag[ing] cultural and social amnesia?…The language of the 'clean break' turns into the apparently ethical consideration of 'forgive and forget' and 'life must go on'. It expresses a terror that, if we take one glimpse backwards, we may be dragged back into the apartheid underworld." (De Kok 1998: 59)

Godby discusses how through his art, William Kentridge warns that if we are now being asked to suddenly develop the "ability to absorb everything, to make contradiction and compromise the basis of daily living, … this desensitisation,… amounts to a form of disremembering" (Godby 1998:111).

Steven Robins' questions foreground the problematics surrounding forgetting, self deception and identity: "How will these personal, fragmented recollections and televisual images of traumatic experiences be represented, remembered, and memorialised in the years to come? Will the new nation state be the sole author of the official script of public memory, or will collective memory continue to lie elsewhere, in embedded memories, in the privacy of homes and within remembered spaces of violence?" (Robins 1998:121)

Existing alongside recollection, self-deception and forgetting, is imagination. The human faculty of imagination is constantly engaged in a process of assimilating, sifting, recreating and negotiating. Whether past experiences are shrouded in doubt or excruciatingly vivid, they more often than not need to be pushed, pulled, and reshaped into a new structure. Memories are minute fragments retained from a present that has now gone – in order for them to be convincingly slotted into a new present they must be

modelled into new forms. Imagination becomes active in the process of forgetting and deceiving.

PERSONAL MEMORY AS INVIOLABLE

A brief summary of the different kinds of memory is required. Memory is the faculty which enables the individual to store and sustain experiences – "memory is a repository or reservoir of records, traces, and engrams of past events analogous to records preserved in geological strata; like the earth (geological records) or the tools and instruments of man (archaeological records) … the human mind is a recording instrument"(Meyerhoff 1985:251). A memory can be anything from the motor-based recollection of what day it is today, to Proust's infamous sensory recollection triggered by the *madeleine.* Certain forms of memory are consciously accessible – voluntary memory, and others can only be triggered by external mnemonic symbols – involuntary memory.

Returning to the second and equally important component within identity, let us negotiate the pertinence of memory as being private. As Warnock puts it, "it is the concept of myself as recipient and possessor, the systematic organiser of experiences, that is central …" Memory as a form of self awareness "… could neither exist, nor be valued, if this center of experience, the familiar self, did not exist" (1987:62).

If the centre of the self resides in the very concept that all memories are the private possessions of the individual, able to be reshaped according to changing circumstances, is that centrality destabilised when memories are shared? Not necessarily, for according to Lowenthal, "memory is by its nature inviolable" (1987:88); we can never share a memory, we can only *translate* it. Yet, it is precisely because memories are ostensibly

private that, in the face of persuasive external values, they can lose credence and ultimately become extinct or at the very least, dormant. Thus, *translating* recollections and assimilating those of others often serves to validate and confirm identity where personal memory is not sufficiently precise. This is the entry point of the concepts of forgetting and deceiving.

Memory is further confused when "collective" memory becomes yet another side of the formation of the self. Although memory is by its very nature "private", and that "privacy" cannot necessarily be deconstructed, what becomes increasingly evident is that it is the storage and processing of the memories that is private rather than the memories themselves. The perspective from which memories are absorbed, and the unique ways in which they are sifted and reassembled is what is private and inaccessible.

What can happen when the individual absorbs the narrated memories of *others* is that, at a later date, "collective" narratives can be fused together with the individual's store of *personal* experiences when recalled. In many cases personal memories can become so enmeshed with the collectively remembered past that there is almost no way of distinguishing between the two.

COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

> The origins like the reliability of recollections lie shrouded in doubt. We can seldom distinguish primary from secondary memories, remembering things from remembering remembering them. (Lowenthal 1985:196)

Memories that are constantly retold or reenacted among members of a community or family unit become integrated into the collective consciousness and culture of those

people present. They are collectively preserved. Preservation invokes the belief in and continuance of practices that can come to be myths or traditions representative of a specific culture.

I know that when my brother was fourteen he stood on and broke the basin in the women's public toilet of a service station while trying to look at a ghekko. I do not remember this, but I know I was the one who encouraged him to come in and look at it. I know what happened because he has told me, and my mother and father have told me. They remember trying to explain to the petrol attendant why their teenage son was in the female toilet, while having to pay for the damages that he caused. No one remembers what was so special about the ghekko. Sharing these collective recollections of the past within a family can result in a unifying experience, as well as a more "rounded" perspective of the actual event, irrespective of the origin of the memory itself.

> Collective memories are both reflected and reinforced through culturally and temporally specific activities and behavior, such as rituals, commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices. These may be, for example, what we term traditions … prescribed and repeated forms of behavior, often of a symbolic nature, which derive their social authority by claiming to be descended from a suitable identifiable past. (Darian-Smith & Hamilton 1994:2)

It is important to note that the very act of recollection, coupled with imagination, self-deception and forgetting, alters the memories themselves. The more times that the same "image" is recalled and reinterpreted within the continuing present the deeper its original meanings will be buried and, consequently, the reason for its continued existence changes again and again. Every time a memory is recalled it is contextualised within a changing

present; it is re-presented in order to serve a different purpose. Memory provides access to a place as opposed to a past, that can become whatever is convenient at any particular moment in present time.

MEMORY MANIPULATED, IDENTITY SHIFTED, AND THE PHOTOGRAPH AS FROZEN TIME

Shared cultural and family memories are the springs that trigger collective remembering. Since the invention of the telegraph in the 1890s -- bringing with it a new perception of distance, time and space -- memories, and the ways that the individual perceives the present, began to change. Today's world is manipulated by broad forms of collective memory that are present within popular culture, consumer-society, commercialised leisure, and the multi-media. Such wholly encompassing visual and aural imagery has brought with it changes in our perceptions of time, space, identity and the past. The invention and subsequent commercialisation of the camera has had an enormous effect on the individual's changing perceptions of time and space.

The photograph, unlike a painting, preserves rather than imitates its subject and can be seen in certain circumstances to actually replace memory. Because the photograph cannot preserve meaning, it can be seen as a kind of mechanical device comparable to the voluntary memory-image. Like selected recollections, the photograph "removes its appearance from the flow of appearances and preserves it" (Berger 1980:50), until it is once more needed within the present and, like the individual's private collection of stored images, is consciously retrieved and utilised to access knowledge pertinent within the present. Barthes claims that the "Photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else -- it immediately yields up those "details" which constitute the very raw material of

ethnological knowledge" (1984:28). The photograph, like the memory image, is a tool that accesses the buried past.

Most interesting, however, is the inherent difference between the memory-image and the photograph: unlike memories, photographs are visually anchored to a specific time and space, and thus, they cannot be retrieved from the past. Memories can only exist within the present, and photographs can only exist within the place and time that they were originally created. Therefore, photographs are wholly nostalgic.

> By nature, the Photograph ... has something tautological about it ... It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb (Barthes 1984:5).

It must not be forgotten, however, that the *meanings* attached to a photograph and its visual origins are two different things; although the visual permanence of the photograph differentiates it from the memory-image, the meanings associated with photographs *can* be shifted or altered in order to place it into a convenient context.

The lack of context surrounding the photograph is easily rectified within the family, and may even be said to serve not only as an addition to collective family memory, but also as a physical form of memory similar to other collected souvenirs, providing a visual enrichment alongside narratives of past experiences.

Memories can also be spread on a global level, with widespread reporting of news through visual literature, magazines, cinema, television, electronic mail and the internet. This mass commodification of images, like family or "communal" memory, can be absorbed as solid and reliable in comparison to personal memory; holding an authority

derived from its broadly communal nature, "as if the truth, 'we all saw it', makes what was seen 'the truth' "(Burgin.1996:229).

Communications could be said to define and even arrange social reality, and over the last decade the rapidly growing network of mass technology has increasingly flooded today's societies. The individual is constantly exposed to new innovative forms of imagery and communication, from the television, to the video-machine, to the cinema, to the computer, to the internet, to the cellular phone, to the fax machine, to the cellular phone as able to receive and send mail. Photography and film could be seen to have informed the individual's way of *seeing* to such an extent that events covered on television can not only become part of that individual's store of memories, but, more importantly, be perceived as so real that they seem to have been personally experienced. At the very least, this flood of vicarious experience channelled by mass media could be said to substantially alter or recontextualise personal memories of experiences.

Powerful and popular cultural forms arise. It is their inherent ability to restructure or misinform today's societies through the validity of collective memory that gives them such power.

> The powerful apparatuses of contemporary commercial electronic mass communications dominate discourse in the modern world. They supply us with endless diversion and distraction mobilized to direct our minds toward advertising messages. They colonize the most intimate and personal aspects of our lives, seizing upon every possible flaw in our bodies, minds, and psyches to increase our anxieties and augment our appetites for consumer goods. Culture itself comes to us as a commodity. (Lipsitz 1990:4)

These information networks are not only utilised for consumer control, their persuasive power is further harnessed for political gain/persuasion.

It is through the simplified and selective narratives of collective myths that historical events are rendered emotionally comprehensible and memorable. Mythic narratives are thus the wellspring of nationalism and they are constantly mobilised to serve differing ideological and political interests (Darian-Smith & Hamilton 1994:2).

How has the advent of electronic mass communications affected the concept of individual identity as constructed through personal memory? Mass communications can cause a "memory crisis" due to their capacity to transcend time and space. The individual can easily be disconnected from past traditions as society rapidly changes around her/him -- we have become "teleotopologically fashioned subjects", says Burgin (1996:57). Mass imagery could be seen to recontextualise personal experience in such a way that it no longer acts as the guardian of behaviour – in other words, television, and other forms of mass media, habituates people to *forms* of behaviour not *personal* experiences, and this affects decisions regarding behaviour and value systems.

Under these conditions, exploration of the self and personal identity can become extremely complicated and urgent as more and more private history is buried beneath layers of mass media imagery. Personal traditions are not so much lost, as buried beneath or confused with, a layer of popular memory-images which have been assimilated.

Warnock argues that irrespective of the origin, however, the past images absorbed and events experienced by the individual become his/her personal history, "precisely because [they are] the subject of reflection" (1987:62). Even media-images that are broadcast internationally become personal when they are internalised, for each individual will utilise a slightly differing element of the knowledge preserved in its message. Some will remember colours, others a specific word or individual. What is remembered is a function of the already recorded memory-images, and present circumstances.

From another perspective, mass media and popular culture have generated an enormous resurgence in the genre of autobiography. Individual memory and the concept of identity have gained profound importance within post-modern societies. This preoccupation is a preoccupation with claiming a unique past. Popular memory has re-rooted the individual's access to his/her roots by profound changes in ways of seeing, perceiving and living.

"In our time ... [this] loss of tangible relics has stimulated interest in geneology ... modern man seeks more or less consciously to reconstruct human links" (Lowenthal 1985: 38).

MEMORY DESTABILISED: THREATENED IDENTITY AND THE EXAMPLE OF ZIMBABWE

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*RE*NEGOTIATION WITH THE PAST

> … when elements and processes of culture lose transparency they always draw reflection to themselves. (Terdiman 1993:15)
>
> All that is solid melts into air. (Marx in Terdiman 1993:11)
>
> Memory is not a constantly accessible copy of the different facts of our life, but an oblivion from which, at random moments, present resemblances enable us to resuscitate dead recollections. (Proust in Terdiman 1993:3)

In this project, I have been concerned to understand the circumstances under which the community/individual feels the need to renegotiate an identity within the present. As discussed, memory is never static within the present, and is constantly renewed or repressed in miniscule detail with the advance of time, but the desire to consciously reassess and renegotiate with the past in the hope of restabilizing a sense of rooted identity within the present is usually generated by the introduction of some form of external value system powerful enough to pervade and unbalance personal and collective memory. This more threatening form of experience could be anything from physical displacement, to war, to political change, to a death in the family. This chapter shall focus only on the particular events that I feel were relevant to my own personal sense of dislocation.

IDENTITY AND PLACE

> To gain an existential foothold, man [sic] has to be able to orientate himself; he has to know where he is. But he also has to identify himself with the environment, that is, he has to know how he is a certain place. (Jakle.1987:31)

This quote articulates the association between memory, identity and place. According to Jakle (1987), a landscape is a potential heritage site. A *familiar* landscape may be seen to accumulate mnemonic properties, providing access to the past through elements that have been particularised by the human hand. Recollection occurs when a certain niche or object in that landscape is revisited, its imprinted characteristics triggering off a successive chain of past experiences. Physically, familiar land can become a sophisticated cognitive map that emits and retains the events that have marked its surface through time.

This potential form of physical narrative through time is not specific to land, however, it is obtainable from the features of what Jakle terms, any familiar "place" (1987:33).

> Places are centers of value ... Place is the sum of all objects that combine to give a sense of behavioral focus through expectation. Places have identity or character through the satisfactions or dissatisfactions anticipated as variously cued by objects both animated and inanimate. Identity ... is a unique configuration of all the objects that go to make up a place. (Jakle 1987:33)

Just as memory can be viewed as facilitator in recapturing the past, so too can the familiar landscape be seen as facilitator in the process of recollection – a vital link in the (perceived) chain of reconstructing a sense of identity and belonging. The land as familiar

territory provides security, stabilises identity, and validates existence in the form of historical or heritage archive. Further, the ownership of land could be seen to privatise and personalise memories and rituals enacted within its boundaries, and become the external place where these memories reside. The *owned* and *familiar* place or landscape supplies the very real and valuable properties of stability for the individual or family unit.

For individuals who rely heavily on the landscape as guardian of memory, is that person's "center of value" (Jakle 1987:33) destabilised when ownership of that specific "place" is threatened? Surely the possibility of being denied access to this "cognitive map" would necessitate a renegotiation with the past as it is memorialised by that landscape. If the "place" as tool in identity formation were removed, that person may need to relocate another tool, one holding equal weight in the form of past experiences.

I grew up in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland province, spending fourteen years of my life in a farming district called Norton. My parents were not landowners (they rented a house on one of three connected farms owned by tobacco and groundnut farmers), but our lease depended on the continued ownership by the existing landlords. To use Jakle's words once again, it is this specific stretch of land that became my family's *place of central value.*

NATIONAL CHANGE, PERSONAL DISLOCATION

The early 1990s saw many rapid socio-political changes in Zimbabwe. In 1991, induced by pressure from the International Monetary Fund, the government introduced the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme in the hope of liberalising the economy. Inflation soared and a recession resulted in an estimated 45% unemployment level as a result of austerity measures.

> In early 1993, the Land Acquisition Policy was passed ... President Robert Mugabe, trying to bolster his flagging popularity, has picked a fight with his country's tiny white minority.
>
> The bout began in May with the announcement that the state will expropriate 70 farms, mostly white-owned, for distribution to black peasants. It hit its highest pitch on August 20 when Mr. Mugabe threatened to deport whites the state regards as racists.[1]

More than a decade after independence, a calculated attack was launched against a minority group in Zimbabwe, possibly in light of the looming 1995 elections. At a time when 45% of its population was unemployed, the government attempted to reroute the population's resentment, actively encouraging the revival of racism. Since 1992, the state-controlled newspapers have published a mass of accusations that range from white Zimbabweans being labelled as "a greedy bunch of racist usurpers,"[2] to "white racists are human vomit of constipated European capitalism."[3]

> In a world of change, memory becomes complicated. Any revolution, any rapid alteration of the givens of the present places a society's connection with its history under pressure. (Terdiman 1994:3)

Early in 1997, "President Mugabe was confronted by a newly organized rebellious group of war veterans ... the 50 000 war veterans marched in the streets with banners outspokenly attacking the government. In order to win back the support of these heroes, who fought to end Rhodesian rule, President Mugabe promised them "gratuities" of Z$50 000 each in December and pensions of Z$2000 per month, tax free."[4]

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[1] KELLER, B. The New York Times International. 30 August 1993.
[2] MUGABE, R. The Herald. 18 September 1993.
[3] UNITED INIGENOUS PRESSURE GROUPS. The Herald. 5 January 1993.
[4] AFRICAN BUSINESS. January 1998. 12.

To avoid bringing the budget deficit back up to 12% or more, the government decided to raise part of the required Z$4bn by implementing a sales tax increase from 15% to 17.5%, and 5% levy on all income earners, as well as increases in petrol and diesel taxes. Income tax was rumored to be shooting up from around 18% to 42%[1]

On November 14, the "Zimbabwe dollar crashed by 75% against the US currency"[2], and on November 28, an official list of 1480 farms stretching across 45 of the present districts of Zimbabwe were published in the Herald Newspaper as having been designated by the government for "compulsory acquisition". The government would not pay for the land, only permanent improvements, and the government would set the price.[3] "Although the farmers lose their rights to the property immediately, they will only be paid by the cash strapped government some time in the future ... Now that those properties are designated for purchase by the government, the farmers have lost title to the land including the right to sell the land, to borrow money using the land as collateral and even to harvest crops *on* the land."[4]

Thus, over the last six years it is possible, if not probable, that the sense of security of most individuals within Zimbabwe's white minority was in some way destabilised. Destabilised enough to necessitate a renegotiation with the past. Politically, the government was ostracising them on racial and economic grounds. Socially, they suddenly felt they were being viewed as intrusive outsiders within their own country. Economically, the escalating financial problems were causing pressure on perceived future stability, and agriculturally the government's confiscation of land was not only removing the comfort of "home" from these individuals, but also removing their livelihood. An overall sense of vulnerability, fear and anxiety perpetuated the lifestyles of this minority group. Consequently, identities were restructured as whites in Zimbabwe

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[1] AFRICAN BUSINESS. January 1998. 12.
[2] CHIMBYA. The Financial Gazette. 4 December 1997.
[3] The Herald. 28 November 1997.
[4] AFRICAN BUSINESS. January 1998. 12.

had to reshape their perceptions of themselves in relation to both their own communities and to those who saw them as different.

Being outside of the country during most of this time, my perception of changes in my own family's national and personal views was immediate, and eventually prompted me to reevaluate my own sense of the past. My parents' and my memories no longer coincided -- I became confused as things I was sure had happened were no longer remembered, or even denied. Their memories of the past were changing to accommodate their present, and I was clinging to memories that had remained unchanged within my new environment. A bitterness and sense of hopelessness prevailed which affected my own relationship with my home – my parents and I no longer seeing eye-to-eye and my home no longer the peaceful and magical place of my childhood.

As a whole, however, the white community in this area became closer – they seemed to form a bond, to strengthen their identities by structuring a solid wall of collective memories, most of which I could not relate to. They renegotiated a sense of identity and any elements from the past that did not correlate were removed, my own being some of those.

> Any minority group when faced with hostile acts does several things. One of its first reactions is that it draws in on itself, it tightens its cultural bonds to present a united front against its oppressor. The group gains strength by emphasizing its collective identity. (Sarup 1994:95)

SEPARATION AND TRAVEL

Distance-related separation from family or any form of closely-knit unit, in relation to external factors powerful enough to destabilise the individual's sense of continuity, is of further interest to myself. If an individual's personal identity is closely entwined with a collective consciousness and/or a specific "place", a long term physical separation from that unit or landscape may also be seen to unsettle self-knowledge.

Long-term attachment to one particular place and one relatively stable value system can result in an overly strong reliance on that place and collective culture, to the extent that the individual feels insecure if separation occurs. Change in environment triggers a re-evaluation of the past. Recollection must now negotiate a new route within the present, just as it must when exposed to any other drastic alteration of the givens. Furthermore, that individual could experience rejection or a sense of alienation within the new country or cultural group into which they have moved. "There is a cultural exclusion of the stranger. S/he is constructed as a permanent Other" (Sarup 1994:103). Sarup describes the resultant complexity facing the individual as a form of non-identity – the individual must somehow balance him/herself between two value systems:

> Strangers are, in principle, undecidables. They are unclassifiable. A stranger is someone who refuses to remain confined to the 'far away' land or go away from our own. S/he is physically close while remaining culturally remote. Strangers often seem to be suspended in the empty space between a tradition which they have already left and the mode of life which stubbornly denies them the right of entry. The stranger blurs a boundary line. The stranger is an anomaly, standing between the inside and the outside, order and chaos, friend and enemy. (Sarup 1994:102)

In January of 1992, at the age of eighteen, I left my existing place of central value (home) to further my education in Cape Town, South Africa. However, I did not remain permanently in Cape Town but travelled back and forth twice a year for six years. Sarup discusses issues of separation and displacement alongside the problematics of establishing a sense of identity within a new environment as well as the difficulties

involved in gaining acceptance into a new cultural group. What she assesses, however, are relatively permanent separation periods; her examples are based upon the experiences of individuals who, like herself, have been separated from their country of birth or family and connections *permanently*. What interests me are the complexities involved within a "back and forth" separation – individuals who, for example, spend six months of the year in their "home", and six months of the year abroad, for a period of several years. This frequent crossing of borders, from my personal experience, further complicated my sense of self. When in Cape Town, I slowly carved out a new value system for myself, legitimising my presence and continuity within an unfamiliar environment, but every time I returned to Zimbabwe, it was to the familiar set of values from my childhood, relaxing and soothing. It became necessary to alternate two diverse sets of personal values in order to exist simultaneously within the two differing environments. One identity was neatly boxed and "stored away", while the other was resuscitated, and visa versa.

While studying in Cape Town, and clinging to images of my "home", the previously outlined political and social issues within Zimbabwe, unknown to myself, where causing memory alterations within my family unit. Thus, every return to Zimbabwe resulted in a more and more evident dissonance between both my own and my family's collective memories.

In a discussion of shipboard journals and letters written by British emigrants to Australia in the nineteenth century, Kerryn Goldsworthy (1996) focuses on the experiences of

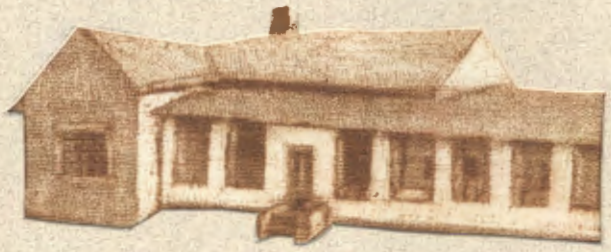
travel itself, rather than the experience of being displaced. She looks closely at the "no-man's land" of the ship as a vessel isolated from everything that has come before, and everything that is soon to come. There is only one boundary for this recently isolated community:

> ... the visible line of the deck-rail – but a number of old boundaries had begun to collapse ... They were liminal beings, literally neither here nor there. They were in a condition of virtual captivity and enforced passivity that equates with the idea of being 'stripped'. They were suspended between a number of apparent, but by definition illusory, binary oppositiions: emigrant and immigrant, north and south, the known and the unknown, the old life and the new. They were undergoing a ritual process of transformation, and their living conditions at sea resembled rites of initiation: ritualistic, equalizing and ... conducive to self-examination and self reflexivity. (Goldsworthy 1996:54)

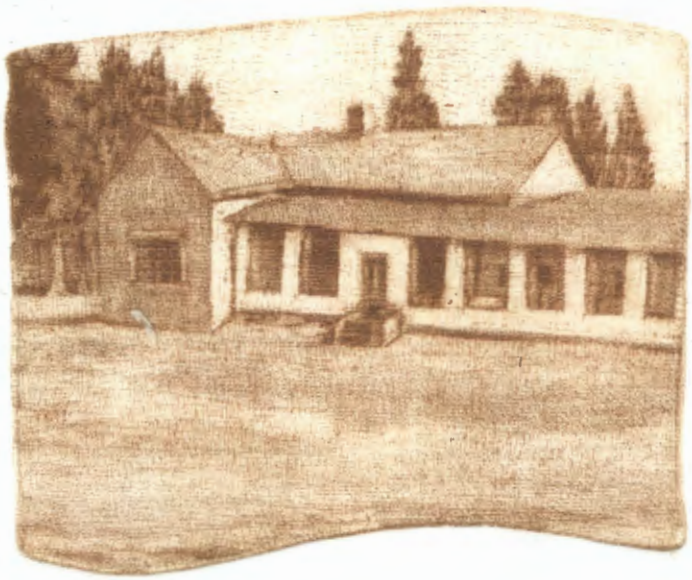
She goes on to analyse the identity transformations that each emigrant must undertake, not so much in order to "fit" into the unknown Australia, but rather to 'fit' into the life on the ship. Most interestingly, it is the inability of the journal writers to express their experiences in writing that highlights their difficulties in negotiating a new discourse within their present, as well as the knowledge that once their destination is reached, they will have no further use for such a discourse if found.

I would like to propose that although much shorter, my travel experiences to and from Zimbabwe by bus over the last seven years have produced similar personal feelings of isolation, vulnerability, and ultimately, the sense of a temporary (three days) timelessness, a small enclosed place existing outside of continuous time where strangers must be accommodated and physical privacy is relinquished.

The over all result of this dual existence has, in many ways, been one of confusion, agitation, and an inability to successfully assimilate the two divergent ways of life. On the one hand I am a rural, land-loving family contributor, and on the other I must learn to enjoy living in a large city with no access to farmland and no family contact. What is obvious, however, is it is this personal dislocation and uneasiness coupled with a disturbing lack of familial coherence in Zimbabwe, that motivated this project of exploration into memory, identity, and the importance of the personal past.



NEGOTIATING A VISUAL PORTRAIT OF MEMORY: WORKING METHODS AND THE MEMORY OF THE COPPER PLATE



NEGOTIATING A VISUAL PORTRAIT OF MEMORY: WORKING METHODS AND THE MEMORY OF THE COPPER PLATE

> A portrait is a sort of general history of the life of the person it represents, not only to him who is acquainted with it, but to many others, who upon seeing it are frequently told of what is most material concerning them, or their general character at least; the face; and figure is also described and as much of the character as appears by these, which often-times is here seen in a very great degree. (Richardson in Brilliant 1991:37)

VISUAL CONCERNS FOR THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ARTIST

What, then, of my own concerns: how can an artist negotiate a "self portrait of memory" visually? Because memories are understood to be inviolable from the perspective that they are so personal, it can be said that the artist could only ever hope to offer a vague or partial representation or translation of specific private memories. Translations of sensations, textures, and smell are necessary for involuntary memory representation. Voluntary memories, although comparable to snapshot photographs, are decontextualised when preserved, they are removed from the dead past and become discontinuous fragments that must be reconstructed, reassessed and sifted when recalled into the present.

These reconstructed memories must be further reconstructed within the language of art before they can become two-dimensional images. Artworks focusing on individual memory are thus reconstructions of reconstructions of sifted memory-images.

Locating my work within the genre of portraiture, it is necessary to look briefly at the issues that arise. According to Richard Brilliant (1991) it is possible to separate portraiture into three categories – emblematic, generic, and representational. An example of an emblematic portrait is one that "does not necessarily depend on accurate depiction of human form and facial features. The representation or inclusion of certain things or symbols associated with the subject is of greater importance" (Brilliant & Borgatti 1990:86). By working with and including visual references to objects related to the individuals that I portray in my work, I am drawing on certain properties within this category of portraiture. I am not, however, simultaneously excluding "accurate depiction of human form" (Brilliant & Borgatti 1990:86). If concise and detailed visual reference to the physical appearance of the sitter is the primary aim of the artist, this form of portraiture is labelled as representational (1990). Chuck Close's work would be perfect to site here -- although "each square" on his monumental portaits "is its own painting" (Guare 1995:35), the subject of the paintings was "the human face examined in exquisite objectivity" (Guare 1995:18). The work that I have produced for this project includes both close scrutiny to "physiognomic resemblance" (Brilliant & Borgatti 1990:125), and the use of *emblems* symbolic of my personal memories of the sitter, thus I would have to tentatively categorise it as existing somewhere between these two forms of portraiture.

The most pertinent issue surrounding the genre of portraiture in relation to my interests in memory is that of immortality. In his book *Portraiture* (1991), Brilliant identifies the difficulty of thinking of portraits as "art and not thinking about them primarily as something else, the person represented" (Brilliant 1991:23).

> Nothing in the whole circle of human vanities takes stronger hold of the imagination than this affair of having a portrait painted. Yet why should it be so? … It is the idea of duration – or earthly immortality – that gives such a mysterious interest to our portraits. (Hawthorne in Brilliant 1991:45)

In light of the previous discussions on the constantly shifting and diverging facets within identity, the irony here is obvious – how does the artist both acknowledge the timeless properties within the genre of portraiture, and simultaneously allude to the transient quality of human identity? Apparently one way would be to represent the same sitter over a long period of time as Jim Dine did in his series of etchings "Nancy outside in July", spanning a four year period (Ackley 1983), and thereby recording both the visual and psychological changes of the sitter as perceived by Dine through time. In my own work, I have attempted to assimilate physical attributes of my sitters from various times in my past, and then combine them together to form a unified portrait that is actually a kind of collage. The portrait of my mother, for example, includes her face as it was when she was in her thirties, and her body as it is now. Her shoes are no longer in existence, but were her favourite pair about five years ago, and the chickens standing all over her,represent only a part of her life -- a short period in the late eighties. Thus, although the viewer is presented with closely observed, life-like and visually unified individual, the image is made up of various memories of different stages in the sitter's identity, rather than from one segment of her existence in time.

An interesting similarity can be set up between the artwork and the viewer, and memory and the present: the completed artwork, placed on exhibition and removed from its context of creation, can only be contextualized by the viewer. The artwork is given significance which is not necessarily that intended by the artist, but rather which correlates to the present concerns addressed by the viewer. Thus, the viewer projects meaning onto the work, while the artwork simultaneously stimulates and produces that meaning.

Similarly, circumstances of the present both determine the production of memory and are shaped by it. Through the negotiating processes involved in the making of these artworks, memories were not only removed and 'rewritten' in another language, but new memories

were developed as the artworks were being produced. I have produced visual representations of negotiations with my past alongside memories of the negotiation process, and memories of the creation process. Each individual piece of copper, although produced via an assemblage of the recreated past, now has its own small recorded history.

VISUAL REFERENCES AND SOURCE MATERIAL

The primary focus in my body of practical work produced for this degree developed from an interest in locating a stable sense of identity through negotiation with past memories and forgotten experiences. The imagery and content for the prints developed from a preoccupation with the self as unique, which also provided a source of narrative inspiration.

The visual character of memory is multifaceted, and may be interpreted in a number of richly layered or vivid ways. The experience of recollection varies widely according to the "type" of memory experienced. Visual perceptions of past events can be "photographically" precise, every crease and detail revealed, or they can be blurred and hazy, emitting only a vague sensation of nostalgia. The source-material produced by this range of memories becomes a kaleidoscope of diverging and conflicting images, some partly obscured, some layered over one another, and others cancelling each other out. Formal aspects such as patterning, repeating and re-using an image within differing contexts arise.

Working by assimilating and renegotiating the visual qualities of personal memories, collective family memories and specifically nostalgic photographs, I have produced a body of practical work that is resonant of a narrative format, and yet attempts to avoid specific contextualisation. I have paid close attention to the detail and patterning within the differing recollections represented. Express emphasis has been placed on the

"comforting" or security-related capacities within memory negotiations, both referentially and methodologically, through the use of items such as blankets, containers holding special objects and through reference to people, places and "souvenirs "of personal importance to myself and each sitter.

Each separate image is the result of the recollections and memories associated with specific individuals and their personal environments. The aim is to contain visually fragmented recollections within the framework of the sitter and thus give the impression of a unified whole. Simultaneously, these images contain no background apart from the white of the printing paper, and thus combine or contradict the "perception" of continuity and wholeness with the *de*-contextualised faculty of recollection -- each sitter is treated with a high degree of detail and "truth to reality", and yet is not placed within any specific context.

When assembled together to make up a continuous panel, the body of work is presented as one continuous narrative; the separate images are fitted together in such a way as to emphasise the flowing organic shapes used. However, it is a narrative that is at times incomplete and fragmented, for the lack of context surrounding the separate images negates a perception of naturalism.

Pinter's analysis of the "heritage site" as a kind of historically imbued shrine to which visitors are required to imagine the missing landmarks is, I feel, relevant to the way in which I would like my panel of work to be viewed:

> Heritage is history processed through mythology, ideology, nationalism, local pride, romantic ideas … into a commodity … the charm of this … is its power of calling up vague reveries and picturings of the past and thus clothing naked realities with the illusion of the memory and the imagination. The past is to most visitors not an aim in itself, but a starting point from which they depart on a

> discovery tour. A journey that will tell them as much about themselves as it will about history." (Pinter 1997: 22)

Using this idea as a framework for my visual aims, I tentatively present my final body of artworks as a form of personal heritage site imbued with tiny details and remembered experiences, that nevertheless leaves space to allow the viewer's imagination to be stimulated.

EXPLORING MEMORY THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF ETCHING

> I am playing a game, but the game is the point. The multiple links behind the image on the plate not only repeat the multiple nature of the print medium itself, but illustrate the dynamics of recollection … (Milton in McNulty 1977:26)

The significance of the use of etching for this body of work is partly to be found in the process itself. Etchings are intaglio prints; a sheet of copper is etched (in my own work) with ferric chloride, creating small, deep incisions that are (apparently) permanent. Ink is placed into these incisions so that an image can be printed from the copper plate.

Like memories, the image is "indelibly recorded" within the copper plate – alterations may be made, lines added or sections burnished out, but the basic impression is extremely difficult to delete completely. When an image is made on a copper plate, the print taken off its "recorded" surface is always a *reversed* impression; the original picture is mirrored rather than copied. "In mirrors we see ourselves, with astonishing clarity; mirrors confirm our identity" (Pacey 1989: 60). These etchings, focused as they are on the visual negotiation of memory, can be seen as mirrors with memories, reflections of reflections that have been reversed and frozen in time on absorbent paper.

Furthermore, of all of the printmaking processes, etching is the most "personal" from the perspective that every practical step is meticulously hand processed. The final printing of the etched image must be done "one at a time" with a repetitive wiping motion of the hand, and thus the ability to reproduce *exact* editions is complicated. Frequently the copper plate is not wiped up in exactly the same way, resulting in minute differences evident in each editioned image. Every time that a memory is "re-printed" within the present, minute alterations occur in relation to the present surroundings.

Historically, the "memory" of the copper plate is also significant to this body of work. The technical limits of making an etching cause boundaries that contain an enormously rich tradition or archive of intaglio. Every time an artist makes an etching, those archives are acknowledged. To know that a present day etcher is using and processing materials identical to those of Dürer or Rembrandt brings a sense of linear continuity to the craft.

Each new etching resonates with the history of making etchings. Etching as a fine art medium relies heavily on the ostensible *lack* of technical changes that have come about through time, and consequently its inherent traditions become more and more important. The process is imbued with historical stability and continuity – while at the same time accommodating creative innovation.

> The vast amounts of experimental work in the field of intaglio tends to influence every practitioner as he[/she], in turn, influences the field. (Heller 1980:204)

WORKING METHODS

The body of work produced for this degree comprises a series of monochrome copper etchings and monochrome collographs.

The planning stages of each separate image involved an assimilation of memories, collective memories and photographs. A series of thumbnail sketches were produced until an overall composition was arrived at. Preliminary drawings were created to size and considerations such as light source/s and perspective were established.

The next stage was to divide the full-size linear drawing into sections and then trace it onto a large sheet of copper. Using a jeweller's hacksaw, these segmented pieces of copper were then individually cut out and filed down so that, when reassembled, they fitted together to form one complete shape, similar to a puzzle. The separated sections of copper were then etched through hardground, softground, and aquatint, with mezzotint added where appropriate.

A roll of cotton Rives paper was used to print the completed images so that one continuous sheet of paper could be used per section. Some of the images are a combination of etching and collograph. In those instances, cardboard was cut out into the required shape and worked into with a blade, glue, string, sand, paper and cloth. Spray adhesive was then applied to the surface of the plate and aluminium foil was glued to the surface by running it through an etching press. The collograph surface at this point became printable. When combinations of copper plates and collograph plates were used to make up one image, the copper plates needed to be raised to compensate for the differing printing pressures required. Thus all copper segments were placed on top of cardboard stencils to raise their heights. Bistre Charbonnel etching ink was used to print the plates.

The entire body of work comprises a series of four collographs and eighty-eight copper plates which slot together to form complete images, leaving a thin white line around each segment. The aim of this segmentation was initially motivated by scale considerations and the limitations of the workshop, however, the idea of the puzzle came to be important for the whole process of slotting together pieces of visualised memory as the theoretical

aspects of this project began to take shape -- to create the visual impression of puzzle pieces that can be shifted and reassembled like the fragmented personal recollections I drew upon.

The textural possibilities of the etching process provided a range of visual results to depict the vividness of certain memories, as well as to the hazy vague perception of an image that cannot be fully recalled. Using hardground allowed a linear quality of exquisite precision, whereas using the processes of mezzotint or collograph simulated a more blurred result which was richly sensory.

The works themselves are slotted next to, above and below each other to form one continuous panel. This fitting together echoes the way that the copper pieces themselves are fitted together, and reflects the way that memories too, are continuously pieced together with the primary aim of establishing a continuous panel of references within the present.

SELF PORTRAIT: THE PANEL

BRIGADIER MICHAEL OWEN COLLINS (OBE)

SELF PORTRAIT: THE PANEL

BRIGADIER MICHAEL OWEN COLLINS (OBE)

My grandfather is 93 years old. When he was in his mid-seventies he lost eighty percent of his sight. My sister and I could never quite tell just how much he could notice, but you could be sure that he always "saw" us pulling faces at each other. This is his favourite chair; for as long as I can remember he has been sitting in this chair every evening with a glass of whiskey. He was a brigadier in the British army and lived in India for four years on the staff of General Mountbatten, while my mother was just a child. In the late eighties, when the oxygen weed completely overtook Darwendale Dam near Norton, he designed a special press with spikes on it that could be pushed through the water, causing the weed to be crushed. He wrote some short stories about the Zimbabwean government but never tried to publish them -- I do not remember whether they were well-written or not, only that I couldn't really understand them. He likes to cook pork chops in Coca-Cola, and have volatile dinner parties -- deliberately inviting guests that he knows will be irritated by each other. Now he is growing comfrey in my aunt's vegetable garden. When visiting him one is obliged to pick the hairy leaves and put them under a heavy weight that crushes out their juice into a plastic bottle kept below. When the bottles are full, for some strange reason, he puts them in his bedroom cupboard. He presently has over fifty two-litre bottles of disgusting brown raw comfrey juice in there, and it smells rancid, but he just laughs if you tell him so.

METHOD: This image comprises seven monochrome copper plates using aquatint, hardground and mezzotint. Softground, aquatint and hardgound were used to make the oval landscape accompanying it.
SIZE: 90 x 130cm
OVAL LANDSCAPE: 90 x 42cm

JENNIFER BOWMAKER


I have ridden horses
the age of six. This is
a picture of Cha-cha -
she now belongs to a
little chinese girl in
Zambia. Cha-cha was
very sulky but would
attempt to jump any-
thing that I placed
her in front of. At
one of the cross
country events on the
circuit, I misjudged
my stride & she ran
so fast that she
tried to jump & we
ended up stuck like a
see-saw.

JENNIFER BOWMAKER

This is an etching of my mother's sister. She lives on a smallholding in Thornville, Natal. When my family first built their fishery, it was in partnership with my aunt and uncle. We would drive out to the lake every weekend in their combi, and the rains would be so good that I remember small rivers running down the sides of the farm road with little fish called *Barbus paludinosis* swimming up them. Sometimes, when we came back up in the evenings monkeys would be sitting on the roof of the Combi.

My aunt has an obsession with pugs. This pug here is the present one, it has rotten teeth and stinks, and it sleeps in her bed between her and my uncle. My aunt has a passion for food and is solely responsible for introducing delicacies such as crème bruleé, fresh artichoke hearts, Mongolian braais and tiger prawns to my palate. She eats faster than anyone I have ever met, and she is the strongest person I know. Once, when I was seven, her youngest son bit me; when I cried and told on him, she bit him back for me.

Beneath this image is a scroll containing small images of important objects from my past which are accompanied by text. This scroll is continued under the image of the crochet blanket.

METHOD: This image contains four monochrome copper plates using hardground, aquatint and openbiting. The scroll was produced using hardground and aquatint.
SIZE: 51 x 138cm
SCROLL: 51 X 34cm

IRVAN CLIVE CLINTON DAMON


SINGER

IRVAN CLIVE CLINTON DAMON

Paradoxically, Irvan is the only non-Zimbabwean represented in this panel. Despite this, the significance of the relationship that I share with him necessitates his inclusion here. Irvan is the only representative of my life in Cape Town, and so, unlike the other sitters in this panel, doesn't represent a "distant" memory. I should like to propose his presence here as an assimilation of my old and newly emerging identity.

In all the time that I have known Irvan, he has always kept all of his most important possessions and documents in one cardboard box on top of a cupboard. In this image he wears no shoes. From what he can remember, when he was small, he had no shoes for school, so he used to take his cousin Lindy's which were too small for him because he has size eleven feet. His checked trousers are made up of small cut-out photocopies of landscape textures collected from the area I come from in Zimbabwe, which were pasted together, transferred onto the copper and open bitten for ten minutes. He is sitting on our only chair: he has studied in this chair every night for six years. Before I met him, he remembers studying in his grandfather's room because there are twenty-four people living in his two-bedroom home.

Below this image there is a sewing machine. This sewing machine was passed down to me by my great aunt Ruby – it is an old Singer machine, which although exquisitely beautiful, can only be used for straight stitch. Ruby didn't like sitting with the adults at family gatherings, but preferred to play card games with the children and teach us rude words or how to dance the tango.

Above the image of Irvan is a small flat landscape reminiscent of the area from which I come in Zimbabwe.

METHOD: This unit contains two monochrome copper plates using photocopy transfer, openbite, hardground, burnishing and aquatint. The accompanying sewing machine and landscape combined the processes of aquatint, hardground, and burnishing.

SIZE: 70 x 108cm

LANDSCAPE: 70 x 34cm

SEWING MACHINE: 70 x 34cm

CLIFFORD BRIAN PRATT

CLIFFORD BRIAN PRATT

This etching of my father shows him at the age of sixty. It is made up of ten different pieces of etched copper. On Darwendale Dam in Zimbabwe, we used to go out in boats and net the fish, bringing them back in buckets which we would then drive up to the gutting tables. We would spread them out on the floor and begin to de-scale and gut them in order to be weighed and frozen for later delivery and sale. I remember when the pile of fish was so
high that I couldn't see over it. My father told me that there was once over three tonnes of fish caught within twenty-four hours when the dam was still new. Sometimes there would be a tigerfish or bottlenose in amongst the more regular bream and barbel. Sometimes my brothers would squirt each other with the brightly coloured fish bladders.

Almost all of the holidays I can remember spending with my family were up in the Eastern Highlands where the national park's cottages were cheap and the rivers were cold enough to house trout (brown and rainbow), but they are genetically incompatible and therefore unable to breed there. My father used to take me downstream to the National Park's Hatchery where we would throw pellets at the swarms of baby trout that were being bred especially to re-stock the rivers. Purden Dam was reputed to contain the biggest trout, but I didn't like to go there for too long because it was always so cold and windy. My father would sit there all day just to catch a fish. That's what made him happy.

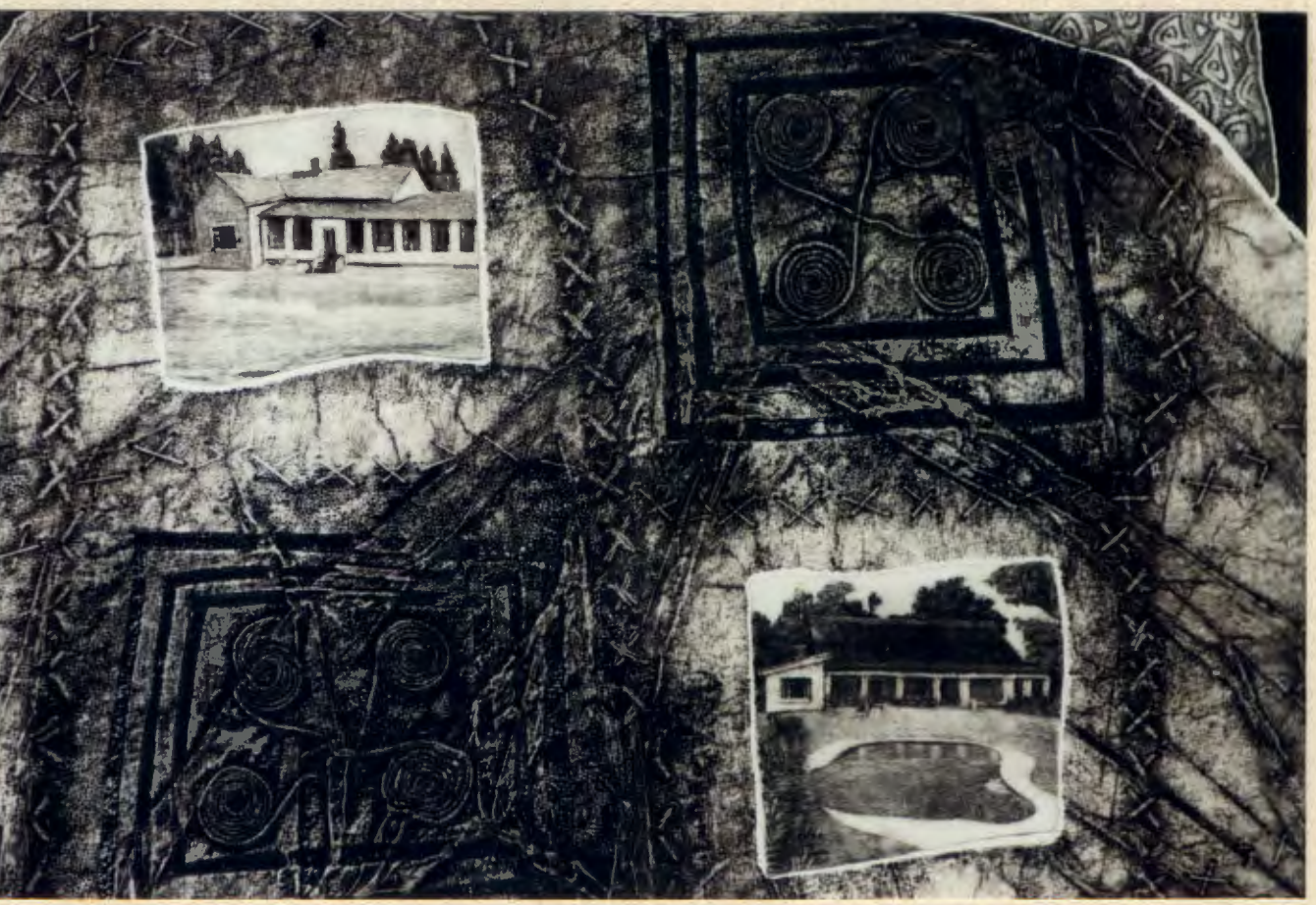
I have sewn 26 of the people and animals that I associate with my father onto his shirt, some of whom I have no recollection because they are his ancestors.

The goose in this section represents an income producing project of my mother's -- keeping geese to make duvets. Except during the breeding season from August to November, every six weeks we would catch them one by one, put a sock over their heads, and pluck the down from their chests, putting it into pillowcases. I remember the house as

always filled with these swollen pillowcases, and the one hundred or so geese always had pink featherless chests.

METHOD: Ten copper segments using hardground, aquatint, softground and burnishing produced this image.
SIZE: 99 x 172cm

THE CROCHET BLANKET



THE CROCHET BLANKET

Sitting on the couch is my mother with a chicken, myself with a box of small freshwater fish, and Irvan with a ghekko on his shoulder. This image is made up of nineteen separate copper units and three collographs. I remember having a brightly coloured crocheted blanket to keep me warm as a child. My cousin James had what we called a "security blanket" which he would drag around behind him while sucking his thumb. He refused to go to sleep without his special blanket. I have memories of my mother patiently trying to teach me how to crochet – it is a very therapeutic form of creation; slowly crocheting hundreds of little squares and then deliberately taking these small separate fragments and sewing them together into one whole and functional unit, effectively making something from nothing. The crochet blanket over our knees is for warmth, and embedded into it are sixteen small mezzotints of houses and landscapes associated with my family or with close friends. Over the generations, these are the "places" occupied frequently by my ancestors or immediate family, from holiday cottages to privately owned houses. There is also the Coleman's house from a farm very near to the one on which I lived for so long, where I remember Grant used to heat the boiled carrots in butter and sugar before serving them.

Above this image there are five small etchings -- one of a brown trout, and four different portraits. My two brothers, myself, and Irvan are portrayed on these circular plates. Beneath the crochet blanket is a scroll, it contains images reflecting souvenirs, people and animals from my past – each small image is accompanied by explanatory text. The scroll is a puzzling together of two copper segments.

METHOD: A total of nineteen etchings and three collographs makes up this image. The etchings combine processes of hardground, aquatint, burnishing, open-bite and mezzotint. The accompanying panels of portraits, fish and scroll utilise aquatint and hardground.

SIZE: 150 x 108cm

PORTRAITS AND FISH: 150 x 30cm

SCROLL: 150 x 30cm

SUSAN JANE PRATT

SUSAN JANE PRATT

This is an etching of my mother. It is made up of four different units that slot together Her face is of her younger self. I do not remember her looking like this, but I have seen photographs and cannot relate to the softness reflected within it. Sewn onto her skirt are some of the species of fresh water fish found in southern Africa.

From 1977 to 1996 my parents managed a freshwater fishery called Lazy River Fisheries on Darwendale Dam. Darwendale Dam is the third largest dam in Zimbabwe; I can remember my father telling me this proudly. When the drought at the end of the early eighties ended, the water level rose up from eighteen percent to full in less than three months, and the lack of fish forced my mother to find a second job. She chose chickens. I can remember how white they were, and I can remember my mother telling me not to make loud noises around them as they could die of fright. When the chickens were fully-grown my mother had to kill and dress them for sale. She placed them upside down with their heads sticking out of a cone, made them lose consciousness by hitting their heads with a knobkerrie, and then slit their throats to bleed them properly. I can clearly remember her clenched jaw and set expression. Ruth, the wife of the man who was employed to work in our house, put their bodies in boiling water to soften their pores and plucked out their feathers. When I was home from school I removed their innards -- the smell stays on your hands for about five days. When I was very young my mother used to read me a story about Preep the pigeon -- I do not remember the story, but I do remember the bird's beautiful feathers. I have given the chicken in my mother's arms similar feathers to those I remember in the illustrations of Preep.

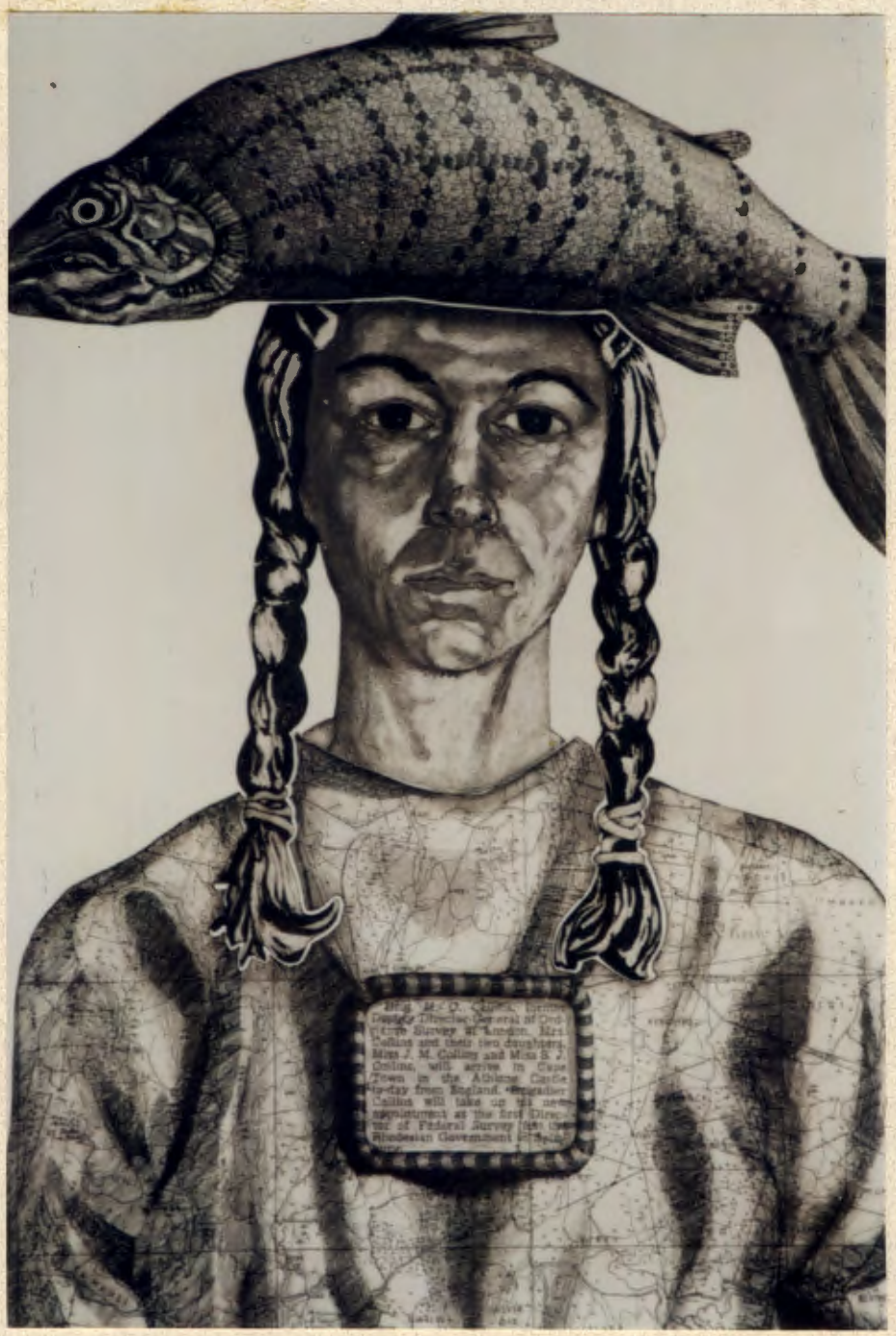
Beneath my mother is a landscape containing images of some of the geese whose chests we used to pluck.

METHOD: Hardground, softground impressions, aquatint and burnishing were used on four copper etchings. The landscape was made with hardground and aquatint.

SIZE: 65 x 138cm

LANDSCAPE: 65 x 34cm

SELF PORTRAIT



SELF PORTRAIT

This etching attempts to focus on all the travelling between Cape Town and Harare that I have had to do twice a year for the past six years. I have also tried to include other memories and "translated" memories of significant journeys taken by myself and family in the past. I would get on a bus or train and spend fifteen to twenty hours journeying to Johannesburg, then sit in the Rotunda for up to twelve hours waiting for my connecting bus or train because I was too scared to walk alone in central Johannesburg. The bus or train to Harare would then take a further sixteen to twenty hours. I always got excited when I saw my first Baobab tree, but for the most part the experience of travelling continuously for an average of three nights and two days was a very strange one to me.

I always travelled alone, and thus found myself among complete strangers, all from diverse cultural backgrounds – it felt like a kind of "no-man's land" where identities were suspended for the duration of the journey, and where I spent time renegotiating with the memories needed for my imminent destination. All of the people whom I met on these journeys appeared to do the same thing -- all we would talk about was where we were going, and from whence we came, as though the short period of time discouraged us from learning any more about each other. I was physically travelling through miles and miles of land, but psychologically re-ordering or storing the memories of where I had come from, and replacing them with the memories pertinent to the place at which I would soon be arriving. Once the Translux bus broke down outside of Johannesburg at one in the morning and we had to wait ten hours on the side of the road in the middle of "nowhere".

In this image I am standing in a trunk that is embossed with sections of my passport, letters from my mother and landscapes of my home. My shirt is patterned with a map and around my neck is the announcement in the Cape Times of my grandfather's arrival from England on the Athlone Castle Liner in 1956. The book in my hand is a list of the

passengers that were on the liner. This section comprises one collograph and eighteen etchings. Above it is an etching of a fat trout.

METHOD:The collograph combines the use of glue, sand, cutting and tearing. A combination of photocopy transfer, hardground, aquatint, and burnishing were used for the copper plates. The accompanying fish is made with aquatint and hardground.
SIZE: 71 x 142cm
FISH: 71 x 30cm

WILLIAM RICHARD PRATT

WILLIAM RICHARD PRATT

This is an etching of my brother who has lived in New Zealand for the last nine years. My brother is a wood-machinest and can make anything out of wood. When he was eight, William caught an enormous tigerfish on Kariba Dam – it was so big that the photograph of him with the special fish was printed in the Rhodesian Road Atlas.

Because he is eight years older than me, he would sometimes fetch me from boarding school on Fridays to take me home to my mother, but before leaving for the farm, we would first go back to his little flat in Harare where he would immediately put on the kettle and make himself a big pot of tea – William loves tea, and will drink up to four large cupfuls at one sitting. My father used to get irritated with him and gnash his teeth because he not only filled the cup to over-flowing before spooning in three sugars, so that a little bit of tea would always overflow, but he would then spend an inordinate amount of time stirring it.

My mother brought up all four of her children on Beatrix Potter. When she read "The Tale of Tom Kitten" to William he didn't like the illustrations, and most especially the faces of Samuel Whiskers and Annamaria. He took the book out one day and scratched their faces off the pages because they scared him so much. So when my turn came for Beatrix Potter, I was brought up on an image of Samuel Whiskers without a face.

The chair that my brother is sitting on is one from an old family photograph of someone who we don't know, but think may be from my father's side of the family. The texture on his trousers was made with a soft-ground impression from the interior roof lining of a car – creating the texture of lizard or ghekko skin. Below William is a teapot and some cups, and above him is an etching of one of the houses that my father's father lived in in Harare. The house was made with a combination of soft-ground drawing and hardground.

METHOD: A total of six segments of etched copper make up this image of William, hardground, softground impressions, aquatint, open-biting and mezzotint were used.

SIZE:70 x 115cm

HOUSE: 70 x 28cm

TEAPOT AND CUPS: 70 x 29cm

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