

Between Forever and Never:

The photograph as a bridge between past and present; memory and its fiction.

1981 - 2009

Jenny Altschuler 2009

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A documentation and substantiative commentray on the body of practical work presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Fine Art at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town.

by Jenny Altschuler, ALTJEN003.

Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town. October 2009



Compulsory Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work.

Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed by candidate

Signature: signature removed

Date: 09/04/10

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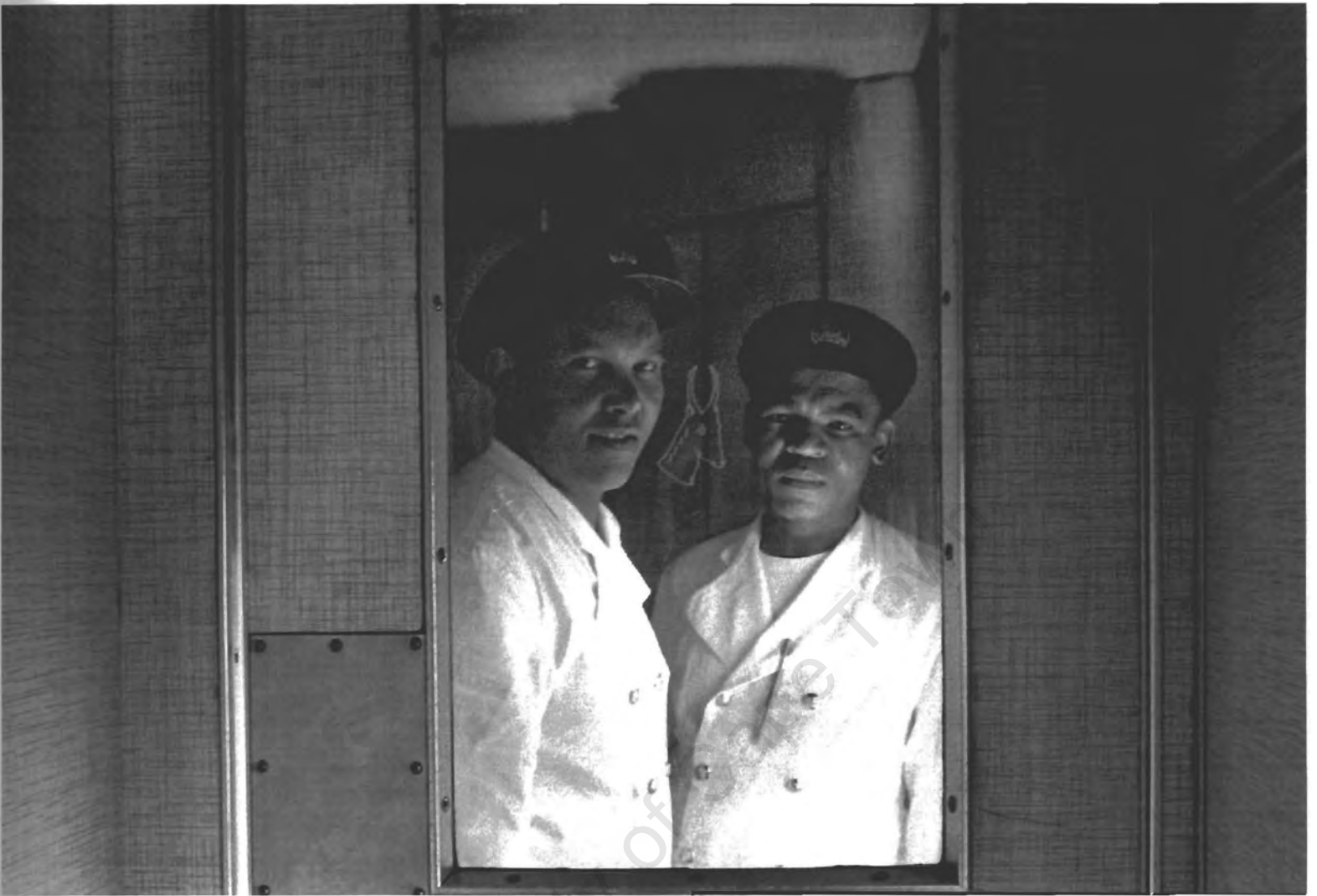


Fig. 2. *Railway Stewards in the Mirror: Trans-Karoo Train Journey*. 1981

Preface

In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes (1980: 64 – 66), describes the process of looking through his mother's photographs after her death. He weighs up how much of her he recognises in the images he comes across. He evaluates the versions of her that are portrayed and deduces that “*none seem to be really 'right':*” neither as photographic performances nor as existing recurrences of “*the beloved face*” that he carries in his psyche. He talks about trying to find her, and achieves only part satisfaction in pinpointing fragments in each image that seem to depict parts of the mother he knows. He concludes that by being partially true, the total representation in each image is false. He suggests that the physical details and direct documentations of his mother's physical self, do not contain the sense of her, as he knows her. Rosalind E. Krauss (1986: 196-209) substantiates Barthes' assertion that a photograph is empty of its original subject, a “*message without a code*”, in her argument that “*discourse, context and supplementary meaning*” are what fill the emptiness of the photograph.

Margaret Olin (2007: 132) challenges the common assumption that photographs are renditions of *what was really there*. “*Should we assume that what the photograph 'saw' was really there (in the event)?*” she asks, “*... Maybe what was there was the improved version... I mean that photographs distort. Getting from what's out there to what ends up on the photograph isn't just automatic... What was 'really there' that she has improved? And which should we accept as the truth?*” (Elkin 2007: 132-133). Olin alleges that a photograph is an edited construct and that the human psyche behind the lens causes the resultant photograph to escape an automatic, mechanical and objective copy of any original ‘truth’. Already as early as the 1960s Andre Bazin¹ proclaimed the photograph to be a version, a reproduction and an original all at once. The still photograph, according to Bazin, has objective access to the real while conjuring fiction. In *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* (1967) he claims that photography delivers hallucination while delivering fact (Bazin 1967: 241).

It is this partnership of fact and fiction that my MFA project investigates. It deals with aspects of the construction of memory and how the photograph influences this. This interest in what was there and what wasn't; as well as the an interest in the possibility of the photographic archive to reveal or not reveal truth, is what led me to investigate my own archives and the images made so many years back. In that period, 1981 -82, I took a series of journeys back and forth between Cape Town and Johannesburg on the Trans-Karoo long distance trains, photographing along the way. I had developed the negatives but they had never been through a post shoot application process² and I had not ever printed them. In returning in 2006 to this collection of negatives, I was interested in investigating the meaning of the photographs and in contextualising them, determining in the process, their possible connection and relevance to the present as well as to the past. In 2006 I felt the project was now open to new possibilities of representing meaning. There were interesting questions I wanted to explore. Although I had never been inclined towards extracting the ‘truth’ from an event, I was interested to gauge if I could get a sense of what had really been there then, if I went back to the sites I had previously photographed in? Does time affect the reading of content? Can photography render the moment on its own esteem without other additional frameworks?

¹ Film critic for French journal, *La Parisien Libère*, a writer in search of the essence of the still photograph in order to understand the moving image.

² After shooting, a certain amount of process, choices of materials, editing and textual contextualisation occurs in order to frame the reading of images. None of these had yet been applied to these images.

David Goldblatt³ (2007: 11-12) describes his delight on a sojourn in the 1970s to the Marico Bushveld area⁴, in confirming factual correlations between his own experiences and those of the Herman Charles Bosman's written creations. "It was exciting and strangely affirming to discover, as I went from farm to farm and met the local people, the extraordinary correlations between the facts, the spirit of the place, and Bosman's stories". Later, in the years leading up to 2007 and 2008, Goldblatt returned to the original sites of his own photographs to reshoot in projects such as *Intersections Intersected* and *In Boksburg*.⁵

Goldblatt's 'returns' resonate for me as my own process in this study has been similar, in revisiting the archive of earlier work as well as the physical site of the railways and trains where the earlier work was made, to reshoot for the *Platform 24* series. The procedure for this study has been to apply a research process to the content of those images from my own archives. This has entailed photographing similar subjects again (in the same territory); a process that has aimed to reframe the earlier work together with the newer work as one overall project. The main subjects of the project are people along the journey, in the sites of the railway stations and trains that travel through them across the South African landscape mainly between Cape Town and Johannesburg. My project has been concerned with assessing and engaging with these images and the physical sites they were photographed in. I have been interested in the relationship of these images to the arena of photography at that time, and to my own practices in the past and in the present. Part of my search has been for triggers that have allowed me to make new work, in the same environments, that picks up on visual questions and scenarios begun in the earlier work. I have sought a more current experience of the time and persons lost. I have attempted to compare and link past and present paradigms and find new ways to present and contextualise the earlier series. The work made in 1981-1982 has become a foil and a support for the 2006-2009 work, providing an important context for the period of newer photographs and projections. Revised readings of the older work, in correlation to the recent work, have clarified subtle nuances of meaning, and enhanced context by the continuation of themes and presences.

I have titled the visual component of this project, *Platform 24*, as this was the name of the precinct on the Cape Town station where I began the journey in 1981, and where the subsequent project 'trips' will end in 2009. Platform 24 is also the central point on the *Trans Karoo* schedule of routes through which the South African overnight trains journey to and fro. It was the platform of the first station built along this main line in the 1890s⁶. While *Platform 24* also uses the notion of the journey as a metaphor for a historical evolution of artistic production and ideas through natural time, it weaves in and out of the role of social and historical document. This highlights, at times more than others, the subjective capacity of memory, as does a memoir. I have tended towards accessing photographic scenarios that slip between fact and fiction and clarity and mystery, in an intentional clouding of documentary evidence and its neurotic belief in a singular factual truth.

³ This is a description from his essay, *Some Afrikaners Photographed, Some Afrikaners Revisited: Notes on how they came to be in Some Afrikaners Revisited*.

⁴ These are mentioned in Bosman's stories of the 1940s and 1960s collected in *Mafeking Road* (1947) and *Unto Dust* (1963).

⁵ The practice and its effects in relation to Goldblatt's series as well as other photographers' work and my own, are discussed further in Chapter 2: pages 23-29.

⁶ I elaborate on the history of the railways in chapter one of my dissertation.

As opposed to what Barthes and Krauss seem to suggest, some deduction pertaining to the context of the 1980s images can be settled upon through a number of factors surrounding the timing, authorship, and subject of the images:

A. The photographs are made in the early 1980s during the apartheid regime in South Africa, and contain visual details of place and persons that connect to visual and written textual records of socio-political condition, framing some reading in this way too. The obvious subject is the South African person posing in the environment of the railways that permits and forbids entry. The association with these territories is highly politicized because of South Africa's history of segregation within public spaces, at that time. Added to this is the knowledge of the government's labour policy, to upgrade the economic level of the 'poor whites' by employing them into railway and police force positions, leaving lower ranking positions for 'non-whites'.

B. The photographs made by me, can be compared to other projects photographed around this time, discussed and elaborated upon in Chapter 2 (pages 23 – 33), in the same documentary portrait-in-environment style.

C. The subject of the series is the South African traveller along the journey; dislocated from the norm of everyday life, in transit, and yet in some ways existing in a microcosm of the macrocosm of social and political power structures. The South African rail road is already connected to ideas of racial hardship, separation from roots, migration of labour and segregation of space. The spaces on the train are also both public and private, allowing the subjects to inhabit and 'possess', albeit temporarily, public space, as they would the private space of their own homes, but without the other ties and connections loaded in those locations.

The earlier images now, in the context of time transpired, histories unravelled and experiences endured, trigger different associations: 'memories', from those I had previously linked in my mind to the experience then. Some new, unexpected associations and understandings of things in the face of the extended timeline have arisen. This divergence may also be due to the fluctuating historical and personal perspectives towards society, power constructs, norms and photographic practices that have taken place since the 1980s.

The visual research is comprised of four interrelated areas of investigation around the theme of the journey through time and space, using the medium of photography in various ways.

1. *Discovery and Retrieval*: investigating an existing body of work concerned with the subject of the journey produced in the early 80's and critically interrogating, contextualising and presenting the images in a new context in the present.
2. *Return*: revisiting sites and concepts explored in the series of photographs from the 1980s. This was then used as the site for a contemporary artistic response:
 - I have made a set of new single photographs in old sites which refer to a past, or to a movement through time.
3. *Bridge*:
 - For this part of the project I have created bodies of work that conceptually and visually bridge the present and the past.
 - Juxtaposition of old and newer images in diptychs and triptychs.
 - Projection as a means to flatten time and connect past, present and future scenarios.
4. *New Horizons*: Letting go of the past and making independent responses to the journey.
 - Stitching of images in panorama style compositions.
 - Shooting through glass windows to create a layered effect.

Chapter one begins with a brief introductory history of the Cape Town railway station, which highlights the historical contexts of trains and stations. Past themes of migration and migrant labour systems are touched upon before the chapter offers two substantiating contexts for my making work on the sites of train stations. I discuss the psychological and symbolic aspects of the journey, including notions of evolvment, change and flux through time and space.

In Chapter two the concept of linking past and present is discussed as well as the idea of the collapse and cycle of time. The theme of *There and Back* and *Then and Now* is highlighted in relation to photographers who have recently created bodies of work around the process of revisiting the archives of their previous images and the sites photographed within them. I show how their processes, which have also included making new presentations of existing work, re-informs and influences previous readings of older work. I refer in particular to the work of Berni Searle, David Goldblatt and Santu Mofekeng in relation to time and returns to specific sites,

or significant moments in memory. The relationship between past and present and the general shift in South African photography from social documentary to personal memoir and concept based projects is discussed.

This chapter also highlights some conceptual and technical choices implemented in linking the past to the present. These include:

1. Returning to old sites and making new work as a means to bridge between past and present
Time frames, using the same equipment and materials.
2. Pairing and sequencing images in order to extend and flatten time and space – for example, in the use of diptychs, triptychs and later in the construction of loose stitched panoramas⁷.

Chapter three unpacks my use of the genre of street portraiture and the conceptual elements of my practice of photographing strangers in the environment in a short space of time.

Chapter four deals with the photographic methodologies employed in the conceptual and practical processes of linking the present to the past. It discusses the practical and technical methods used to affect the significances of meaning intended in the work:

1. The application of the split moment, through the controlled use of slow shutter speed, to suggest the fracture of the photographic moment into both the capture of time and the loss of the moment.
Blurring is also used as a means to create the association with movement, energy in flux as well as the idea of non material existence.
2. The use of projection to layer paradigms of past and present.
3. The choice of photographing empty spaces as a reminder of loss and presence.
4. The use of the panorama format to elongate an experience of time.
5. The use of the digital medium of photography and its manipulation-associated software programs.
6. The change over to colour to affect a more contemporary feel.
7. The use of the device of framing as a compositional and conceptual tool.

The conclusion sums up the central concepts underlying the production of the body of work as a whole and the themes underpinning *Platform 24*, as well as those located in each of the separate and interrelated bodies of work.

In addition to this dissertation I have produced an addendum which functions as a book of photographs. This serves the point of recording this body of work for the purposes of this MFA. I have chosen to present the project in a book because for me the book represents the journey more adequately than an exhibition. A book is portable in a way that framed photographs are not. What is more is that there can be a level of immersion in a book which is different to the level of the experience of work displayed in a gallery setting: one can control the conditions of viewing a book. Finally, a book has a clear beginning, middle and end and follows the form of a journey.

⁷These are panoramas that are not made with any panoramic hardware or accessories nor with panoramic software. The images used to construct this format were shot as single frames and synchronized later, in retrospect, alongside each other, to convey a conceptual expanse rather than record the geographical one, as well as to elongate the physical experience of the piece and allude to an extended time frame.



Fig. 3. SAR (South African Railways) to Johannesburg. Platform 24, Cape Town Station. Early 1980s.



Fig. 4. 16 year old Mother and Child: Trans Karoo Train Journey. 1981.

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Chapter One:

Some History of the South African Railroad

This chapter does not aim to be a comprehensive history of the South African railroad, as that is beyond the scope of this thesis. It aims instead to provide relevant historical background to this photographic research. For this reason it is necessary to provide an overview of the site itself and its important role in the history of South Africa, through the increasing influx of settlers at the Cape in the 1800s, the establishment of the gold mines, The Boer War, the apartheid era and the resistance from the 1950s onwards.

In the 1890s, when the railway line was extended and opened between Cape Town and Johannesburg, it took 47 hours to reach the Orange River (Fisher. 2002).⁸ A growing gold trade was thriving at the time of its opening, with people and goods being transported to and from the developing mines in Johannesburg. The port of Cape Town began *The Cape to Rand* route, as it was called, as well being the entry point through the sea access to the rest of the world.



Fig. 5. The first Cape Town station from the Castle of Good Hope side in 1865. (anonymous)



Fig. 6. The vaulted shed with glass roof, Cape Town. 1877. (anonymous)



Fig. 7. *Early Morning: Waiting on the Platform.* Cape Town Station. 2006. (Vaulted shed in view with part vaulted shed in view).

Controlling this access to the rail route was a powerful position to hold. The British imperialists under Cecil John Rhodes were anxious to harness this power as part of their intention to control Southern Africa. Conversely the Boers⁹ also used the trains and railway lines to hold and withhold entry to this railroad in order to sabotage the British rule (Kleingeld 2000).

⁸ Today it takes at least 26 hours one way and this is the same line I have been travelling for this project.

⁹ These were a group of descendants of Dutch farmers who left the Cape Colony to escape British rule.



Fig. 8. Boers during the *Boer War* posing with the train behind them. Anonymous.



Fig. 9. Soldiers for the British army also used the train as their symbol of power (anonymous).



Fig. 10. Kimberley station: Three SADF (South African Defense force) soldiers. Jenny Altschuler. 1981/82¹⁰

Cape Town, because of its position as a British colony was also a geographically strategic destination for adventurers and wealthy colonial visitors as a starting point on their way to explore Africa. Describing the experience of the voyager taking a steam train out of Cape Town station in the early to mid 1900s, Foster (2005: 296 – 315) noted that in many personal journals describing experiences through Africa and South Africa, voyagers would use the train as their central background. These accounts contribute to “*the spatial story of imperialism during the period when South Africa was emerging as a modern, autonomous nation*”. Although it is evident that these accounts have no further purpose but to describe personal memoir, they unsuspectingly reveal the construction of a cultural usurping of the South African landscape, serving as document of western white assumption of superiority. Perhaps the evidence of the construction of apartheid lies partly in these memoirs.

I found little trace, verbal or visual, of the personal memoir by the black voyager on the South African long train journey in this early period until the mid 1950s. Dorsay Can Themba, evokes an experience of the inner Johannesburg city train, in *The Dube Train*, written during this period for *Drum* magazine. In his sensual account Themba creates the same sense of danger outside the train as in his intense account of it’s inside (Themba c1955). The description suitably parallels the visual portrayal of the city train ride as related in Peter Magubane and Ernest Cole’s images of the 1950s¹¹, also taken for *Drum* magazine (fig. 13 and 14).

Magubane’s reportage photography of the 70s and 80s graphically depicted the political strife and violent confrontations on the South African ‘road’ as did the ‘struggle’¹² photographers of the 1980s using the camera as a tool of resistance against apartheid (Fox 2001). The train, although present in film and literature as a symbol of escape of the rural black African to the city¹³, does not have much representation photographically.

¹⁰ In the late 70s and 80s forced conscription to the South African Defence Force saw soldiers using the trains for journeys to and from military camps around the country, far from home.
¹¹ Cole and Magubane were later politically affected, for their social documentary images exposing the ills of apartheid. Cole chose self exile to America, dying a young pauper, penniless and ill and disillusioned about the possibilities of racial harmony. Magubane spent 5 years in prison, some in solitary confinement and later under house arrest.
¹² By struggle photographers I mean those photographers involved in the struggle against apartheid, such as the Afrapix collective: Gideon Mendel, Dave Hartman, Omar Badsha, Eric Miller, Guy Tillim and Paul Weinberg to name a few.
¹³ This represented the promise of greener pastures, politicization and resistance from the confines of tradition, rural poverty and insignificance. On the other hand the escape was also portrayed in novels and film media of the time, as a false escape, culminating in dystopia, from the semi-safe rural home to the trap of the apartheid city, 3rd class urban citizenship; exploitation of labour; loss of innocence and fall from morality to shame through prostitution, alcoholism and murder.



Fig. 11. *Leaving Johannesburg on the 'Jazz Train'*. Bob Gosani. 1950s.



Fig. 12. *Dolly Rathebe in her compartment on the 'Jazz Train' to Durban*. Bob Gosani. 1950s.

Fig. 11. and 12. photographed by Bob Gosani in the early 1950s for *Drum Magazine*, (Schadeberg 1994: 19-20) tell the story of the black celebrity performer in the traditional Drum style which mimics the staged Hollywood photograph. These musicians and dancers, separated from regular day to day existence in the South African city, by their careers, seem to escape the rough life, in the photographs of them in their Americanised outfits, on the long distance trains from Johannesburg to other cities such as Durban or Cape Town.

1950 saw the introduction of Population Registration, the Immorality Act and the Group Areas Act which legislated separation of different racial groups and forced removals of peoples from non-segregated areas into segregated suburbs and townships. Further segregation permitted entry only through separate entrances reserved for either white or 'non-white' persons, for example on public transport such as busses and train compartments. Photographs from the later 1950s and 60s show black people under intense discomfort through lack of decent amenities; sufficient scheduled rides; and lack of humanitarian consideration. Ernest Cole's photographs of migrant labourers arriving in Johannesburg, in the 60s, are among the few photographs of the slightly longer train journey into and out of Johannesburg to the townships in the rush hours before and after work.

Pirie (1970) refers to letters to the press by 'African' passengers complaining of overcrowded carriages, in years prior to the 1948 election of the Nationalist government. He attributes the overcrowded situations to the decrease in the number of carriages being available to 'African' passengers. He also suggests that segregation caused an easier roll over into a formal apartheid system by being in place already before and throughout colonial rule (Pirie 1992: 671-693).

In *House of Bondage* Cole describes the experience on these trains in the 1960s as 'nightmare rides', reducing the African passenger to a 'disenfranchised sub-citizen'. Cole captioned his photographs in detail, explaining their socio political context (fig. 12 and 14) (Cole 1967: 60-69).

Train Station, Johannesburg (fig. 13) by Peter Magubane portrays an overhead view of an overcrowded Johannesburg platform with fashionably dressed commuters patiently waiting to board. Seven years later, in 1967, Ernest Cole documented the increasing problem of overcrowding with people boarding the trains even if it meant endangering their lives. Such photographs have recorded the effects of the socio-political conditions on the inner city railways (Cole 1967: 68-69), but there are few images however which transcend the socio political document. Magubane's rendition of black people arriving at the Cape in 1960, suitcases still in hand, rushing to gain their first ever glimpse of sea, perhaps transcends the socio-political comment (Artthrob 1999), evoking a sense of abandonment of order and reason in the urgency of the commuters to fulfil their compulsion.



Fig. 13. *Train Station, Johannesburg.*
Peter Magubane, 1960



Fig. 14. *With no room inside the train,
some ride between the cars.* Ernest Cole. Early 60s.



Fig. 15. *First sight of the sea.* Peter Magubane, 1960.

By the early 1960s the station and the train had become symbols of apartheid: their signs and signposts restricting access were a visual manifesto of the system of rules and attitudes enforcing the rift between the races and the grossly imbalanced divisions of power. Separate entrances, benches and carriages led the passenger into spaces vastly different in condition and quality, even though closely adjacent in physical proximity (Makeka 2007).

The David Rhind Papers show copies of diagrams of trains and carriages, illustrating the different internal structure of the first and third class carriages. The third class train's facilities differ vastly from the first class, and although one assumes there must have been a second class train, there is no record of one (Rhind 1999). From the 50s until the early 1990s, toilets, benches, entrances and ticket offices had signposts decreeing who was permitted to use that facility.

Although the road has been a central site in South Africa's changing socio-political evolution, being "...an engine of change, a site of resistance, a symbol of both oppression and liberation, and a place of freedom of expression, ...one of struggle: from the bloody trails blazed by the early Dutch settlers to the taxi wars of today" (Fox 2001: 443). The train has been more of a 'visual metaphor...signifying movement, transition, crisis, freedom and escape' (Nuttall 2001: 125), as portrayed in South African films from 1949, such as *Cry the Beloved Country*.



Fig. 16a. Sign posts related to Railway Sites, Johannesburg Station. Ernest Cole. Early 1960s.



Fig. 16b. Station bench with apartheid sign. Anonymous. c 1980.



Fig. 16c. Platform Bench: Railway Stewards. 1981.

Nuttall asserts that "the visual meanings of migration by train are unstable". She substantiates this, saying that the speed by which the blurred images through the window pass, "plays with sight, potentially offering the thrill of powerlessness, which may be pleasurable or traumatic". The instability caused by the constant motion of the train's movement also psychologically subverts a static confident position because it causes the passenger to sway and lurch with its speed and turns. Lesley Marx (2001: 127-140) cites films that use the train journey as rites of passage for their protagonists¹⁴ and other characters playing out their South African socio-political stories, with the backdrop of images that speed past and landscapes that recede into or approach from distances (both physical and psychological). She suggests that in many of the South African films, the train becomes a vehicle of flux "into or out of the city, into or out of varying possibilities for discovery about the self..." (Ibid:138).

¹⁴ These include films such as *African Jim* (1949) and *Saturday Night at the Palace* (1987).



Fig. 17a. *The Third Class Carriage*.
Honoré Daumier. ca. 1863-65



Fig. 17b. *The train accelerates with its load of clinging passengers*. Ernest Cole. Early 1960s

The railway journey acts a symbol of escape though its flux from receding entry points to distant exit destinations, saving the characters. The alternate offering of the ideal of the destination is a state of dystopia, with the characters incarcerated in the journey as destiny, indicated in Nuttall's reading of powerlessness.¹⁵

In 1864 Honoré Daumier created two large studies of people in the 3rd class train carriage, as oil paintings. "*A poor family of three generations occupies the front bench. While the others sleep, the old woman is awake, wrapped in the closeness of her family and her reflections*" (Tower 2008). My own intent however is not of a social or political comparative study, and although these elements are often embedded in the layers of the readings, and are relevant, I have avoided an overt position in this area. The 3rd class train carriages of the 1980s trains were at the back and for 'non-white' passengers only, and facilities were sub standard. The trains were divided into two classes of carriages (1st and 3rd), the 1st class being for whites only. Train workers were mostly white and employed in a system that was intent on co-opting poor whites into railway and police positions in a government project to improve the economic level and status of their class.

25 Years later in 2006 two separate trains with unspoken class structures existed. The *Premiere Classe* cost R1,300 one way and the 'sitter' Shoshelozza Meyl, only R180. It seemed that little had changed. In 2009 there is a third train, the 2nd class *Tourist Class*, costing R350, while the first two still cost around the same. It is on this ride that I have witnessed the first real desegregated experience. It is worthwhile to note that these prices differ at various time of the year depending upon the season.

¹⁵ It is these opposite states of being of the passenger along the journey, that I refer to in the *Tinacaps* colour series, those of escape and incarceration, power and powerlessness over destiny, as well as the ideal and the dystopic scenario.

¹⁶ Honoré-Victorin Daumier was a prolific French caricaturist, painter, and sculptor, especially renowned for his cartoons and drawings satirizing 19th-century French politics and society.



Fig. 17a. *The Third Class Carriage*.
Honoré Daumier. ca. 1863-65



Fig. 17b. *The train accelerates with its load of clinging passengers*. Ernest Cole. Early 1960s

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¹⁶ Honoré-Victorin Daumier was a prolific French caricaturist, painter, and sculptor, especially renowned for his cartoons and drawings satirizing 19th-century French politics and society.

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Fig. 18. *Platform 24: Arrival and Departure. 1981 - 2007. Triptych.*

Chapter Two:

The Journey: There and Back

About 10 years following the 1994 elections and the official end of apartheid, a significant part of the subject matter in art was the review, rejection and reclassification of paradigms¹⁷ set up during apartheid. This resulted to some degree in freedom from the categories and boundaries of apartheid classifications: new readings of history and events were interrogated and reconstructed. While much of the rest of Africa had already begun to debate a post colonial discourse by the 80s, South Africa had only begun this process more purposefully after 1994. The mid to late 90s and early 2000s assessed 'interim themes' of Post Apartheid, Post Colonialism, and a general Post Past¹⁸ in a process of searching for new forms of identifying and understanding the South African artistic response. Artwork presented in exhibitions around the 10 years of democracy discussed new ideas of identification, 'reframing' and 'refiguring' in Post Colonial, Post Apartheid, global and diasporic South African contexts (Bedford 2004: 10, 25, 68, 128). Africa was still in question as being a place or a construct of the "...singular historical outlook of the West characterized by notions of divisive ethnicity, poverty and war" (Kelner 2007: 22).

John Picton, in *Made in Africa*¹⁹ (2005 55–57), comments on the statement by Atta Kwami, that the past is evident in all kinds of contemporary practice. Picton suggests that the evolvment of an autonomous identity would be difficult to achieve, suggesting that the past is embedded in the present as the century of colonial and Afro-Euro-American past relationships had already influenced present culture so deeply. Both Kwami and Picton seem to call for new contexts and inventions to guarantee a separate future identity, rather than to unpack the past. In a reversal of this concept, Simon Njami surmises that the African artist may always remain the foreigner in the art world, dependant upon acceptance from the global art community to be recognised. He suggests that in this way the artist is free to play the ethnologist, deconstructing the clichés the world has put in place and ironically using this same weapon back (Njami 2007: 62-63). Njami proposes that one way of constructing personal identity as an artist, is to identify one's milieu and establish a place in the global art context. The only other option he proposes is to psycho-analytically reassemble the fragments of the past and painfully work through its retrospective relationship with the present making work that responds to this relationship. It is this latter option which I chose to follow during the Masters program: to reassemble the conceptual, physical and artistic fragments of the past and its connection with the present. It is in this frame of mind, fragmented, yet compartmentalized, that my decision to go back in order to go forward, was made. I had been photographing for 25 years and wished to re-explore and interrogate my identity and context as a South African artist using the medium of photography. I decided to return to re-investigate the visual and conceptual territory of my photographic archives. This in turn led me back to the physical space of the railways.

One of the ways of accessing South Africa's past, is through the rich databases of archived information, photographic and other, in public and private collections. These archives contain a broad spectrum of viewpoints related from various historical, political and psychological standpoints, power structures and trauma. In the years between 2004 and 2009, this data has continued to be re-examined, redefined and relocated in new and different contexts. The need has persisted to investigate the comparisons, continuations, changes and general relationship between the cultural and artistic experience of apartheid and post-apartheid, in a broader evaluation of the changing constructs of history and storytelling. Post-apartheid artistic engagement using this kind of juxtaposition has blossomed over recent years with South African artists who employ photography as their medium, reflecting on the past.

¹⁷ Sets of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constituted a way of viewing reality during apartheid.

¹⁸ The past as a quarantined state (albeit to be critiqued and labelled) seen from the vantage point of a new separated state, a safer place of distance.

¹⁹ Source for the catalogue of the original exhibition of *Africa Remix: Contemporary Arts of a Continent*, 2005.

Sam Nhlengethwa was a young man when the apartheid era was dissolved. In 2004, while investigating his family's albums of personal images of rites of passage, snapshots of daily experience and records of social events, he discovered gaps in the relationship between these family photographs and the public archived historical data of the era they were taken in. On the other hand, it seemed to him that the visual and verbal stories of such an important era had become lingering paradigms still caught up in the country's emotional and psychological matter. In order to take ownership of the lost parts of his family's history, he decided to connect them to famous historical moments. Appropriating well known images of apartheid scenes and experiences from the archives of the 1950s issues of Drum magazine, he inserted pieces of the private archive, in order to match and redefine a personal experience and simultaneously reveal a historical context to his family's story. In *Glimpses of the Fifties and Sixties*, the collage of private and public experience is produced through the photogravure process. The new 'memories' contain new contexts which influence the manner in which they are read. (Nhlengethwa 2004). Nhlengethwa personalises communal history, while historically contextualising personal experience, proving the struggle against apartheid is his own intimate heritage, his own family's experience (Fig. 19 - 20).



Fig. 19. *Hard at work 1*.
Sam Nhlengethwa. 2003.



Fig. 20. *Pass Raid*.
Sam Nhlengethwa. 2003.

Similarly Berni Searle produced a body of work in 2005, titled *About to forget*, in response to black and white snapshots (taken during apartheid), from her family album archives. The artist painstakingly cuts out the silhouettes of family members from stencils onto crepe paper. In a videoed performance of the artistic process (in which coloured dye 'bleeds' from her cut out crepe representations of the characters in the photographs into water), Searle alludes to forgiveness of the past through the watering down of the deep orange-red colour, which historically symbolises anger, trauma and pain. The viewer is led to an idea that through the process, Searle is able to let go of the trauma of the past as the colour fades from the people-shaped crepe paper, into the reddening water, which symbolically desaturates the pain. "*The process of forgetting intertwines both presence and absence of memory*" (Stevenson 2005). In order to let go, it was necessary for her to return. In order for her to forgive, she is forced to remember. It is interesting to note that during the TRC hearings conducted in South Africa at this time, there was much deliberation around forgiving, forgetting and letting go as well as remembering, owning up and taking responsibility. However, in the end, it became more appropriate to forgive and remember rather than to forget.

Of all the works of this era that engage with the notion of the archive, I relate closest to those of David Goldblatt's from his *Intersections Intersected* (2008) series and the *In Boksburg* series (2009). In the exhibition of these works he partners images from his returns to the shooting sites of his photographic archives with the older photographs in order to reinterpret them²⁰. In *Intersections Intersected*, he is concerned with commenting on the extended dynamics between the two eras. For the *In Boksburg* series Goldblatt returned to his archive in order to re-evaluate and re-present the work. He also revisited the original sites in the town of Boksburg for a few newer contemporary comparisons (fig. 22-23) (Goldblatt 2009). For *Some Afrikaners Revisited* he returned to his archive only to re-edit. The new version is a fresh selection from the larger body of images, some never shown before. He admits that some prints are even different in their cropping as a different trend was popular then in 1979 (Goldblatt 2008). Here the theme of the South African landscape is revisited, in order to fulfill a desire to make more lyrical images, not bound as much by political documentary. Nevertheless he acknowledges that it is hard to make a non-political image in South Africa, as everything relates to and is affected by political dynamics (Goldblatt Walkabout: 2008).



Fig. 21a. Anonymous family album snapshot from which the crepe silhouettes in *Along the Way* were shaped.

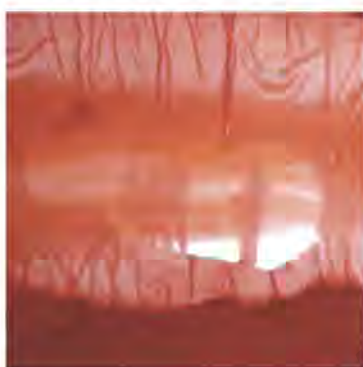


Fig. 21b. *Along the Way*. Bernie Searle 2005. Detail from triple projection video still from *About to Forget*.



Fig. 22. *In Boksburg town, corner of Commissioner and Eloff Streets*. David Goldblatt. 1979/80



Fig. 23. *In Boksburg town, corner of Commissioner and Eloff Streets*. David Goldblatt. December 2008.

Intersections Intersected presents black and white images of landscape and architectural structures photographed in the apartheid years, from 1965 to 1990. These are juxtaposed as if in diptychs, with larger colour prints shot in large format negatives over the past 5 years, 2003-2007 and digitally printed. The later images make visual connections with the original earlier images but also present other visual and conceptual associations that reference the long term subtler effects of apartheid. In Fig. 24 and 25, from *Intersections Intersected*, broken promises of the post apartheid government recall imbalances of apartheid, only now the 'opposition' is less clear, and the particular problems enlarged. Long term signs and symbols that are residual in the landscape as a reminder of the legacy of apartheid emerge in these images. They highlight cycles and evolvments that have occurred of their own accord over time, as well as those that have been forced unnaturally into or out of the landscape through apartheid strategies. There is a combination of the inevitable and of steered destiny.

²⁰ My project, *Platform 24*, was begun 2 to 3 years before Goldblatt exhibited his works that deal with returning to the archive and the site of previous photographic engagement.

²¹ For this exhibition Goldblatt has returned to his negatives of the series and, in addition, has printed several previously unpublished images. He has also returned to Boksburg to photograph the town in its present incarnation, and a selection of these large-format colour prints will be included on the show. Seen side-by-side with the black and white prints, the colour works exemplify the complexities of past and present that continue to shape life in South Africa" (Stevenson 2009.)

In his forward for the later publication of the revisit of his earlier series *In Boksburg* Goldblatt comments, “*Boksburg is shaped by white dreams and white proprieties. Most of its townspeople pursue the family, social and civic concerns of respectable burghers anywhere, while locked into a deep and portentous fixity of self-elected legislated whiteness. Blacks are not of this town*” (Goldblatt 2009: 3). “*For Goldblatt, the ultimate nature of this social order was embalmed in the insane complexity of the Group Areas Proclamations for Boksburg*” (Stevenson 2009). Goldblatt creates his scenes with great attention to sharp focus in a deep ‘depth of field’ and a cold clarity of factual detail. This holds the ‘objectivity’ of societal critique in focus as well.²²



Fig. 24. *A new shack under construction, Lenasia. Extension 9. Transvaal.* David Goldblatt. 5 May 1990. From *Intersections Intersected*.



Fig. 25. *Stalled municipal housing scheme, Kwezinaledi, Lady Grey, Eastern Cape.* David Goldblatt. 5 August 2006. From *Intersections Intersected*.

Svea Josephy (2005) quotes Neville Dubow, maintaining that post-apartheid photographers began to question their own “*position of committed, socially critical documentary*” practice after the demise of apartheid. In her essay she notes a general evolvement in specific cases towards ‘new manifestations’ of and ‘more creative responses’ towards documentary narrative (Josephy 2005: 6-7). This is also apparent in the move of the reportage documentary image into the fine art world, from the 2000s. Although Goldblatt has never succumbed to photoreportage, his bodies of work have been more adventurously presented, in the gallery space, suggesting a more conceptual framework for their readings.

The exhibition *Then and Now* (2007) tests the points put forward by Josephy by showing continuity between the different time frames for some photographers. Curated by documentary photographer, Paul Weinberg, the exhibition showcases a selection of apartheid and post 1994 work by eight established South African documentary photographers²³. Although the photographers have not created partnerships of old and new work nor rephotographed in older sites of photographic engagement, an essence of their concerns within their photography, in both the past and present periods of work, is represented. There have been formal changes in the medium in general as well as conceptual and contextual shifts in the South African arena, although some underlying continuation of sensibilities around social issues is apparent. Weinberg comments in an online interview that David Goldblatt’s work, for example, “*continues to be driven by the same imperatives*” (of concern around values) as those driving his earlier work, and that many of the photographers experienced an important continuity between the photographs they made then and the work they do now (Weinberg 2008).

²² These include Paul Weinberg, David Goldblatt, Guy Tillim, Eric Miller, George Hallett, Graeme Williams, Cedric Nunn and Giselle Wulfsohn.

²³), on the other hand, have been more interested to undermine clarity and cause doubt, mystery and a sense of displacement from the historical experience.

“...The dilemma is how to deal with the memory of the past. For instance: who owns this memory? What is re-remembered (re/membered) and how?...” (Mofokeng 2000)²⁴

In 1997 South African photographer, Santu Mofokeng, began to travel to international sites of well-known 20th Century traumas in order to investigate its residues within these significant places which had been revisited, written about and photographed in other contexts, by researchers, historians and descendants of both perpetrators and victims. Mofokeng intended to link his own endurance of the ordeal of apartheid, to other sites of trauma, for example those experienced in Auschwitz and Ho Chi Minh City, and by photographing them with questions in mind.



Fig. 26. *New Year's Eve in Krakow.*
Santu Mofokeng, 1997/8.



Fig. 27. *Auschwitz train Station, Poland.*
Santu Mofokeng, 1997/8.



Fig. 28. *Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.*
Santu Mofokeng, Late 1990s.

By beginning his photographic project on Robben Island, South Africa, and re-entering it in Auschwitz, Poland and again in Ho Minh City, Vietnam, Mofokeng points to world wide parallels in the experiences of trauma, racism and war crimes. A psychological cycling of time and linking of place occurs²⁵, plotted by the elongated sequence of times of the shoots and by the traumatic dynamics of the past and present occurrences in the geographical sites chosen. Mofokeng opens a re-examination of the possibilities of moving on by forgiveness and forgetting. Forgetting is alluded to by the fact that everyday life continues in these places where horror was once rife.

The viewer is faced with the questions that are opened by the juxtapositions of the images. “How does landscape contain the horrors it has witnessed? How does a landscape, or a photograph of a landscape memorialize trauma?” He asks, “Can a physical site lose the marks that trace its’ experience of death and disaster?” The association questions if people can ever forget (Godby 2006:74). In *Nightfall of the Spirit* (Mofokeng 2000: 80-116), and in his ongoing body of work, *Chasing Shadows* (Mofokeng 2007:83), Mofokeng has often chosen to shoot at night when clear vision is inaccessible and only certain details appear while others recede. The misty night atmosphere and the motion of people passing by enhances the eeriness of the places. Figures are blurred, in opaque silhouette or missing (fig. 26 - 28), drawing attention to balances between presence and absence, and a sense of dis-ease within the ease of mundane daily living.

²⁴ Mofokeng’s statement for his exhibition, *Nightfall of the Spirit*, in 2000, at the Foto/Graphik Galerie Käthe Kollwitz in Berlin.
²⁵ This occurs in my own practice.

Mofokeng's methods for alluding to the past interest me although in my own work, I am not dealing with trauma. I am however also suggesting that landscape retains and forgets aspects of histories. In the recurring scenarios taken in different eras, the mysterious nature of memory and its subjective manifestations within time, are alluded to. Like Mofokeng I use low lighting conditions, steam and mist, enabling a choice of the use of slower shutter speeds which cause the sense of motion in parts of the image.²⁶

In my own practice:

Although I am not facing the same person years later, the characters that come before my lens are types as well as individuals, complex personas, intensified through the comparisons and similarities linking them to a larger journey. I have not been so interested to be an onlooker, but rather in making images that access intimacy and personal connections with strangers in a short space of time. The resulting portraits focus on the psychological and emotional space, which eludes capture to a certain extent, enhancing the idea of transit and dislocation. This liminal²⁷ context is set up by the recurring frames of the bench, window, exit and the corridor or platform, locating the subject in transit spaces, borders between stationary points, and in the private capsules that my subjects inhabit. Although there is no complete escape from the historical reality, the subjects seem to travel a parallel psychological journey. This sense is enhanced by the different time frames, repetitions of backdrop and suggested cycling through space and time, linking the experience into one sequence.



Fig. 29. *Compartment F: Trans Karoo.* 1981.



Fig. 30. *No Exit: Shoshelozza Meyl.* 2006.



Fig. 31. *Platform 24: Couples on the Bench.* 1981.



Fig. 32. *Women on the Bench: Waiting for the Shoshelozza Meyl.* 2006.

In the juxtaposed images, for example in the triptych, *Platform 24: Arrival and Departure. 1981 – 2007* (fig. 18), as well as in the 'loose' diptychs (fig. 29 -30 and 31 -32) the photograph with the earlier date acts as an entry point to the site, to the record and to the memory. The photographs, presented loosely as diptychs or as triptychs of the journey, incorporate the experience of past, present and future within the circumference of personal and public lived occurrence. This understood link between the frames causes a bridge through time and memory through association of the obvious commonalities present in the titles as well as in the particular settings which frame both moments. The more recent images encourage the flux of the subject to the present and maybe even further forward into a future, but the cycle returns back and forward again in time, cycling incessantly, as there is no disappearance of the first image as there would be in a movie or video. Flux also occurs between 'states of seeing', (namely between the inner and outer experiences

²⁶ These elements are elaborated upon on pages 40 and 41.

²⁷ Liminality is discussed further in Chapter 4. (page 40)

of life).

Tension is created between the physical and psychological states, for example, on the bench, or at the window, as in fig. 29-30, 31-33 and 44 -46. Readings are aimed at slipping between being on the bench of Platform 24: on the South African train journey, and on the bench of time: along the journey of life. The linking of different states of experience as well as different timeframes, in retrospect, creates new contextual options, and diverts meaning to some comparison which may draw attention to elements of evolvment, regression, and transformation.

New possibilities of interpretation arise and new meanings are proposed. In Platform 24 a bridge is created between the past and present, through the presentation of people in the same places, on the same platform and trains, 25-28 years apart. The territory of engagement shifts between the geographic space of the railways and a dislocated liminal space in which the characters cycle through time. A set of two triptychs presents sequences of frames made at different periods of the project. *Platform 24: Arrival and Departure 1981 - 2007* (fig. 18) attempts to create a sense of the disappearance of time, using photographs across a quarter of a century, that increasingly blur across the sequence. Time speeds away and the train, in the act of rushing out of the station, reflects its surrounding environment, and seems to take with it the station, the waiting people and the platform. These sequences attempt to forge the feeling of an extended time frame of endurance and a sense of shifting states (to do with geography and states of being of the subjects) across the panels.



Fig. 33. *The Corridor of time, 1981 - 2007*. Triptych

Through the repetition of some elements, i.e. the physical location and the format of the figure in the environment, and the disappearance of others, as well as the application of slow shutterspeeds and low lighting conditions I attempt to create the illusion of the flux of matter through time. The representation of the platform and the corridor seem to disappear as their two dimensional details blur and fade. The progression from the clear image to an unclear one is also an attempt to allude to fading memory and the elusiveness of time. I am grappling with a way to inject the feel of a change of dimension so that the viewer can experience the different timeframes (1980s and contemporary), simultaneously. In fig.33, below, the physical location repeats itself across the sequence, while the atmosphere changes with the disappearance of other elements. Here there are three different experiences of the corridor, with three very different stories. The corridor as the constant subject, is witness to this evolution and endures, through change, weathering in this dystopic scenario and seemingly on the way to extinction. The last frame portrays a view inside a discarded train. Other sequences, as in the colour panoramas, comment on a less degraded outcome of time, although mortality is a veneer of interest, layered within the study, and suggested with the allusion to loss and absence in certain works.



Fig. 34. *Woman in the Mirror. Station toilet before the ride.* Early 1980s.



Fig. 35. *Head Steward at the Corridor Window.* 1981.

University of Cape

Chapter Three:

2 Minute Intimacies



Fig. 36. *Hod Carrier*
1928. August Sander.



Fig. 37. *The Americans*,
Sophiatown. Bob Gosani. 1954.



Fig. 38. *Farmer's son and his nursemaid*,
Marico Bushveld. David Goldblatt. 1964.



Fig. 39 and 40. *Park Station, Joburg*.
Paul Weinberg. Early 1980s.

The idea for *2 Minute Intimacies*⁴⁰ evolved out of an earlier series I had been working on from 2003 to 2006, called *People I have Never Met*. Both series' admit to the lack of personal closeness and intimate relationship with the subject in any sphere other than that of the photographic experience, before and after the moment of shooting. These works draw attention to the enigmatic character of the camera - stranger relationship that forms during the relatively short liaison of the street encounter, on which street portraiture³¹ is based, and sometimes the depth of the photographic seduction of the subject within such a short duration of time. However, they also intend to consider the easy exploitation of strangers by photographers who publicise intimate details of a subject they have barely spent time with³². *2 Minute Intimacies* uses the genre of the humanist social portrait³³ already well established in the early days of apartheid in South Africa within street portraiture. This type of portrait often documents and describes strangers in the environment who on some level encapsulate social roles and conditions. Pam Warne, writing about photographers who have made portraits within the "tides of history and social conflict" in South Africa, points out that "Even where the subjects compose themselves for the camera they are not doing it as a performance of 'self-commemoration', but as actors on a social stage not of their making" (Warne in Bedford 2004: 96). It has always fascinated me how the practice depends upon the co-operation of strangers for a short time, often revealing private and sensitive information about personal character and identity, in public, communal and political territories, through the photographer's portrayal of the subject's pose, mannerisms, physical attributes, and social standing.



Fig. 41. *Trans Karoo: Mother and Daughter*. 1981.



Fig. 42. *Platform 24: Railway Steward at the window*. 1981.



Fig. 43. *Reflections 1*: 2009.

Susanne Holschbach in *The Pose: Its Troubles and Pleasures*³⁴ purports that the core principle of the 'pose' in a portrait is that of allowing the subject to "reveal something about his self-perception and his social status". She states that the pose is "at once a conscious attitude and an involuntary expression of psychic disposition and social norms" (Holschbach in Eskilden 2008: 172-173). The portraits in *2 Minute Intimacies* are of strangers who I have come across at various times at the station and on the trains during the two distinct periods recently and in the 1980s. Tensions are created by the unexpected similarities and incongruities in the photographs. I intend that the viewer might search for signs of social change, change in ownership of these transit territories and for a gauge of the changing dynamics of the relationships of the people from the juxtaposed eras to the spaces they inhabit. The visual detail gives little away however, when one looks for similarities and differences between the recent ones and those made in the 1980s. For example, some socio economic elements found in the apartheid era occur in both images while at other times it is difficult to make comparisons.

⁴⁰ These were photographed in black & white in 1981 and 2006 and in colour in 2009.

³¹ The (train) subject matter would have been unknown people in the social environment, photographed as symbols of the 'everyman' (eg. David Goldblatt and Paul Weinberg, fig. 36-40). The range of photographers using this genre during apartheid is great and the purposes varied.

³² An example of this exploitation might include photographs of the poor, (traumatized, ill or disenfranchised). Conversely it can be argued that photography of this genre can be used as a humanitarian tool for the purposes of uplifting 'lower' classes of people. In these cases the genre can be seen as humanist.

³³ Humanism was a term first given to the mid 20th Century concerned photojournalists, who believed that photography can perform a genuine reforming function and effect change as a vehicle of universal moral aspiration..

³⁴ Susan Sontag (1876-1964), whose lifelong project, "Man in the Twentieth Century", portrayed the regular German on the street, and W. Eugene Smith (1918-1878) are among those notable for their sensitivity and deep moral concern with which they treated their subjects.

³⁵ This essay was written for the catalogue and 2008 exhibition, *Street and Studio: An Urban History*

In *2 Minute Intimacies* my method in accessing the co-operation of strangers and obtaining some kind of permission is not necessarily verbal, but perhaps is accessed through body language, an inviting look or a nod of the head. In fact I attempt not to speak much and to keep the 'stranger' relationship alive, so that the connection remains a highly intimate photographic one but not a personal. The subjects remain people I have never met, at least not in any other manner than photographic. I avoid conversation or light 'chit chat' trying to learn no more about the characters in front of my lens, except that which reveals itself on its own or is volunteered without prompt. In this way I am assured that it is the subjects' relationship with what they feel or think photography will provide for them, for the present, for posterity, for their ego, and not my personal relationship with them that drives the portrayal. I intensify the dynamic that keeps them strangers, avoiding any other intimacy, except that which they volunteer towards the camera's offering of the potential world eye of posterity. I intensify this nature of the street portrait procedure that seems to access some sense of essence in a short space of time.

Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Anne Michael claim that "*Cultural theorizing with its emphasis on separation and segregation has been based until recently on the following tendencies: the over-determination of the political, the inflation of resistance, and the fixation on race, or more particularly on racial supremacy and racial victimhood as a determinant of identity. In its adoption of these paradigms, South Africa has projected itself as different, as special and as unique ... as dislocated from the African continent, as not African*" (Nuttall 2001: 1-2). *Platform 24* is concerned with evoking the essence of characters; cameos of people found along the journey. It does not purport to voice for those who cannot speak, nor attempt the story of victims of disenfranchisement, however the association may be formed with this kind of reading in spite of my influence. In my framings of the scenes, degrading signposts have disappeared and the subjects seem at ease in their environments, as well as having equal opportunity to each other to pose and present their selves for posterity, to the eye of the future beholder.

It is interesting to consider the relationship of my own identity to the qualities of the representations forged in partnership with the subjects. I am female and white and have photographed men, women and children of all races, through this project. I have attempted to be vigilant about respecting my subjects across the board, as well as aiming to provide a space for the them to have some power over my representation of them, with them gazing back strong and steady, however this is a debatable issue, as in the end I never knew them and all is only surmised. Added to this is the fact that they cannot see my framing nor be sure of the exact moment I have chosen to press the shutter. The people play out their characters within the constructs of the photographs, however this role is not without its socio political significance, and the subject acts both as type and as individual, symbolising one or more groups that they may represent as the well as the particular³⁵.

The railway environment offers positions such as *on the bench* (Fig. 44 – 46, page 37), *at the train window* (Fig. 47 -49, Page 38), and *in the corridor*, (Fig. 50 – 52, Page 38) where portraits can be framed. These positions seem to harness qualities and elements that stand as metaphors for various psychological states of being along the journey. While the approaches of different photographers, making portraits in South Africa may be different, "...the 'gaze' is frequently incorporated as a potent device in the transfiguration of the African self from object to subject" (Firstenberg in Warne in 2004: 100). The use of these approaches causes a divergence from the documentary treatment of the humanist portrait, towards a more symbolic reading.

³⁵ The character in Fig. 44 represents the young, black, male, working class adult. He also represents the train worker as the individual with particularities of personality and character, as well as the voyager along the journey.



Fig. 44. *Railway Steward*. 2006.



Fig. 45. *Platform Bench: Woman in White*. 1981.



Fig. 46. *Before the Journey: Platform 14, Johannesburg Station*. 2009.

The first two series', made in 1981 and 2006, reference each other, as the 1981 works are reconceptualised and partnered o in close proximity on exhibition. The mood of a past continued in the present is set by the effect of the black and white film medium and by the repetition of poses. A tension between linear and cyclic time modules is created. The subjects, though different people, are almost in the same stances and positions in both time periods, and many other elements, for example the architectural and background elements, seem to have frozen. Still time has moved on in a linear mode from then to now with the images dated 25 years apart. There was indication of evolution, signs of flux, in the environment of these spaces of transit. Elements of time passing and approaching were very apparent to me when making these photographs. These included the sounds of the wheels turning and the effect of window scene after window scene flashing by, continuously repeated. In seconds vistas would appear and disappear, and the platforms would fill with emptiness and then with reappearances of people, trains and bustle.

What also seems significant at this stage is that strangers in public places would allow my camera and I a certain amount of intimacy within a very short space of time. *2 Minute Intimacies* plays with this dynamic of accessing a complex portrait in a few minutes. The route's territory is filled with sites in which people position themselves within the physical space of the railways that parallel psychological states of being along the evolving journey of life. These outdoor 'studio sites', on the bench, at the train window, along the corridor, in the compartment and on the platform, are points at which I have made the portraits.

In Fig. 47-48 young females are stationed at windows with their mothers in the background. The train seems to be a protective space and both images emit an increased sense of this in the presence of the mother. In *Mother and Daughter: Compartment H*, the window is open. The young woman is flanked by a mother figure who seems interested in the photographer's relationship with her daughter. In *Mother and Daughter: Compartment Window*, the young girl is far more engaged with the photographer who is reflected in the glass, however the mother seems less invested in the photographic moment. *Four Heads: Train Window, Carriage 6 Cape Town Station* (Fig. 49) presents a more uncomfortable view of a family at one small window. The image suggests an impending uncomfortable ride when personal space is minimal. The child as well as the adults appear trapped, seeming to have no agency in their position along the flow of the journey.

The Compartment Window:



Fig. 47. *Mother and Daughter, Compartment H.* 2006.



Fig. 48. *Mother and Daughter, Compartment Window.* 2006.



Fig. 49. *Four Heads: Train Window, Carriage 6.* 2006.

The Corridor:



Fig. 50. *Empty Dining Car: Man behind the glass door.* 2006.



Fig. 51. *Couple in the Corridor: Premier Classe Ride.* 2006.



Fig. 52. *Three Man and Newspaper: Premier Classe Ride.* 2006.

Waiting on the Platform:



Fig. 53. *Friends before the Ride.* 2006.



Fig. 55. *Late Train, Platform 24.* 2006.



Fig. 54. *Family with their Luggage. Platform 14, Johannesburg Station.* 2009.

The Static Platform vs Moving Elements:



Fig. 56. *Young Girl on Suitcase.*
2006.



Fig. 57. *Platform 24: Letting go.*
1981.



Fig. 58. *Platform 24: Trolley Man.*
2006.

The Compartment: Black and White:



Fig. 59. *Mother and Daughter, Compartment D.*
Trans-Karoo Train Journey. 1981.



Fig. 60. *Old Man and suitcase at the Window.*
Trans-Karoo Train Journey. 1981.



Fig. 61. *Grandfather and Grandson, After Maitjiesfontein.* 2009.

The Compartment: The New Colour Series:



Fig. 62. *Shoshelozza Meyl: Mother and Daughter.*
2009.



Fig. 63. *Reflection III: Knitting the Landscape.*
2009.



Fig. 64. *Night Ride with Newspaper.*
2009.

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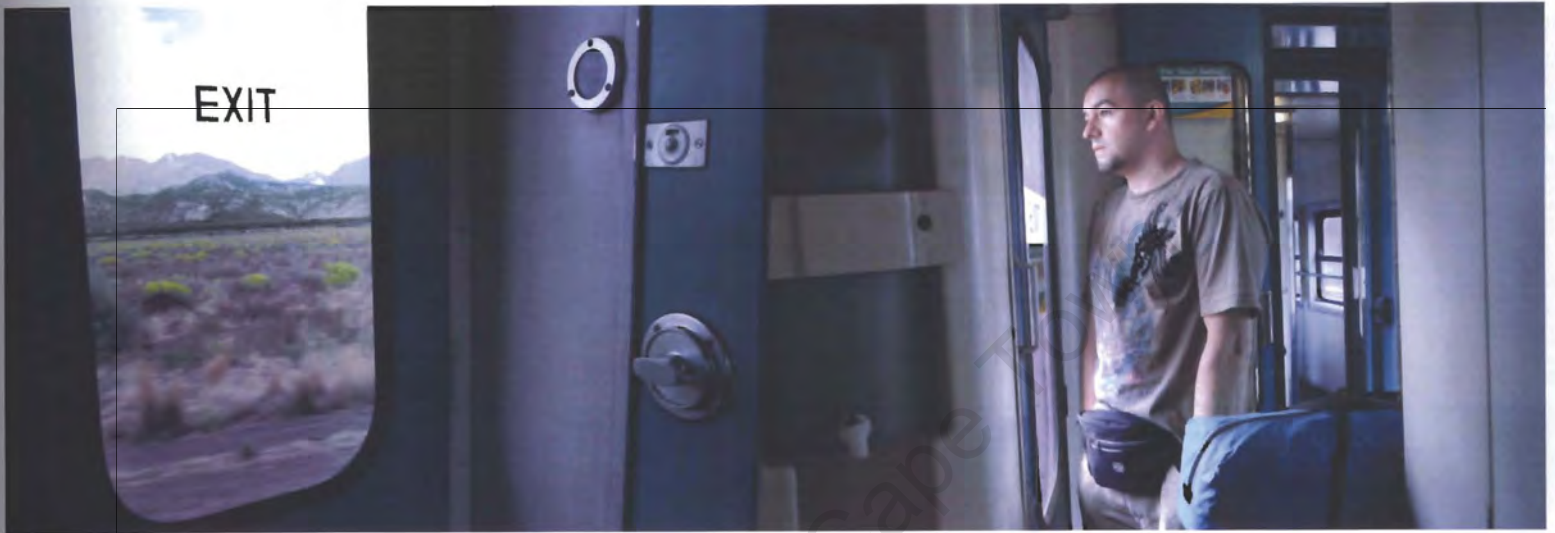


Fig. 65. *About to Return: Just Outside Wellington*. 2009

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Chapter Four:

Methodologies

The application of the Split Moment to allude to time captured and time passed by:

This technique uses the slower shutter speed as well as the freezing of static details to highlight the idea of capturing a moment in time but also to simultaneously acknowledge the impossibility of stopping time. A balance between states of transit and flux on the one hand and those of momentary clarity or rest on the other, are implied in the application of blurring on part of the image. Perhaps what is suggested is that *life* escapes entrapment and photography can only capture something else; some version, a construct which may look similar but is not life. This loss, or death of the original moment, references Barthes theory that a photograph records death not life. Barthes argues that photography is "...the medium within which we experience the reality of death in the modern world" (Allen, G. 2002). Barthes maintains that every portrait memorializes a person (whether they are still alive or already dead), and what is there in the image, is "*the return of the dead*" (Barthes 1981: 9). Barthes identifies the essence of the photograph as: the that-has-been (Albergate 2003: 2).

In the images in which I have employed this technique, the unsharp and/or blurred details allude to the unstoppable passing of time, (escaping capture and the freezing of the photographic moment). While the static parts of the image allude to the realities of the present. The loss of time and/or memory is also evident in the loss of frozen clear detail.

"How foolish of me to believe that it would be that easy. I had confused the appearances of trees and automobiles and people with reality itself, and believed that a photograph of these appearances to be a photograph of it. It is a melancholy truth that I will never be able to photograph it and can only fail. I am a reflection photographing other reflections within a reflection. To photograph reality is to photograph nothing." (Duane Michals 1984).

Many understandings of photography relate in some way to description and document of physical appearance of the world, people, places and objects. Duane Michals does not attempt to copy the world, but rather to conjure and communicate his sense of the invisible and intangible, veering from the material and external manifestations of reality. Intending to make the intangible aspects of life visible, Michals uses low lit spaces (forcing slower shutterspeeds) which cause the blurring of anything that moves within the image. The background contexts remain static and often sharply defined because of the small apertures used in order to compensate for slow shutterspeeds. This separates the blurry, energetic non material substance from the static, materially fixed physical surroundings. The emphasized different states make intangible aspects like that of chance, dream and the spirit visible, "...using the quintessential documentary medium (photography as it was defined) best known for its faithful description of the tangible world" (Frizot 1998: 677). I too choose to define the intangible by comparing and contrasting it with the detailed, sharply focused tangible, concrete world alluded to by the frozen areas of an image as in Fig. 65-70. According to Mary Warner Marien (2002:355-356) slow motion techniques and sequencing, as applied by Michals, access flux of energy and time, "...presenting reality as a fluid journey between exterior and interior experiences". For me, the reality of what has passed and what is now present is not bound by the physical details visible and I seek to make visual a reference to the presence of the less tangible and the transitional.



Fig. 66a. *Returning Home, after visiting Migrant Mom.* 2006.



Fig. 66b. *Early Morning: Young Girl in White Nightgown.* 2006.



Fig. 67. *Smoke Break, Before the Ride.* 2006.



Fig. 68. *Death Comes to the Old Lady.*
Duane Michals. 1969.



Fig. 69. *Announcing Dinner.* 1981.



Fig. 70. *Walking through.* 2006.

The use of Projection:

Liminality and Transience - accessing the non-material in a material world.



Fig. 71. *Empty Window 1: Shoshelozza Meyl Carriage.* 2007.



Fig. 72. *The Return: Head in Steam.* Photographed projection of 2006 image on empty shedule board. 2007.



Fig. 73. *Projection onto roof of Station.* 2007.

In the Buddhist concept of the *here and now*, the present is meant to be all encompassing. The past and future can only be affected and dealt with by being in touch with the present. However it is the level of consciousness that moulds the meaning and manner of existence. In order to reassess the past, I have brought it into the present. I have re-issued versions of the experiences in new photographic images that mimic and correspond with the 1981 works, in order to reinvestigate and complicate this notion of human consciousness and existence. In 2007 I conducted a series of experiments with projections on the Cape Town Station which I called *The Return*. Although this performative aspect and its documentation is not part of my final exhibition, I think it is viable to discuss it here as a process which has informed my thinking. The projections were beamed into a number of sites on the station. These refer to a time gone by and the loss of the original, (person, period, moment). The representation of subject, (who is not in the present at all), appears as a transparent beam of light, a spectre, returned in time. The projected images have been photographed again as light portraits, giving evidence that a version of the subject has re-occurred in time. The projected images of the long forgotten people therein become part of the here and now and new relationships can be forged. Commuters walk past the version of these characters; see their faces; walk through them and upon them (when projected on the ground).

The series makes association with disappearance, absence and loss experienced over time. Although people reappear in the images, in a sense their reappearance mourns the living subject/object's absence, as they have long ago moved on to different moments, geographies and spaces. As with Buddhist philosophy, photography holds the past and future in its present. Any photograph in the present admits its past, the death of the original (moment, concept, performance, beauty, subject/object of the photograph) (Barthes 1980: 67-109). The projected image is also non tangible and this increases its potency. The photographer may experience the presence of non-material elements which particularise characters in time and space, but it is only the material elements of that experience, the physical realm, that is seen, even with magnifying tools, that can be photographed. The non-material experiences which may also be present, (of kinship, closeness, recognition, love, pain etc.) can only be alluded to and communicated through the language of visual signs and codes.³⁶

³⁶ Compositional tools, visual references, text, common association, technique and context.

In Fig. 75, *The Return: Walking Through*, made in 2007, I have projected an image shot in 2006 of a baggage porter, onto the ground of platform 24. People walking on the platform on this day could choose to walk on top of the image to get past it or circumvent it. However, in choosing to walk on top of it they could only walk through it. As they attempted to walk on top, the light of the projection was blocked from the ground and the image fell only upon them, leaving the ground clear.

In walking through an image, meaning is conjured around imaginary thoroughfares to and from the past moments and back. The new projected images connect aspects of the past with new politics of territory and powers of presence. When projected 'back' (made to re-occur) within the original or a different physical site, a new association with time in flux is created. How does it feel to walk upon this person's projected image, in the current time? In Fig. 74, *The Return: Two men*, my new image of the projection, recalls the appearance of the older man photographed so many years before, reminding once again of how he looked. At the same time as it memorializes and iconizes him, it presents his physical disappearance. Not only is his body not there, but as soon as the projector is switched off, the image disappears. The ghost like quality of the transparent persona adds to the allusion to transience and the ephemeral quality of the material world. The man that is there, however is highly conscious of this *presence* and of my interest in it and its resonance now in his and my space. I am also attempting to trace and connect my own sets of artistic responses within time, in order to question the nature of my own existence. Thus doing, I connect the registrations of those I have photographed, presenting their presence and absence again and again.



Fig. 74. *The Return: Two Men*. Projection onto wall of an early 1980s photograph. 2007.



Fig. 75. *The Return: Walking through*. Projection onto platform ground of 2006 photograph. 2007.

...But presence in this instance goes hand in hand with death. What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. As soon as the click of the shutter has occurred, what is photographed no longer exists..." (Perloff 1997: 32-58)

According to Sigmund Freud, psychological projection is a defense mechanism in which one attributes to others and the external world, unacceptable or unwanted aspects of one's internal world. Freud, expounding his theories in the early 20th Century, suggested that projection allows the expression of subconscious impulses / desires / fears to transfer outside oneself, without letting the ego recognize them as one's own (Stratton 2008).

Photography is perhaps always a self portrait, externalizing choices made in framing (conceptually and psychologically) one's version of anything. Having a camera between the world and the self is perhaps a defense mechanism filtering against first hand experience. Nothing is as painful, as shocking, as embarrassing or unfortunately as pleasurable as it could have been by experiencing the world first hand. Marie-Louis Von Franz, a Jungian Psychologist, extended the view of projection in the 80s stating that: "... wherever known reality stops, where we touch the unknown, there we project an archetypal image" (von Franz 1993: 256-268).

Perhaps it is the unknown and indefinable character of photographic representation of the world that for me parallels the same of existence itself. Where my answers stop is where I need to project. The fact that most of my subjects are looking at me, therefore seeing me look at them, with hindsight, may be due to my fundamental urge to share the idea of 'being seen', noticed and recorded: to show that I am indeed 'real', existing in a material world. Roland Barthes claims that the very essence of photography is that one "...can never deny that the thing has been there", and therefore that the photographer has been there (Barthes 1980: 76)³⁷.

Perhaps the fear of mortality, of not being able to stop time (in the photograph nor in reality) is parallel to what I am evolving in *Platform 24*. In other words it is the psychological projection of internal aspects of self onto the external world. The reappearance of the photographed subject and location flattens the time frame, bringing the past to the present but ends up reminding of what is lost. The further conversion of the images into transparent slides, serves to intensify the loss of the whole as it presents its parts. The new photographs cropped and framed from the original experience visually and conceptually, by the new investigation of the photographer, fabricate a parallel world of memories with different narratives and meanings.

In both Fig. 71 and 79, *The Return: Empty Window 1 and 2*, there are no people in the windows. This is not obvious as the projections are split between the inside and outside of the train, seeming as if there are two personas, one physical and one transparent. The idea of the inside and outside is also a play between the exterior superficial experience of existence and that which may be depth. Examples of this are the inner and outer partnerships of the physical body and the life force within, the physical experience of time/space and the subjective/conscious experience of the same. The transparent person appears as if only a memory. On realization that the entire person in the image is all projection, the suggestion arises that memory may be a series of myths and that the photographic evidence, when held against its original actual occurrence or other accounts of the experience, serves to increase an allusion to the mysterious nature of existence.

One might assess how a projection (which further loses certain qualities of the original images and filters in bits of the new scene) represents or distorts the subject. To me it is interesting to gauge what of the original scenario has been lost, and what has newly appeared with the passage of time and new juxtapositions. There seems to be a destabilization of the assumption that the photograph retains its full original connection with any history, personal or other. I am using the medium of photographic projection to unsettle this myth of photographic static factual proof.

³⁷ This is said of analogue photography, and since Barthes' statement photography has seen a worldwide commercial crossover to digital photography and its related software. This has affected the status of capturing singular experience, locking time and proving fact. With the ability to distort and change appearance, clone and erase two dimensional matter, and work on layered transparent existences, Barthes idea of proof that "...the thing has been there..." has changed. The very definition of photography as a document of any truth of actual experience shifted by the 1990s.

The transparency acts as a means to dislocate the 'captured' subject from the photographic frame in order to set it free to appear within and upon other contexts. In this way I re-access the meeting, the moment and the experience which is lost at the same time as the camera's shutter causes a 'frozen'³⁸ image of those very things to be gained. The transparent quality of the projection often merges the scene into one layered experience.

While the process and physical performance of projecting the images into new and old sites at later times, has been profound in the enactment of projection onto the world, (that of playing G-d, of making life, of repeating existence), the effect of the recording and the documents that are the residue of the 'act', are pale representations. As in all documents of performance, the artwork is elusive and its wholeness escaped.



Fig. 76. *The Return: Projection of 2006 photograph of woman's face onto train carriage.* 2007.



Fig. 77. *The Return: Waiting Man.* Projection of 2006 photograph of man's torso onto platform pillar. 2007.



Fig. 78. *2 Minute Intimacies: Man in the Aisle.* 2007.



Fig. 79. *The Return: Empty Window 2.* Photographed projection of 2006 image into empty train window in 2007.

³⁸ In photography, the use of a medium to fast shutter speed will cause a generally static image. This presents the appearance that a moment has been captured in time and forever frozen in that frame. The thawing of that frozen moment would happen with slower speeds used in exposure times. Flowing blurry lines occur in the image in places where there has been some kind of action.

Photographing empty spaces: absence as a reminder of loss of presence

In 2007 I photographed trains which are no longer used, illustrated in *The Return: Abandoned Train* Fig. 82. and Fig. 33. *The Corridor of Time: 1981 - 2007*. These trains, too old and broken for transport uses, have also been stripped over the years by people using them for shelter or playgrounds. Juxtaposed with images of the same views of working trains, they allude even more to the inevitable decomposing of physical matter and the mortality of the material world³⁹, as do images such as Fig. 80-81. which reference elements not in the frame. An atmosphere of sadness and mourning for the loss of the past is created. There are no people in these images conjuring a lost world once full of energy and purpose. The trauma of the loss of the past rests in the marks and residue signs of occurrence retained in the landscape. When these images are presented in sequences with other images, as in Fig. 33, *The Corridor of Time*, made in similar or the same arenas, cycles of time are conjured through the combination of repetition (of the subject theme⁴⁰ and site) and change (of the condition of the current site and the atmosphere therein).



Fig. 80. *The Return: Empty Clipboard*. 2006.



Fig. 81. *The Return: Legs in Steam*. 2006.



Fig. 82. *The Return: Abandoned Train 2*. 2007.

³⁸ As well as ephemerality of the material world and infinity versus the finite.

³⁹ Corridor scene, compartment scene, platform scene.

Letting go of the past: Panorama Transcapes and the digital colour experience:

pan-o-ram-a : an extensive unbroken view, as of a landscape, in all directions; a wide or comprehensive survey;
. a large extended picture or series of pictures, unrolled before spectators, so as to appear continuous. (Collins 2006)

I have employed the medium of the photographic panorama through situating two or three photographs up against each other with no break between them to create more fluidity between the images. In this way a similar sequence is set up through the linked images as in the triptychs (pages 31 and 33), to create further conceptual and visual associations with time and site. The train is often a place of introspection, particularly on a long journey. While the landscape and the passing times of day flash by, people spend hours, even days, in their compartments, along the corridor and staring out the window at different moments during the train journey. The panorama allows more information into the frame and it enables me to say more.



Fig. 83. *Balloons and Bubblegum: Joburg to Cape Town*. 2009.

This most recent body of work (2009) employs the use of exposure techniques during the shooting of the photographs, in order to complicate the display before my lens in the single images. It also makes use of post productive techniques needed to stitch the images together to construct the panoramas. The move away from the black and white film medium also seems to close the need for the practice of unpacking the past in order to prepare context for a meaningful present. These images are also made on the sites of the railways and long train journeys across South Africa but the themes are more open to psychological interpretation, forging fresh associations with the passing of time, introspection, and the personal journey, as windows reflect scenes inwards and outward. Windows are seen into and through, compartment doorways hide and reveal parts of larger scenes and layers of information are conveyed in a similar way to the effect created through the projections. This phase closes the revisiting processes (worked through in the first half of this masters), and the obsession with reassessment of the past as well as the search for signs of transformation and change.

The panoramas attempt to complicate a reading of time (the present) as well as that of space since different environments are forced together. In addition to the panoramas I also produced a series of single colour images in the digital medium under the same title of *2 Minute Intimacies* and with some of the same intentions of making portraits of strangers. In some of these images I have photographed through the glass as well as off the glass, including the reflection of scenes behind me. Instead of the panoramic supplementing of extra imagery, I use the supplementary vista reflected off the glass and in the mirrors.

These details cause association with other dimensions, whether in time or in place. The journey is one of incarceration to a certain extent. One way to escape is into the mind. The subjects are present in the scenes but their minds and thoughts are elsewhere. In Fig. 85-86, the characters seem passive; however, it is in their passive body condition, that their minds seem active. Transcapes, for me, encapsulates the state of being in the here and now of the passage of time itself, in a way that the earlier series do not, by relying only on its own time slot and immediate vicinity of occurrence.

This series lets go of the past as a support for the present. It does not hold on to previous period's images, nor force a comparison with the past, in order to resonate. It cannot completely separate itself from its links to *Platform 24* though, as it continues a number of dynamics including the main journey theme. I have utilised juxtaposition only with images from the same or similar shoots. The images are made in the train journey sites but are no more in black and white or in the analogue medium. I use the digital colour medium placing their readings in a more contemporary context both visually and practically.

There are a number of differences between the recent works and the older ones, even though the themes are consistent. A gentler rhythm of time seems to be occurring through the later sequences because of the unbroken continuum of the pieces. In the previous diptychs and triptychs the dates that the separate photographs were taken, are years apart and on different journeys, effecting the feel of a flattening of various historical time periods (1980's brought forward to 2000's).



Fig. 85. *2 Minute Intimacies: Returning Home*. 2009.



Fig. 86. *2 Minutes Intimacies: Abroad*. 2009.

Although some of the recent images may be individually classifiable as social portraits, their juxtaposition against images of passing landscapes or other part of the train experience, seems to construct association more prominently with the here and now. Characters are presented in transit, facing windows or doors instead of the photographer. They seem to be engaging in introspection: possibly thinking, dreaming, reminiscing, assessing or appreciating the passing and approaching geographical and private landscapes. In fact they cannot do much else. They must endure the inevitable route to their destinations.

This is an area of entrapment of the body, in compartments and narrow corridors on the other side of an expanse of freedom, open space and far distances to view. Inside the train is the space that steers one to look 'in'. The subjects are presented in spaces that offers split dimensions of experience as did the 2006 black and white images, which used shutter speed to access the split (page 42). Through reflection off glass, mirrors and open views of internal and external windows, they can experience expanse.

In the later work all parts of each construct are taken in the same time frame, or on the same journey at different times of the day. They seem more personal and the characters are not in classic portrait positions, sometimes not even facing the camera. The confrontational meeting of photographer and subject seems to be less significant. I have said of earlier portraits that perhaps it is my need for my subjects to see me to prove to myself that I exist, that causes me to photograph them so directly frontal, their eyes staring into mine. In this series the need for me to be seen by my subjects has disappeared. The new colour has affected the mood of the images. There is more fluidity of movement in this series created through the continuous vista that digital software techniques have allowed me to effect. These processes begin a view towards new horizons of artistic production that are not tied to past image production. Although I am using the panorama format, they are not seamless however, with their borders parameters still clear.

While a wider range of considerations around the theme is harnessed in the sequences through the wider angle of view, the more obvious edges of each separate image also contain, and focus on, certain elements in each separate part of the sequence. This series suggests a more immediate passing of time, perhaps only through fractions of a second. They do however suggest the passing of time in a more universal sense.



Fig. 84. *Transcapes: Night Corridor*. 2009.

Perhaps it is in Jo Ractliffe's series' *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (drive-by shooting)* (1999) and *Johannesburg Inner City Works 2000-2004*, that I most empathise with in the shooting method from a travelling vehicle that evokes a sense of passing the landscape, as well as in the manner of the extended panoramic sequencing that she has used. In the *Vlakplaas* series, Ractliffe returned to the infamous farmhouse where torture and political interrogations took place during apartheid. She expected to find signs of trauma, but these signs have disappeared from the physical space. Instead what remained was a "...seemingly innocuous farmhouse, surrounded by a country landscape, next to the Hennops River" (Ractliffe 2004: 45 - 52). On the day of the country's second elections Ractliffe went back and photographed the site. In order to find a manner in which to disturb these bland scenes, Ractliffe removed the plastic framing mechanism from her Holga camera, causing a continuous yet fractured image to form throughout the entire roll of film. Selections edited from the roll have formed her pieces for the various bodies of work (Fig. 90). The parts of the sequences hiccup into, and overlay each other at points, causing an uncomfortable view of the place. Perhaps it is the only way we can look at it, in doses.

Like Santu Mofokeng's *Nightfall of the Spirit* (page 33-34), this work opens a re-examination of the residues of the past trauma and questions the possibilities of moving on by forgiveness and forgetting. Ractliffe's series was commissioned for and exhibited in *Truth Veils*, an exhibition accompanying the conference, *The TRC: Commissioning the Past* in 1999. Ractliffe says of *Johannesburg Inner City Works* that in searching for a sense of the sublime, she found "a city of slippages... a place where the familiar slips into the unknown and past and present seem strangely collapsed into each other" (Ractliffe 2005: 9). It is these kinds of slippage which I am interested in accessing, in my colour images which similarly use reflections and the kind of inner framing techniques utilized by Ractliffe.



Fig. 87. *Vlakplaas* Jo Ractliffe. 1999. Detail from Holga film strip.
From *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (drive-by shooting)*.



Fig. 88. *Wolmarans St. Joubert Park* Jo Ractliffe. 2000. Holga film strip.
From *Johannesburg Inner City Works 2000-2004*.

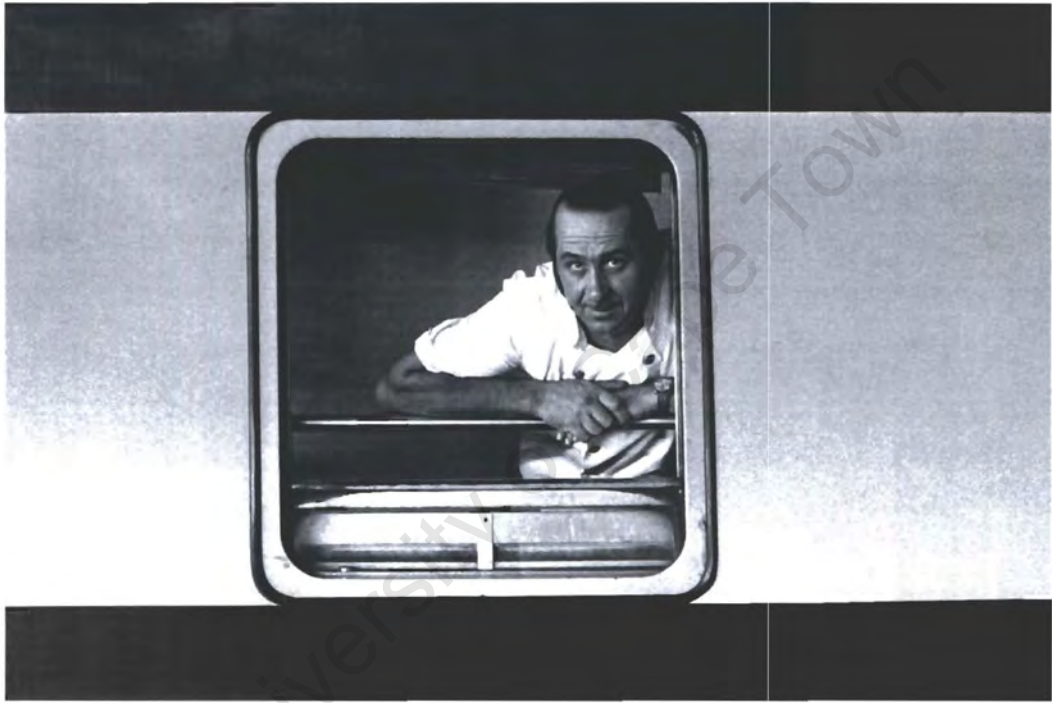
In the *Transcapes* series my portrayals of the characters along the journey are not as confrontational as in the previous ones, adding an introspective quality and acceptance of the point along the circumference of time. Each character seems to be encapsulated in a private experience in his or her compartment or at the window along the corridor of time. Time and places approach, are met and are left behind. Cycles of dawning to nightfall are traversed. There seems to be an acceptance of the places (physically and psychologically) still to be encountered and all experiences so far endured. This state of mind parallels my own shift in the face of the past year's set of personal experiences; however there also seems to be a shift in the cultural political arena. Urgency for overt social commentary seems to have subsided to some extent, so whatever social commentary may be derived is more poignant, delicate and underlying rather than confrontational. Guy Tillim answers "I know what someone who is hungry should look like, and I can make people look like that too. But the other way to approach it is to move away from that, and let the subjects speak for themselves" (Hirsch 2008).

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The Frame: some significance

Long before Photography was invented, the compositional device of the *frame* was being used by visual image makers such as illustrators, painters, draughtsmen and print makers.

Bound by the size and shape of the canvas, wall, metal plate or sheet of paper that the piece was being created upon, the conceived design of the elements used were placed within the confined area inside the border of this surface, the frame. Around this border, in order to emphasize the content and strengthen the separation of the piece from its mundane background of reality, an external invention called a frame was employed. This external 'accessory', most often mimicked the shape of the work, and was designed to 'finish the piece' and enhance the attraction to it while the piece was drawing attention to itself in its exhibited surroundings. According to the different eras of artistic representation and trend, these frames differed in size, material, style and emphasis and sometimes were purposefully not used.



By the time of photography's invention, the idea of the frame had been a highly sophisticated and considered compositional tool for centuries, used as an integral component in representation. Only with photography however, did the idea of the frame become symbolic of 'seeing'. The politicization of seeing, that of witnessing, has been the underlying understanding of the traditional photographic practice of framing in the 20th Century modernist definition of photography. However, within Modernist Art movements such as the Bauhaus, Futurism, Dada and Surrealism etc. photographers brought multiple framings into the photograph with techniques of collage and negative sandwiching. Postmodernism extended the use of multiple framings with its open insistence upon the concept of the copy and the non- authentic, drawing the final framings from a number of origins, and reframings both literal and figurative.

Andrew Lamprecht draws attention to the photograph (or the frame) as a witness to nature and yet as an inversion and interpretation of nature. He writes, "*In photography the initial study (to follow the traditional concepts of the artwork) would be nature's. This is a vital point: in a sense it points to photography's place as the witness to the birth of modernity. Photography has always been a medium that liberates*" (Lamprecht 2002: 4). Discussing the relationship between the name, *Photography*, which in Greek means painting with light, and William Fox Talbot's publication in 1844, *The Pencil of Nature*, Lamprecht maintains that the origin of the content of a photograph is derived first from reality, or nature, which the photographer and the frame, witness before the photograph escapes it (a direct transfer of reality, nature). Graham Clarke also refers to a dual aspect of a photograph, (but of the scientific and the cultural), purporting that the photograph speaks of man's need to take control of nature and order and construct the world around him. Clarke substantiates this claim with two examples. He says that the name Photograph "...speaks to an underlying concern to control light and time", and later in the passage alleges that "*photography establishes a hold on the past*" trapping it in a continuous present (Clarke 1997: 11 – 12).

Traditionally, in order to produce a photographic image, a chosen composition of the view of a subject has to travel through this frame before it gets to the film or CCD chip to be imaged. This composition usually corresponds with the view of the subject guided through a viewfinder, the seeing tool, also considered the frame. The photographer's concept and the context that the image has been placed within are also considered as the frames of the image. These direct the manner in which the subject is portrayed in the physical frame and this is enhanced by further association with the language of the word, other images in a series or in loose juxtapositions, as well as in the environment it is ultimately experienced within.

The photographer frames the act of seeing, draws attention to an edited version of what has been seen and in so doing, intentionally or unintentionally situates the content within some context, aesthetic, political, functional conceptual and/or theoretical (Szarkowski 1978: 11). Graham Clarke stresses that any photograph is dependant upon a number of concepts which establish its meanings as an image and an object. These contexts, historical, cultural, social and technical, are layered within all images, whether the photographer consciously intends this or not (Clarke 1997:19). However, whatever decisions are made, the representation is governed by the physical structure, enclosure and extent of this physical camera area of the frame.

In my study I have been interested to play with the various uses of the frame. I have consciously reiterated the recurring shape of the square and the rectangle in the sites of the trains and the platform.

The frame of the window and the compartment both visually and conceptually encapsulates the travellers, separating their private experiences and joining them in common mission. I have also been acutely interested in the formal elements of the frame and its relationship to the composition of the works, in order to draw attention to some and connect others. For this reason many works aim to conceptually frame the raw archived images from the 1980s against their newer contexts of South African chronologies, artistic, political and historical. At the same time I have considered the general move in the post apartheid climate to reposition and reframe artistic responses and the readings of these in juxtaposition with new contexts of photographic and artistic theories and ideologies. This led me to the revisit the physical site as well and to the formation and creation of works that use multiple images that compare, contrast and reference each other, to create a more complex message. This move to complicate the experience of the moment led also to the creation of compositions that employ multiple frames within the a single work, as well as to create the loose stitch panoramas which lay the multiple images side by side in much the same intention.

All these partnerships use the frame as layers in a narrative which travels both forward and back as does a train along a railway line. The frames are also meant to signify parallel moments that happen at the same time, flattening the experience of time, or as points of experience along a circumference of time which repeats itself in a circular route and can be read both backwards and forwards, or all at once. The partnered scenes, in the diptychs and triptychs, gain an elongated context in reference to each other and the overall caption or title which frames them as one idea. In a number of the single images, the physical frames of the compartment doorways and windows are used to highlight relationships and layer stories. This consideration of the framing devices has been a useful tool in the connection of separate timeframes as well as particular moments experienced along my journeys, but also of similarities I have wished to draw attention to. My aim is to visually and conceptually frame my concerns.

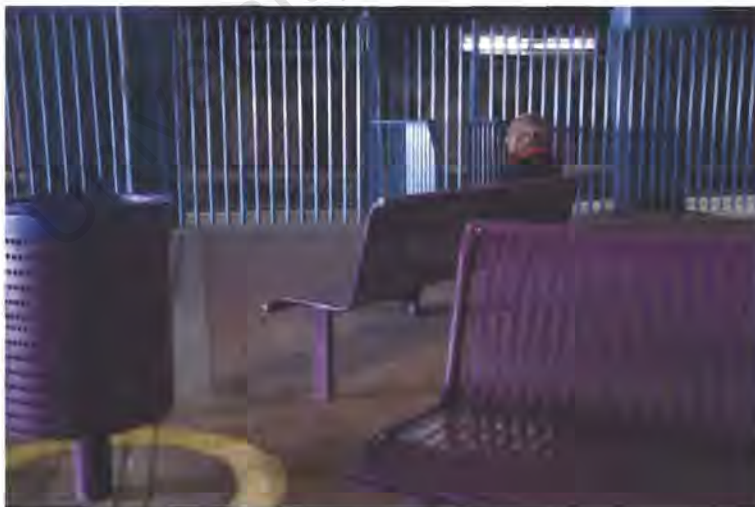


Fig. 90. *Before the Journey: Platform 14, Johannesburg Station. 2009*

Conclusion

In arriving at the end of this dissertation, I do not declare that this is the end of the process. The questions posed and the issues raised are indeed ongoing considerations as I continue to work as an artist that images a landscape, both personal and social. In response to the triggers recognized within my archived images of 1980s body of work, (discussed in my preface), as well as those cited that have been created by other photographic practitioners, I have picked up on visual questions and brought a more current experience to the analysis. The questions I have posed to myself have been important to my practice and my evolution as a photographer, not for the sake of finding fixed answers, but for their agency in extending and enlarging my conceptual framework as well as my application of the material medium.

I have found that memory has a most vulnerable nature, and that its increasing unreliability over extended time periods, serves to increase the believability of the photographed scene as signifier of the original (person, moment, object). I have been playing on this mistaken identity of the photograph as a possible true record, by including half stories, selective sharp detail as well as some less determinable visual descriptions of actuality. *Platform 24* has pursued investigations into *the internal and external experience of reality*, the *ethereal nature of time*, the present as being part of *the cycle between the past and future; presence and absence* and *the human subject as an object of destiny or co-incidence (Platform 24: 2 Minute intimacies)*.

In applying a theoretical framework to the process, I have been able to explore the relationship between context, content and meaning from a more objective point of view, but unlike Barthes, I have been both author of the two dimensional version of the 'event', and the interpreter. This has allowed obvious advantages, but also presented some disadvantages, arising out of the precarious relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in the face of 'knowing' the overt intentions and motives behind the work and yet applying an external theoretical critique to the same. It has however been an exhilarating experience, satisfying and fruitful, in that I have produced work that supports and explicates my concerns, as well as services my aim of contextualising my practice within the past and current South African artistic arena.

I have exhumed, 'aired' and contextualised a forgotten project from the 1980s. I have created a body of 50 new images which is presented in an addendum to the dissertation. I have produced this dissertation as well an exhibition of 40 pieces from the study.

The final series created in the last stage of the study, in 2009, *Transcapes*, displays a move away from obsessing over the past, although related through subject matter and theme to my previous bodies of work for this study, for example *Platform 24* and *The Return*. While the work acknowledges a revisit, the concern is no more an investigation into, nor a comparison with previous scenarios. The images from these latter journeys do not unpack nor interrogate a long gone past, but perhaps imply a transition from an immediate present to an immediate past or future. An experience of a flux of time, however, is still insinuated.

This body of work marks my crossover into the digital colour medium. With this step comes the awareness of an additional implication of a tampered-with truth. As well as the employment of blurring in parts of the images, reflections and inner framing to pinpoint and layer cameos of detail, the scenarios may easily be interpreted as constructed and manipulated simply because of the reputation of the digital medium. It is however in this very area of interrogation of the photograph as a vehicle for layers of construct that I have been interested in engaging with. Whether or not I have tampered with the fusion of images in the series of panoramas is not pertinent to the question. The automatic assumption that the images have been manipulated after exposure, in digital software processes, is heightened by the use of exposure techniques that split, reflect and complicate a singular framing.

The result conveys a conceptual expanse of space and time rather than a mere record of the geographical sites and the moment of exposure. The physical experience of an expanded timeframe and spatial area is also created by the elongated artworks, widthwise or lengthwise (diptychs, triptychs and panoramas), and in the loose juxtapositions of similar images in the textual and practical versions of the study.



Fig. 91 *Self Portrait: Inside Outside, along the Journey 1981-2009.*

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Fig. 92. *Transcapes: 2nd Honeymoon through the Karoo*. 2009.

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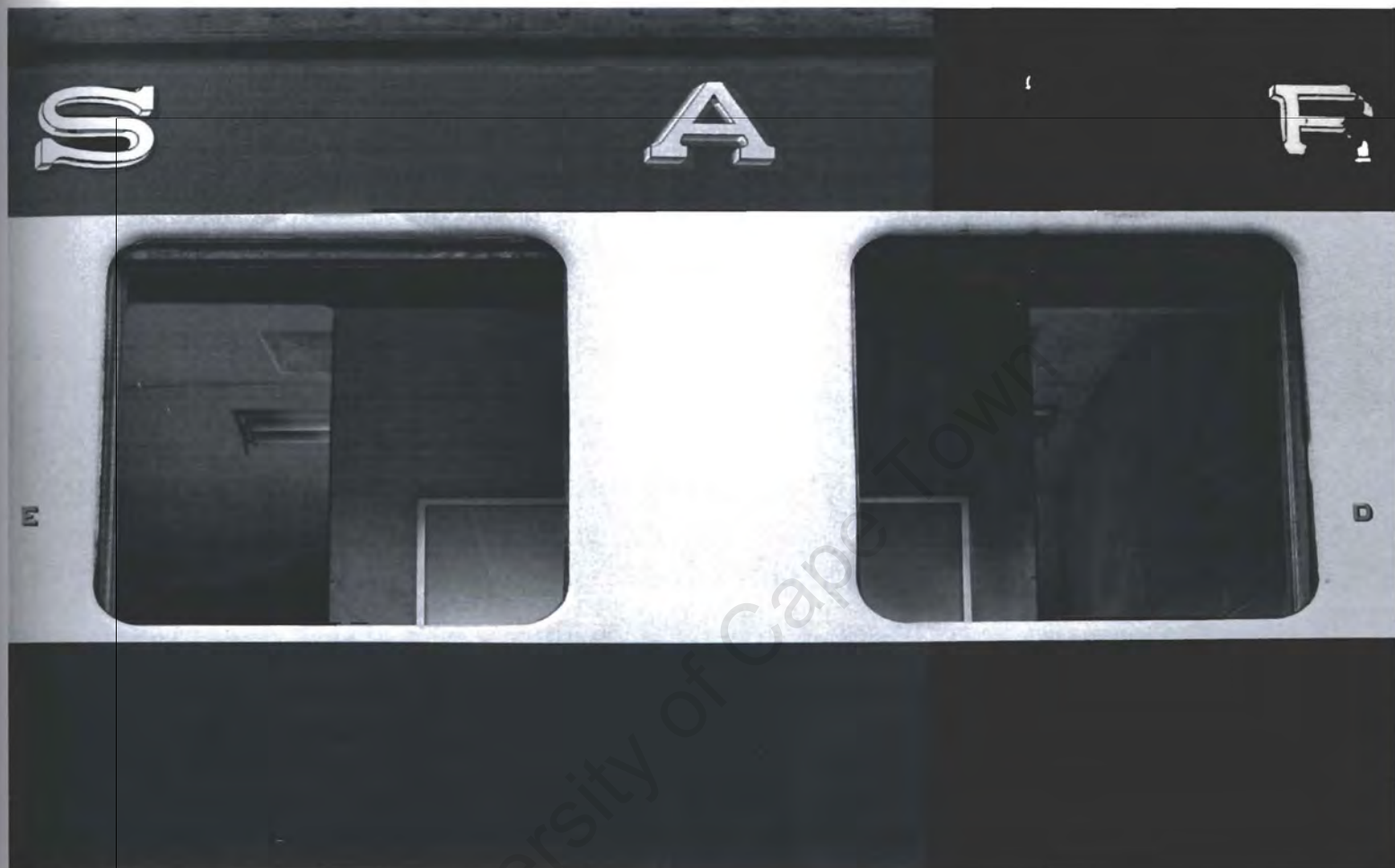


Fig.1. SAR: *Dead train, Salt River Train Dump*, 2007

The Addendum to the Dissertation:
The practical body of work

Jenny Altschuler 2009

The Journey

The visual component of this project has been titled, Platform 24, as this was the name of the precinct on the Cape Town station where I began the journey in 1981, and where the subsequent project 'trips' have ended in 2009. Platform 24 is a central point on the Trans-Karoo schedule of routes through which the South African overnight trains journey to and fro. It was also the platform of the first station built along this main line in the 1890s. While the concept uses the notion of the journey as a metaphor for a historical evolution of artistic production and ideas through natural time, it weaves in and out of the role of social and historical document claiming a more personal responsibility.

The engagement with the past highlights, at times more than others, the subjective capacity of memory, as does a memoir. I have tended towards accessing photographic scenarios that slip between fact and fiction and clarity and mystery, in an intentional clouding of documentary evidence and resistance to the insistence of singular photographic truth.

I have revisited the site of my own photographic archive and applied a research process to the content of a chosen body of unworked negatives. This has entailed an intense analysis of the found images and reshooting similar subjects (in the same territory): a procedure that intends a reframe of the earlier work together with the newer images made in current time, as one overall project. The series that I have responded to hails from a collection of black and white images photographed 27-28 years ago in the early 1980s. This series consists of people on the journey, in the sites of the stations and trains that travel through them, back and forth, across the South African landscape departing from and returning to Cape Town. I have re-engaged with these images and the physical sites they were photographed in, on a number of levels: objectively and subjectively; as the photographic image maker, conceptually and compositionally, and as and as the viewer in retrospect.

My interest in gauging their relationship to the arena of photography in that earlier period has driven me to analyse the history of similar practices then, as well as attempt to come to an understanding of my own practices in the past and create new responses now, in the present. Part of my method has been to intuit triggers that have allowed me to make new work, in the same environments that pick up on visual and conceptual questions and scenarios begun in the earlier series.

The final series created in the last stage of the study, in 2009, Transcapes, displays a move away from obsessing over the past, although related through subject matter and theme to my previous bodies of work for this study, for example Platform 24 and The Return. While the work acknowledges the 'Revisit', its concern is not the investigation into, nor a comparison with previous scenarios. It does not unpack nor interrogate a long gone past, rather insinuating a quiet, moment to moment transitional experience of the flow of life.

The 2006 series is shot in the black and white analogue medium and the documentary style that promotes one of the definitions of photography as a reliable record of truth, however notions of photographic truth have been challenged from the early history of photography peaking with the partnership of Postmodernism and the advent of digital photography.



Fig. 2. *Self Portrait Inside Outside* 1981 - 2009

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Platform 24: 1981 - 2009

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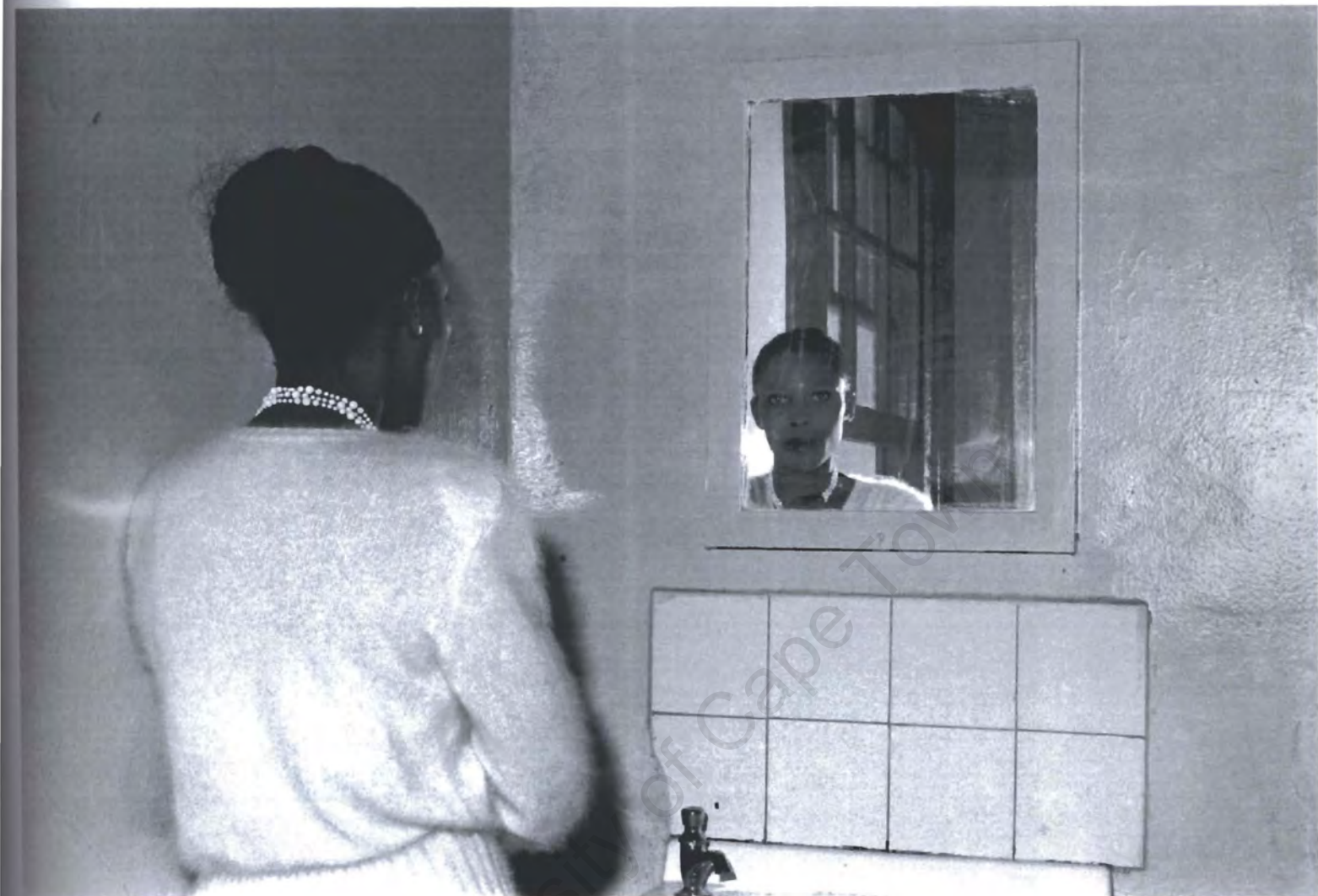


Fig. 3. *Woman in the Mirror*
Station Toilet before the Ride 1981



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Fig. 4. Platform 24: Checking Departure Schedule. 1981.



Fig. 5. *The Return: Empty Schedule Board*, 2006



Fig. 6. *Platform 24: Couples on the Bench*,
Waiting for the Trans-Katow 1981.



Fig. 7. *Platform 24: Women on the Bench*,
Waiting for the Shimbolaza Mexl, 2006.



Fig. 8. *Platform Bench: Woman Waiting*, 2006



Fig. 9. Platform 2; Comparison D 1981

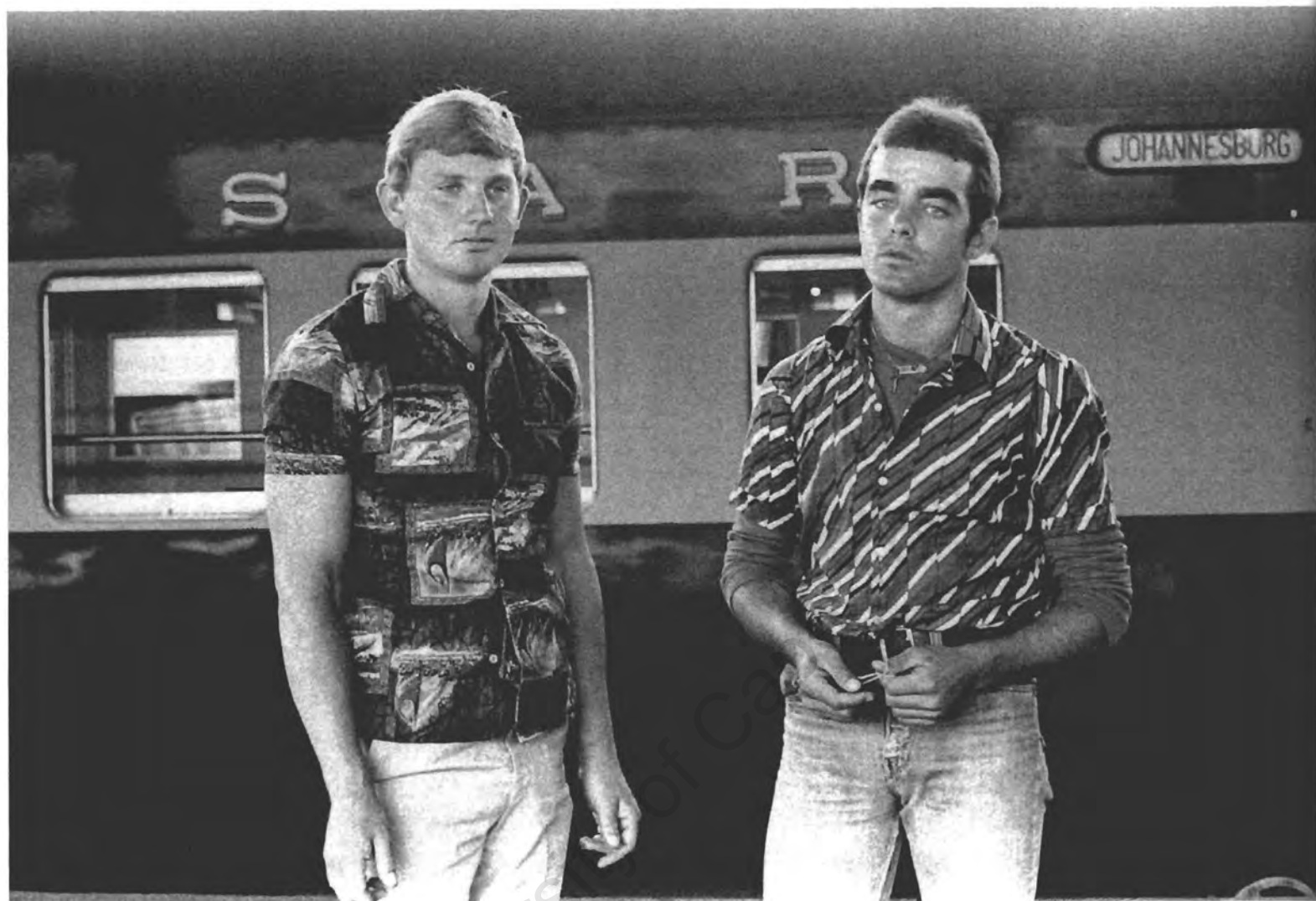


Fig. 10. SAR (South African Railways) to Johannesburg,
Cape Town Station, Early 1980s.

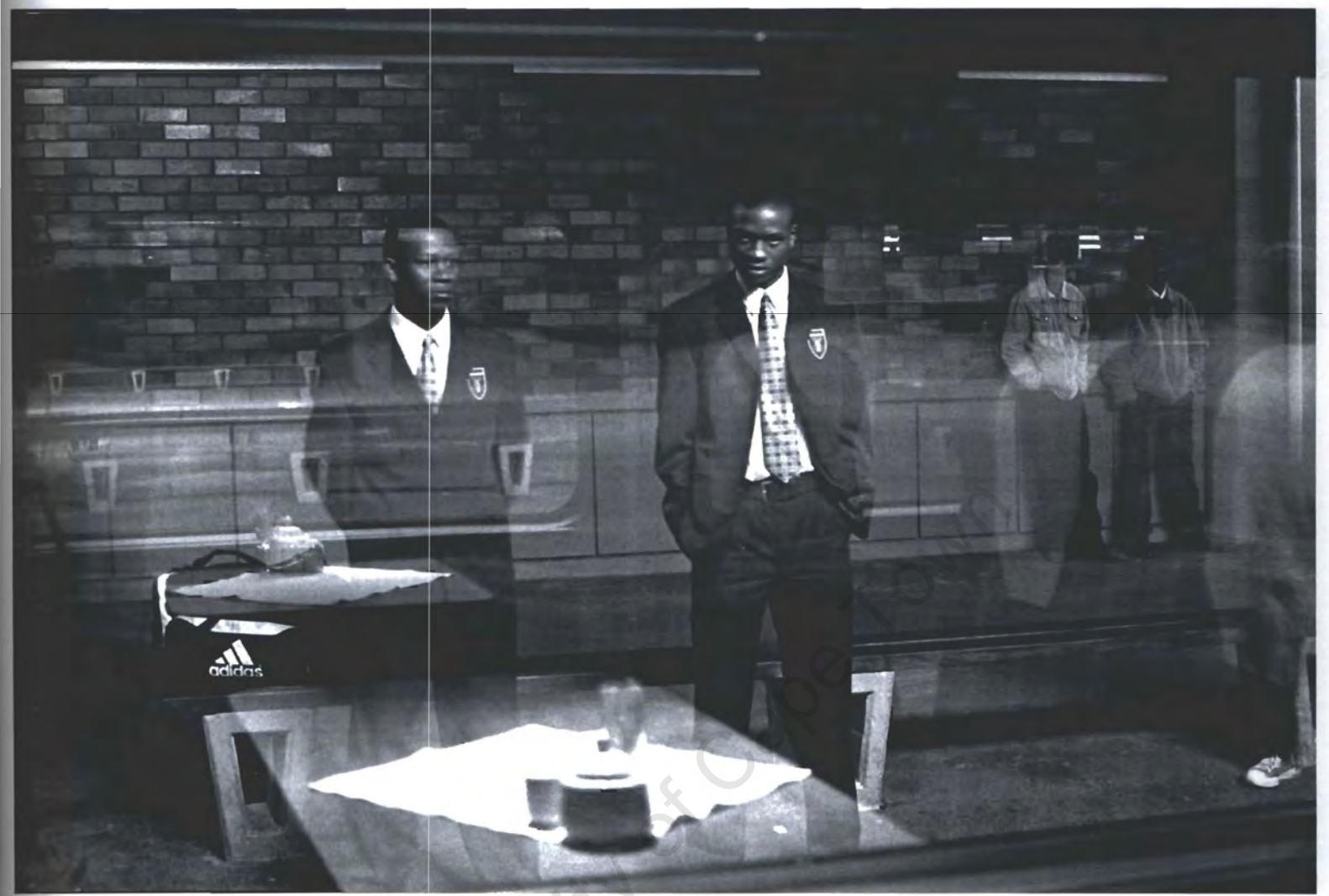


Fig. 11. *Platform 2: Inside/Outside*
Premier Class Ride, 2006.



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Fig. 12. *Friends on the Platform*. 2006



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Fig. 13. *Saying Goodbye* 2006.



Fig. 11. *Mother and Daughter: Compartment H*, 1981



Fig. 15. *Platform 24: Railway Steward at the window, 1981*



Fig. 16. *Platform Bench; Woman in White*. 1981



Fig 17. *Early Morning Young Girl in White Nightgown*, 2006.

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Fig. 18. Platform Bench Railway Stewards 1981 - 2006



*Fig. 19. Early Morning Waiting on the Platform,
Cape Town Station, 2006.*



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Fig. 20. *The Return Legs at 86,000, 2006.*



Fig. 21. *No Exit: Oreyomgho Shushelusa Moyo*, 2006.



Fig. 22. *Stewards in the mirror: Trans-Karoo Train Journey*, 1981



Fig. 23. *Compartment 4, Icarus Kaimo*, 1981



Fig. 24. *Empire Dining Car*
Man behind the glass door, 2006



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Fig. 25. *The Last Carriage. At the end of the Line.* (1981)



Fig. 26. 16-year-old Mother and Child:
Trans-Karoo Train Journey, 1981



Fig. 27. *Old Man and suitcase at the Window*
Arans-Karim Train Journey, 1981.



Fig. 28. *Reflections II: Returning Home*
1981 - 2007. Diptych.

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Fig. 29. *Platform in Platform, Passing Through*, 1981

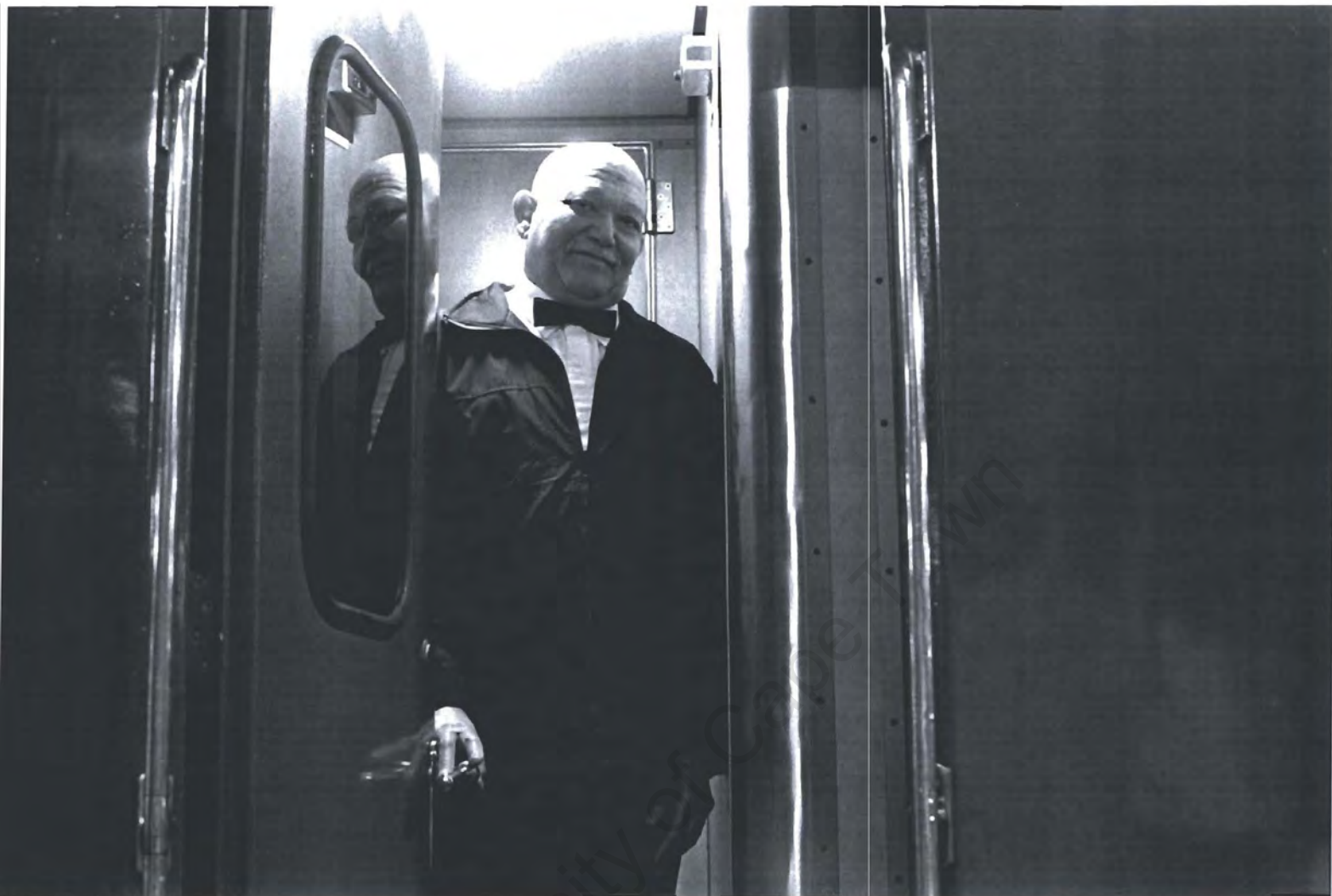


Fig. 30. *Premier Class Ride: Steward at the Entrance*, 2007



Fig. 50. *Three Men and Newspaper* Premier Class Train, 2006.



Fig. 32. *Platform 24: In Focus*, 2006



Fig. 33. *Platform 24: Letting Go*, 2006



Fig. 34, *Platform 21, Yonggogori in Suwon*, 2007



Fig. 35, *Platform 21, Incheon*, 2006

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Fig. 36. *Platform 24: Arrival and Departure, 1981 - 2007*. Trąpczyk

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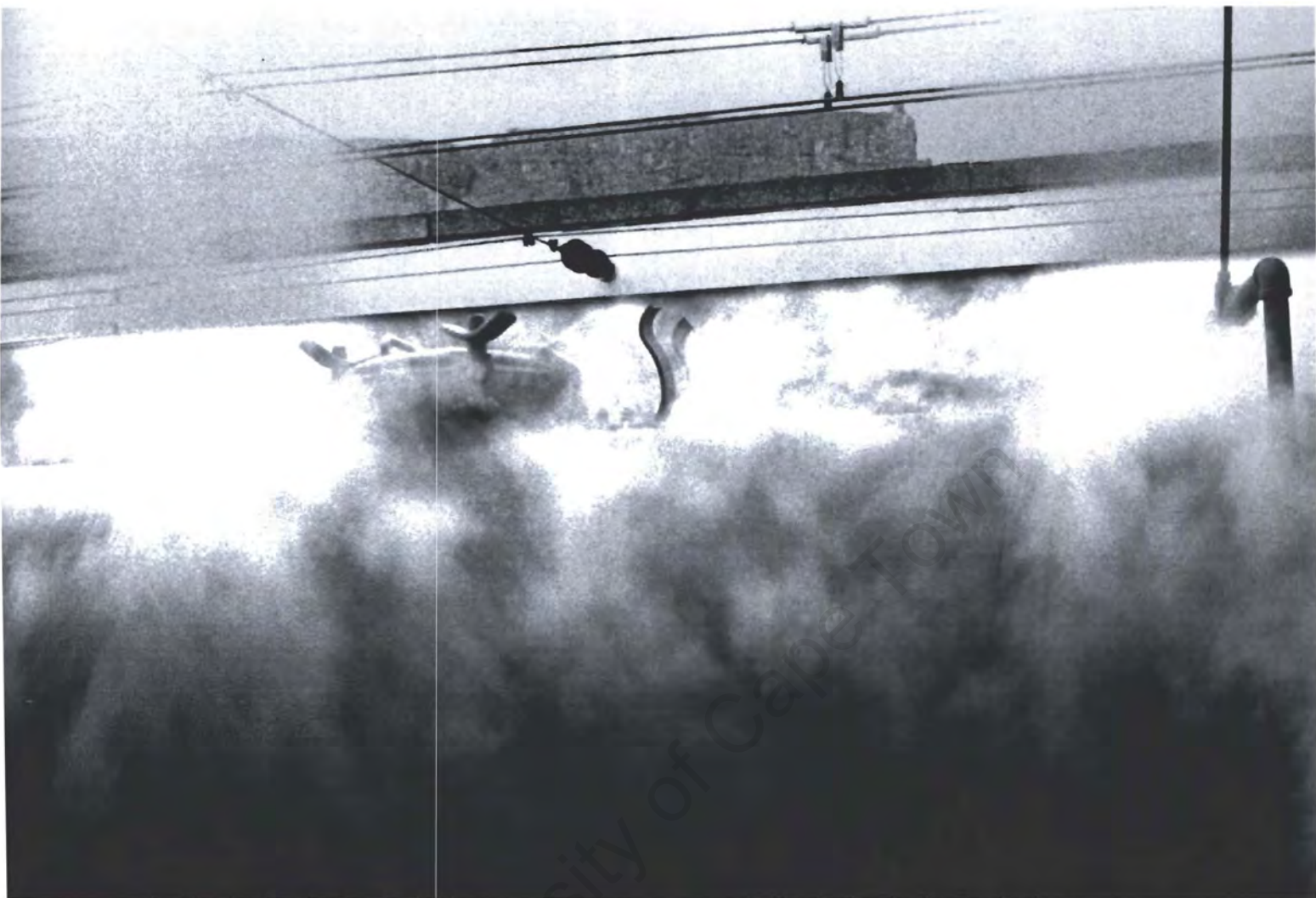


Fig. 32. Steam with Mountain View 2006



*Fig. 38. Couple in Compartment.
Trans-Karou Train Journey, 1981.*



*Fig. 39. Couple in Compartment.
Shoshelna Meyl Train Journey, 2006.*



Fig. 10. Couple in the corridor.
Premier Class Train, 2006.



Fig. 11. Compartment B.
Couple on Lowest Class Ride, 2009.



Fig. 42. *Fans-Karom: Mother and Daughter*. 1981.



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Fig. 15. *Shobhana Myles: Mother and Daughter*, 2009.



Fig. 44. *Woman between the Carriages*.
Shubelova Meyl, 2006.



Fig. 45. *The Bellhop Announcing Dinner*, 1981.



Fig. 46. *After Mianostromem*, 2009



Fig. 11. *Walking through the Dining Car, 1981–2009* Dupuyet.

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Fig. 09. *Landscape from Abandoned Train*, 2007. Diptych

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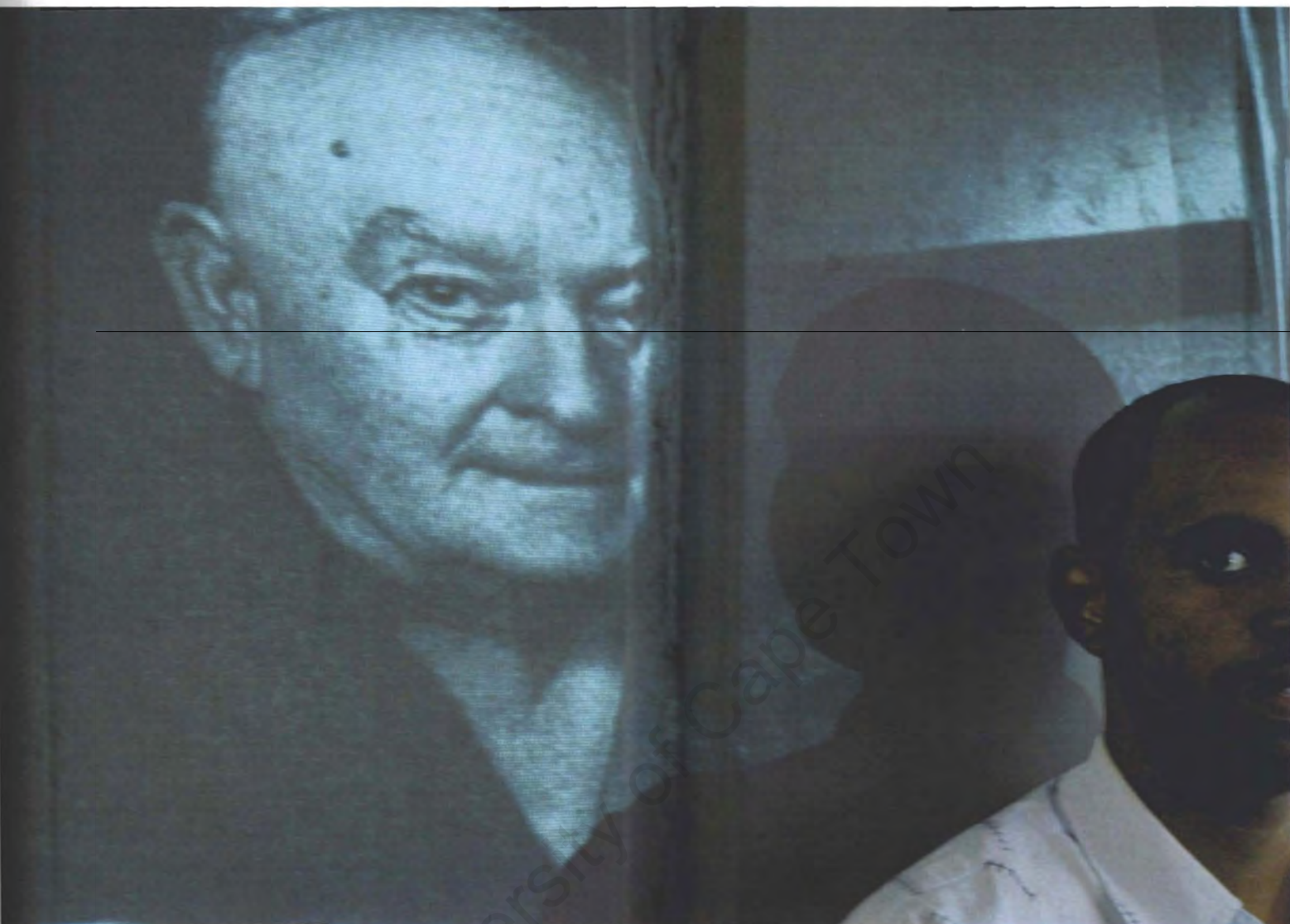


Fig. 50. *The Return: Two Men 1981 - 2007*.
Photographed projection of 1981 image onto Station Wall in 2007



Fig. 51. *Empty Window 1: Shostakovich Motel Carriage*
Projection of 2006 image into empty train Window, 2007



Fig. 52. *The Return: Head in Steam.*
Projection of 2006 image onto empty schedule board. 2007



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Fig. 53. *2 Minute Intercities, Man in the Aisle*, 2006.



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Fig. 84. *The Return-Trip Window?*
Photographed projection of 2006s image into empty train window in 2007

Transcapes: The Last Leg. 2009

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Fig. 55. *Family with Luggage on Platform 1-1,
Johannesburg Station, 2009.*



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Fig. 56. *New Friends: Tourist Class*, 2009.



University of Cambridge

Fig. 57. *Couple in Compartment A*, 2009



Fig. 58. *Logo Landscape*, 2009



Fig. 59. *Reflection I* 2009





fig. 60. *Transcapes: Standing in the Corridor of Time*, 2009, Panorama



Fig. 61. 2 minutes. *Innocent Time Away*, 2009



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Fig. 62. *2 minute bitumenes*. *Abroad*, 2009





Fig. 63. *Landscapes, Balloons and Bubblegum, Joburg to Cape Town*, 2009, Panorama.



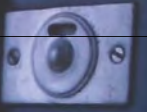
Fig. 64. *Reflections III. Knitting Landscape*. 2009





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Fig. 66. *Trainscapes: About to Return; just outside Wellington*, 2009, Panorama



Fig. 67. *Grandfather and Grandson: Evening Compartment*, 2009.



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University of Toronto





fig. 69. *Trainscapes: 2nd Honeymoon through the Karoo*, 2009, Panorama.



Universitäts

Fig. 70. *Waiting for the last ride. Platform 14, Johannesburg Station, 2009.*