Archontic Aporias: The Mediums of Memory

By

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Abstract

Contextualising my research within the Eastern Cape as a descendant of 1820 settlers, I question the modalities of historical recollection by introducing memory as a viable mode of archival production alongside that of the archive. Through interrogating Eastern Cape archival institutes and employing an autoethnographic approach to my familial archives, I show that archival curation affects the gaps, schisms, and interpretations of archives as much as the 'unreliability' of memory. I rely on definitions from Jacques Derrida and literature from Achille Mbembe and Verne Harris, as well as reflexive methodologies, to engage the ways of remembering the past and methods of storytelling. With this undertaking, I expose the aporias within archival processes. This written component is part of broader research that encompasses theoretical study and a practice-based Fine Arts research project culminating in an exhibition that shares themes of memory, archive, trauma, and curatorial and personal heritage management. This research engages in case studies of artworks by Angela Deane and Maureen de Jager to contextualise and position the creative process.

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

Julia Arbuckle
08/11/2022

In Memory of Francis Castell Damant White
1930 – 2021

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Introductory Chapter

> I have reflected many times upon our rigid search. It has shown me that everything is illuminated in the light of the past. It is always along the side of us, on the inside, looking out. Like you say, inside out.
>
> Jonathan Safran Foer - *Everything is Illuminated* (2002)

> And so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.
>
> F. Scott Fitzgerald - *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

Archival spaces are characterised as being spaces that promote care. In parallel, they are also spaces of ruination. Time, human error or physical exclusion all contribute to these processes. This practice as research[1] pivots on this duality of curation and erasure. Using Akrich & Latour's (1992) notion of re-inscription within the archival setting, I question the human interaction in the archival preservation process. Highlighting archival institutions within the Eastern Cape and focussing on the history of the town of Makhanda, this practice as research warrants an autoethnographic response. I rely heavily on my experiences of storytelling, postmemory, memory and oral traditions to problematise the roles of the archive in delegitimising some histories over others. My research engages with the ways that human archival intervention creates aporias in the archival space that can open the doors for the introduction of alternate mediums of history and memory recollection.

My practical research deals similarly with themes of identity within history: interrogating time and space, dating back to the 1820 Settlers in Makhanda, up to my present, 200 years later. My practical exhibition titled *Looking After*, manifests as *A Collection of Familiar Things*,

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[1] Research across disciplines. "to embrace PhDs (academic research) that include non-textual artefacts as part of their exposition." (Wilson & Hawkins, 2017, p. 82)

consisting of found objects collected in cloth envelopes, photo albums *Untitled I* and *Untitled II*, curated and assembled from family photographs and documents respectively, and *A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions*, a short film with sculptural elements associated. These areas of creative research are discussed throughout the thesis component. Practice as research combines both the theory and the practice, using art as a methodology for the better understanding of the theoretical frameworks within my research (Skains, 2018, p. 85). With this in mind, my research encompasses both equally.

The history of Makhanda is already told through many modes. The physical evidence, the streets, buildings, topography, and monuments all tell us a story. There are also institutions of remembrance, archives, museums, graveyards, and churches. Similarly, the stories, oral histories and traditions passed down from generation to generation live on as truths of a people's many histories. This practice as research parallels objects with storytelling to promote archival modalities past that of the institutional archive.

In *The Ethics of Memory* Margalit explains that:

> shared memory in a modern society travels from person to person through institutions, such as archives, and through communal mnemonic devices, such as monuments and the names of streets […]. Whether good or bad as mnemonic devices these complicated communal institutions are responsible to a large extent, for our shared memories.
> (Margalit, 2002, p. 54)

This leads me to the question: What happens when mnemonic shared memory devices are foundationally colonial creations? Could titles, collections or ways of display been skewed by bias or historical incentivisation? This question is one I intend to answer firstly through the interrogation of the archive as an institution and secondly through the introduction and interrogation of postmemory.

Archontic Aporias relates to the medium of history: both prefaced in power relations and full of contradictions. Archontic mediums according to Derrida (1995, p. 50), are "citizens who thus held and signified political power". Archontic, within my practice as research, designates the archive as a space of power within these institutions. Derrida exemplifies in this term the hidden curriculum of the archival space, a place prefaced in power relations. I lean heavily on acts of trauma perpetrated through these misuses of power, both personally and historically. In this way, I engage in the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, or *Afterwardsness* (Bistoen, 2014, p. 668).

The main alternate archontic medium this research engages in is the notion of memory through oral history and thought archives[2]. This research will specifically look at my engagement with colonial narratives and oral stories passed down from generation to generation. *Archontic Aporias* are in this case a reflection and criticism of the form that privileges archives, reflecting the main aim of this research, i.e., to consider what it means to be a keeper and interpreter of the archive. I am using the connection that individuals have with their own historical stories and memories in parallel with the way the archive functions as a curated state apparatus and, in so doing, I introduce memory as a viable mode of historical archiving.

My practice as research reflects on the notion of the archive as a theoretical space of discourse within the spheres of society affected by colonial curriculums. In Chapter 1 I introduce the archive. I also define the archive as a *state apparatus*: thus, how it can be questioned and how the functions thereof promote a hidden curriculum of separation? The mediums of my practical exhibition entitled *Looking After* are engaged alongside this discourse. In Chapter 2 I introduce alternate archival productions. I also question the historical legitimacy given to the archival space. My filmic exploration: *A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions* introduces

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[2] Defined by me as 'Archives in thought': that which is considered history but is not written down or documented physically, i.e., memory, oral tradition, storytelling, ancestral knowledge.

postmemory as a framework for the understanding of a traumatic past. This chapter also introduces back looking through reflexivity and autoethnography. Angela Deane's *Ghost Photography* series plays a role within this chapter to centre erasure and ruination within my practical research. Chapter 3 engages in physical archival exhibits at the Makhanda Albany Museum. Historical and curatorial re-inscription is introduced and engaged through a close study of Maureen de Jager's *WO 32/8061 [The Book of Holes]* and her accompanying essay.

Throughout my research, I distinguish between institutionalised archival histories and historical modes of remembering that are considered less tangible. Such will be described as abstract archives, intangible archives, or people's histories. This separation is not to perpetuate a Spivakian 'othering'[3] of non-physical or non-written archives, but rather to situate such concepts that have yet to be accurately introduced into the archival pantheon (Spivak, 1988).

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[3] "the process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between 'us' and 'them' – between the more and the less powerful – and through which social distance is established and maintained" (Lister, 2004, p. 101)

CHAPTER ONE
Power Relations: The Hidden Curriculum

This chapter introduces the archive as a theory. I give proof of its existence as a state apparatus. Within this chapter, I introduce the notion of the *hidden curriculum* of archives, specifically those belonging to or stemming from colonial rule and apartheid-era politics. This is to best understand the way the historical setting affects the archival setting.

My practice as research is concerned with the mediums that society chooses to recall history. The main state-organised medium of recall and recount is through the archive. Achille Mbembe defines the archive as referring to "a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state." He goes on to express that the term is also understood as "a collection of documents – normally written documents – kept in this building" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19). Mbembe continues to define the role of the archive and the ways that the becoming of an archive gives it status. "The status and the power of the archive derive from this entanglement of building and documents […] and so we arrive at the inescapable materiality of the archive as well as at its resulting role […] as an instituting imaginary" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 22). The power derived from this entanglement exemplifies the role of the archive as an institution. It shows a clear strategic function: that there is power in the archive derived directly from the state-owned building. This understanding of the archive also betrays the strategic aporias within the medium, i.e., the insistence on the physical document over other archontic media[4]. When focussing on these specifics and paralleling them with Foucault's apparatus it is

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[4] Note my use of betray rather than portray in reference to curatorial techniques that imply the legitimation of some modalities over others.

clear that the archive is a state apparatus, the express intention of which is curating the historical experience.

According to Foucault quoted by Agamben, an apparatus is "a set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, and supported by, certain types of knowledge" (Agamben, 2009, p. 2). Agamben expresses that "it (a state apparatus) appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge" (Agamben, 2009, p. 3). This definition provides an important insight into the nature of the apparatus as used by Foucault, placing it in direct involvement in the play between knowledge and power (Agamben, 2009, p. 2). This definition is imperative in the understanding of the archive as an apparatus of the state.

Achille Mbembe describes the act of becoming an archive as a death. The state can curate the historical experience through the collectivisation of documents under the broad definition of 'archive' (rather than individual authored documents). This is why it is impossible, according to Mbembe, for personal archives to exist within the self: the very nature of the state-owned archive is the removal of the individual essence. Individuals cannot host an archive that is objective in nature as it cannot exist for the people as a whole. There is no way of knowing that the collection is accurate and unbiased. Essentially, Mbembe is arguing that there is too much room for slippage where memory is concerned for thought archives to be considered legitimate.

However, I argue that archives are not in the business of truth-telling and neither are memories. Archives are a mode of historical recollection that is institutionalised, funded, curated and influenced by the political, cultural and social stories that the state wants to promote. In comparison, memory is a less viable mode of historical recollection but is no less plausible as

a functioning archontic medium. This paper engages these modes of archiving, questioning their validity as modalities of history and, in doing so, exposing the aporias within both.

When referring to the archive as an "Instituting Imaginary" Achille Mbembe expresses that the archive has an effect on society at large through its function as a mnemonic device for the recollection of history. This definition implies a life past the physical document, rather calling on the archive as a phenomenon of society that exists within the minds of the people without being accessed or studied. This argument paradoxically leaves room to argue in favour of the archive as a state apparatus while also considering memory as a viable medium of archiving.

I have used such concepts within my practical exhibition. Focussing heavily on the physical, alongside memory, I have created *An Archive of Familiar Things*. These evoke a memory for me but are also part of a broader historical archive of familial things. They are both familiar and familial in nature. In displaying these objects of memory, I have employed a system that evokes archival record-keeping, specifically using envelopes to simulate archival quality preservation tactics, also bringing into question the motif of concealing and keeping hidden. This references in part the privileging of archival spaces but also the *hidden curriculum* of the archival space as one of delineating worth. The envelopes represent my vault of archives and the way they exist for me as fractured pieces of the whole story while still having importance and significance in my life. The function of the envelope is firstly to keep the contents private as well as safe but also to conceal. This was an important aspect of my archival memory: how I offer these memories to the viewer, concealed, shielded, and safe, but also hinted at through the different types of fabric used, as well as the small indications of what might be within. The envelope becomes for me a metaphorical vessel for learning and knowing about my history, through the form of letter writing. Letters written for family members over decades all impart

to me a small glimpse here and there of what it must have been like for them. In this way, the envelope becomes the traveller of knowledge from the past to myself. I chose to use that motif as I travel my history and knowledge to the viewer.

The hidden curriculum originally refers to and consists of "the unspoken or implicit academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students while in school" (The Great Schools Partnership, 2015). While associated with education studies, the notion of the hidden curriculum exists and can be used in any institutions that exist to police, educate or maintain control. The premise relies on the "unwritten, unofficial lessons, values and perspectives" betrayed by the way things are done. For example, within a school setting, if prayer is read at each meal, while not being a Christian school, the hidden curriculum is the promotion of Christian belief systems. Similarly, if in a gallery space the amaXhosa relics are displayed separately or differently from those of the settlers, there is an underlying message there, perhaps one of separation, the perpetuation of a history of inequality between races. This research relies on the hidden curriculum exposed in the way that physical archives are promoted over oral histories or stories. The subliminal message is one of illegitimacy within the field of archival history. My practical exhibition includes an oral aspect: the room is filled with my voice, as well as excerpts of my grandparents telling stories of the past. This element is heard rather than seen. In comparison to the hidden objects enclosed in envelopes, it is open and candid. This comparison between archives being hidden and the spoken word being vocalised, hopefully, creates a similar tension to that which I consider in this chapter.

Verne Harris's *Seeing (in) Blindness: South Africa, Archives and Passion for Justice* refers to the experience of archival power relations in the apartheid regime, "of oppositional memory fighting a lifeand-death struggle against a systematic forgetting engineered by the state" (Harris, 2002, p. 2).

This exemplifies the hidden agenda of the archive, stating that the archive "never speaks to us as a thing in and of itself. It speaks to us through the specificities of particular relations of power and societal dynamics" (Harris, 2002, p. 4). These relations of societal and power dynamics are seen clearly in the way that archiving has been set up as a white tradition[5]. This can be seen through the ways that oral tradition has been set up as an oppositional force to that of paper archiving. In the essay *Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance* Stoler (2002, p. 269) argues that "what constitutes the archive, what form it takes, and what systems of classification signal at specific times are the very substance of colonial politics." This argument is a clear indication that the current form of the archive is a political tool based on its roots in colonialism.

The systematic delegitimising of oral histories has been occurring for centuries. With it came the creation of aporias within archival institutions. With the introduction of colonialism, there was a movement toward western education systems. These prefaced knowledge creation and production with rote learning. This introduction in turn created a divide along educated and uneducated lines which referred wrongly to the educated as those educated in the western norm. This educational turn delegitimated traditional education occurring between parents and children or the elders with the recalling of historical anecdotes, stories and religious teachings, in so doing allowing a gap of such knowledge within written archives. Western education systems may have been functioning under the disguise of 'civilisation', but the hidden curriculum of this phenomenon is clear. It functioned foremost as a way of delegitimising the oral tradition as unreliable and untruthful in comparison to the state.

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[5] "the stranglehold enjoyed by white South Africans in the archival profession." (Harris, 2002, p. 5).

This hidden curriculum can still be seen now through the ways that the western notion of the archive is rooted in the written word. There is little institutional weight given to oral histories and those that exist in memory rather than on paper. Going beyond cultural practice or race[6], even colonial heritage in my experience exists in a multifaceted nature. There is a broad cultural history that can be pulled from state archives outlining the wars and the socio-political climate of the 1800s. Concurrently there is an entirely different account by each person who has a grandparent who remembers a story their mother told them. My familial 'archive' is a collection of accounts portraying initially the personal but also allowing glimpses of the social, political and cultural essence of the time. It is a bizarre experience having multiple accounts of the same history lying side by side with only some being considered worthy of archiving. These multiple and overlapping histories are what have for the most part inspired my practice as research. In engaging these personal archives and the forms in which they come, I also question the validity of some archival mediums over others.

The epistemic injustices seen in the promotion of some histories and the delegitimising of others highlight this colonial mindset and continue within archival methodologies. This is seen through the way that the archival space can manipulate the content of the archives. The collecting and recollecting of the past are both flawed regardless of using memory or statefunded and curated archives. As such, both should be considered equally as mediums of historical recollection.

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[6] Notwithstanding identity politics, i.e., gender, sex, class, background.

CHAPTER TWO
Thought History: Abstract Archival Production

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The Ancestors

are having a summit –
they chase around the garden
disturbing hens.

Silver birches shake,
light shudders in
the branches.

The ancestors try on dresses
delivered by the centuries they
roam through like bandits.

When they speak it's with
the yellow eyes of a fox and
clicks of an orca.

They wrestle, naked,
on the grass for the
best shoes.

Tomorrow they're having a banquet
of possets and pears.
They sit on the table,
whistling *Happy birthday,*
promise to leave white dishes
at your door.

- **Jackie Wills (2019)**

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Memory is a viable archontic medium. This chapter proves this through an in-depth theoretical interrogation of the existing archontic medium: *The Archive*. Postmemory is a key methodological tool here. It best illustrates the way that memory functions alongside the archive. Angela Deane's *Ghost Series*, alongside my practice as research, is a case study into using gaps and fragments as productive archival techniques. Storytelling is an important

method for memory archives. With this, I introduce an autoethnographic response – a telling of my stories.

Postmemory describes the "relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" (Hirsch, 2018). While first coined by Marianne Hirsch to express the generational trauma occurring in Jewish communities after the Holocaust, this theory exemplifies what it means to "grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by those of a different generation" (Hirsch, 2012, p. 107). This term reflects my experience with the narratives and histories that have been impressed upon me by my grandparents and the older generations.

The filmic element of my exhibition entitled *A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions* grapples with such historical impressions. The film is an attempt at repositioning my history

Figure 1. Julia Arbuckle, Looking After (2022), (Production taken from short film) for myself – reaffirming my identity over and above that which exists in my past through an enactment as spectre. Dressed in reproduction garb I choose areas of significance to my historical family as a backdrop. The garments consist of a reproduction of 1860 support garments, including a corset, bum pad, crinoline, petticoat and reproduction Victorian shoes (fig.3). This all references garments worn by Mary White (nee Bowker) in a photograph found in my archives (fig. 2). These garments are seen throughout the film and will remain on display in the final exhibition space.

Figure 2. Mary White (1960), Photograph (Production taken from own archives)

Figure 3. Julia Arbuckle, Looking After (2022), Mixed Media sculpture installation, (Production taken from pre-exhibition showing)

I become a vessel for my ancestors, visiting historic sites of resonance that I have been told about. They are not necessarily resonant for me in particular, but I have been told that they are significant and, thus, I engage them. I cannot help but feel the pull toward them, haunting their past while they haunt my present. They give me glimpses into how things were before, but just as Hirsch says, they dominate and displace my narrative. What does it mean to be a keeper and interpreter of my familial archives? While I am engrossed in my familial heritage, I cannot help but feel the removal of myself, the lack of an identity for me that exists past the stories, histories and collected memories. This realisation has allowed me to begin a deep uprooting of

self.

While within the practical element of this research postmemory manifests as a sour realisation, the introduction of such a methodology within my thesis furthers my argument towards abstract archival creation[7]. Postmemory existing within my head suggests the experience of an existing archive in the abstract sense, one that exists without materiality or physicality. This notion of a postmemory shows the human ability to house an archive that does not exist physically, but yet still exists.

Status and Materiality

Materiality can be seen as an important identifier for the archive, especially when discussing the notion of status. There is an obvious link to physical archives as evidence of the past. They are physical sources that hold the truth of what was before. In his 2002 paper *The Power of the Archive and its Limits*, Achille Mbembe defines the archive as both building and document combined (Mbembe, 2002). Similarly, Derrida refers to such status when using the term *archontic* mediums in his paper *Archive Fever*[8]. There is an entanglement of truth, materiality and status within the archive. However, the definition of truth in the archive is one that I wish to contest.

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[7] Abstract, used to describe something un-pin-down-able; defined as "existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). This would include oral histories and tradition, storytelling, ancestral knowledge, memory and postmemory in kind. Essentially those archives that exist in thought rather than in object.

[8] To which the title of this paper refers.

Verne Harris believes in the judicial powers of archiving as a space that hosts evidence, expressing the way it "binds archivists to be for remembering and against forgetting, for exposure and against the secret, and so on." (Harris, 2002, p. 4). I can see why that may be, especially when said opinion comes from someone within an apartheid state. The entire regime relied on state secrets and spreading propaganda. In a time where there is no guarantee of reliable information from the government, there is a foundation in written documented facts, and the recalling of those documents when the time comes to reconcile the past. This is exemplified thus:

> Colonial knowledge was treated as a 'historical source', and as such considered a valid representation and evidence of the past […] Since at least the nineteenth century, the documental legacy of colonialism has been used in this instrumental manner by successive generations of historians of imperial economy, policy, administration, systems of law, social structure, resistance movements, and so on. (Roque & Wagner, 2011, p. 6)

"The archive is a conjoining of trace and substrate – writing on paper, painting on rock, virtual tracing in computer hard drives. This is what separates, ultimately, 'memory' from 'archive'" writes Harris (Harris, 2002, p. 7). However, Harris also questions this pull of material power, stating:

> Even the most committed subversive in the archive is shadowed by the archontic. Equally, even the most committed archon in the archive is shadowed by the anarchontic. For the archive is divided against itself, always works against itself. (Harris, 2002, p. 7)

Harris highlights the cyclical function of the archive.: the need for the state to destroy and the need to preserve history, even in anarchy. Also quoted in Mbembe is this paradoxical

relationship between *Archon* and *Anarchy*: "On the one hand, there is no state without archives [...] On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 23). Harris clarifies Mbembe's statement, explaining that "There is no remembering without forgetting […] They open out of each other, light becoming darkness, darkness becoming light. And dancing between remembering and forgetting, at once spanning them and within each, is imagining." (Harris, 2002, p. 10).

What is clear in Achille Mbembe and Verne Harris's writing is that while the archive exists initially as a physical space, there is an element of history that exists as an "imaginary"[9]. As such it could be argued that archives can exist through the recollection and historical memory of individual people. Harris argues that the archive is "a process of remembering, forgetting and imagining. A process without beginning and without ending." (Harris, 2002, p. 6). This exemplifies the importance of human engagement within the archival process. This also promotes the inclusion of memory as a viable archival medium alongside archives themselves. All of this is to say that while there is significance placed on the physicality of archives, there is also an undeniable human essence throughout the entire process. This essence should be leaned into and promoted rather than denied.

With human being comes forgetting. Forgetting is inevitable. It is a clear aporia of the abstract archival production I have introduced. This is true when referring to memory and it is true when referring to archives. Jacques Derrida, quoted by Verne Harris, states the very nature of archiving is just to facilitate a forgetting:

> The work of the archivist is not simply a work of memory. It's a work of mourning.
> And a work of mourning […] is a work of memory but also the best way just to forget

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[9] Social values and laws

the other, […] to keep it safe, in a safe – but when you put something in a safe it's just
in order to be able to forget it (Harris, 2002, p. 5)

Forgetting in this sense can be paralleled with Patricia Ladwig's ruination, as a productive entry point into the understanding of history (Ladwig, 2012). Harris corroborates this in the apartheid setting:

Forgetting was an important element in the struggles against apartheid – forgetting the
dimensions of struggle too painful to remember; forgetting the half-truths and the lies
of the apartheid regime. We also had our secrets and our blind spots. We also allowed
our imaginations to play. (Harris, 2002, p. 4)

Verne Harris states in regards to apartheid social memory that "memory is never a faithful reflection of 'reality'. It is shaped, reshaped, figured and configured by the dance of imagination" (Harris, 2002). In stating this Harris brings into question the reliability of memory, a discussion pertinent to my argument for the legitimation of memory. Harris follows this up: "beyond the dynamics of remembering and forgetting, a more profound characterisation of the struggles in social memory is of narrative against narrative, story against story" (Harris, 2002, p. 4). This is to say that where one can remember something, someone else can remember another. This is, in my research, the beauty of thought history. Memories exist in parallel while opposing, contradicting or erasing themselves. This is the very nature of memory that cannot be engaged with when engaging archives.

Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* describes the innate essence that one feels to keep and recall history within ourselves. Noting the injunction "to guard and gather the archive […] is no less just to remember the others, the other others and the others in oneself, and that the other peoples could say the same thing in another way" (Derrida, 1995, p. 50). What Derrida says in this

instance is that it is entirely possible to house an archive of one's own within the self. The implication of such is that it is necessary to then know that the same archive can exist wholly differently in the mind of another who experienced the very same history. In essence, mimicking what Jeltsie Stobbe says when referring to curatorship, it is "as much about how it was as it is about how it should have been. To be more precise, it is about how it was *as well*" (Stobbe, 2022, p. 13).

This research has been an attempt at an autoethnographic method. Storytelling that occurs in autoethnographic study is key to the understanding of my research. This method allows insight into thought archives and the use of such in the cross-examination of the archive as a space of history and memory collection. Storytelling is a key component of the autoethnographic method as it underpins the self-narrative within the research. In this vein, I am attempting to use my stories as a way of better understanding the broader social, political and cultural elements of memory recollection and the mediums to do such things.

Countless historical accounts are alive in my head at this moment. Do they not constitute archives? The memory replacing document and my physical form replacing building in Mbembe's definition? The two exist in an entanglement that gives my "thought archive" a personal status in its own right. Of course, there are arguments against this. According to Gülce Torun, memory is not an accurate source of truth due to its very nature as a personal resource. The human memory is not accurate over time, an attribute that some may say the archive has. The archive's main goal is to keep knowledge for long stretches without error, alteration, or destruction. The human memory in parallel is perhaps not so reliable when set against the notion of the archive (Torun, 2019, p. 8).

However, we have seen in the argument above that archives have just as much to do with forgetting as they do with memory. Furthermore; the ruination that occurs when the human memory forgets mimics what occurs in archives over time. There is a despoilment, a ruination that occurs in archival processes, accidentally or purposefully. The archive is, in essence, a curated collection, made to look whole so that the state can determine what is publicly available. "A montage of fragments thus creates an illusion of totality and continuity […] the time woven together by the archive is the product of a composition" Mbembe (2002, p. 21) writes, perfectly exemplifying the hidden curriculum of the archive. Not only that but there is a process of removal throughout. The document is removed from its context. There could be errors in preservation methods which could corrupt the paper, the ink, and the air surrounding such things. The implicit relationship between archive and ruination is perfectly signified in *Fieldwork Between Folders*:

> Archives might be in perfect condition, searchable, and well-administered. Nevertheless, the materials contained in all of them, in one way or another, already have been subject to 'ruination' through selection, classification, or in the worst case, decay and destruction. (Ladwig, 2012, p. 4)

It is not difficult to see the parallels between the two 'archontic mediums' (memory and archive) when one admits to the human involvement within each.

To return to my thoughts mentioned previously on archives and truth, I think the main qualm with accepting memory as viable *thought history* arises when people equate archives with truthtelling. When things are considered true or false, there is a divide set that delineates things as good or bad – a sorely misplaced binary, seeing as neither archives nor memory are truthful. Archives are institutions that are funded, curated and influenced by the political, cultural and social stories that the state wants to promote. Archives are more realistically storytelling

devices for the mass population that curate the histories they deem worth recalling. Memory, in parallel, is the only personal resource that links anyone to their experiences. As such is considered a truth-telling device solely for the owner of such memories.

In attempting to engage my theoretical work within my artistic practice I have grappled with the difficulty of telling a complete story of the histories I house within me, especially to an audience that has no context or connection, necessarily, to the work. Further, I have attempted to find a manner in which I can extend the level of importance and the seduction I feel from this history. The archive in Mbembe's words works as a function of the state through this "system that facilitates identification and interpretation" where "at the same time a process of despoilment and dispossession is at work" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20). I believe it is this process of despoilment that we see in both memories and archives that betray the human condition. Our imperfections affect the modalities we use to recall and collect the past. It is important to understand that this research is not aiming to delegitimise the archive for this human error. Rather, I am exposing the contradictions in both thought archives as well as institutions of archiving. Perhaps the answer to these aporias lies in absence over presence. Zeb Tortorici states "while all archives have the potential to seduce us, the fragments and absences have an even greater potential to seduce than do complete cases, narratives, and testimonies found within the archive" (Tortorici, 2015 [no pagination]). A seductive archive is then both fragmental presences of "lived experience" and "indexical absences" or "historiographical ghosts" (Tortorici, 2015 [no pagination]). One such instance of seduction in archival absence is Angela Deane's photography project titled *Ghost Photographs*. Here, removal allows a deeper engagement with the subject matter.

Angela Deane's "Historiographical Ghosts"

Figure 3. Angela Deane Ghost Photograph Series, Ethel & June (2020), Found Photographs and Acrylic, 3.5" x 3,5" (Production taken fromhttps://angeladeane.com/artwork/4536039-Family-picnic.html)

In her *Ghost Photographs* series, Angela Deane paints over any human presence within her archive of found photographs and replaces them with ghosts. Each person in these images has undoubtably died, or grown older. The snapshot of the past, when reworked in the present, expresses the loss and change that has occurred from the moment these photos were taken. She turns them into the ghosts they have inevitably become. In this way, Deane speaks to the roles of memory and nostalgia in history's archives. Deane explains that her work is "tied to

memory" and in her interrogation,[10] she creates "the sweet married to the bittersweet" (Deane, n.d.). The use of absence over presence links directly to my introduction of memory as a viable archontic medium. It reinforces the notion that even when history or memory is lost, forgotten or subject to ruination, it can still have a personal resonance, as well as significance as a historical source. This exemplifies the notion that while memory as an archontic medium is flawed, it is still viable alongside the medium of the archive.

Deane morphs an archive of found photographs that each have a context and a story, into ambiguous scenes out of time, with indications of what the tale might have been but no faces to tie to memory. In this way, Deane allows the images an ambiguity that is not dissimilar to that of staring at a photograph of an ancestor whom you have never met. The empty shapes that shroud the figures in each photo allow anyone to come to the image and place onto the white ghostly shape memory of their own. As Deane, herself describes: *You may haunt these ghosts* (Deane, n.d.).

Deane's intent with this series is an exploration of abstraction in memory – a physical representation of the unreliability of memory, the way the brain recreates people, places, and histories like found photographs. This series reads as an archive, a place of forgetting and remembering. When looking at the photos themselves one can imagine the scenes before they were painted over, trying to construct a narrative with the little context given. This also introduces the notion of archival re-inscription, a methodology I will engage further in Chapter 3. The complication of the archive and, thus, the 'redistribution' of the available variables allow for a deeper reading (Akrich & Latour, 1992).

These photographs used to belong to someone. These histories were someone's memories. This is clear in the titles of each image, as though it were appearing in a photo album, tucked away

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[10] How do we hold it? Can we define what it is now that it once was?

on a bookshelf. The titles give context that is often lost in the removal of the human elements of the image. Titles like "Winter Travels" and "Family Picnic" (Figure 2) share some context of the image that is visible from the surroundings, not hidden under ghosts. The nature of the images allows for a shared nostalgia to occur: almost everyone has a family picnic memory or a winter holiday to place into that photograph. Other photos have more specific titles: "Tony and Tina" or "Ethel and June" (Fig 1), people who are remembered by name become small white ghosts staring back at the viewer. Deane states that these photos are not lost, but rather, able to be found. In this, I believe she means that with the loss of the individual, each image becomes more than itself: it opens the image up to the audience to recreate or associate history with. In her own words*: Faces become ghosts. Person becomes vessel. And vessel is open for possession.* In removing the personal association, she allows a selfish interpretation for each viewer, thus creating any number of interpretations based on the viewer's context, history, memories, and nostalgia (Deane, n.d.). In this way, Deane's series mirrors that of the curated archive. It opens itself for the viewer to interpret, despite being curated with sources and variables that once existed in a personal, individual setting. It shows the very nature of archival and museum curation, the way that the archive is moulded, put together and made to tell a story for us to interpret, an idea which I elaborate on in Chapter 3.

This personalisation of the past through removal fascinates me. The way of taking from something allows the thing to function as an archival device for a much larger audience. It

Figure 4. Angela Deane Ghost Photographs series, Family Picnic (2019), Found Photographs and Acrylic (Production taken from https://angeladeane.com/artwork/4536039-Family-picnic.html) makes me consider the many ways that archives are represented for the present: how just the way one person interprets archival material, outside of its historical context, can change so much of the broader understanding. When I look at the archives I am using to inform my practice, the hundreds of photographs I own of family members throughout the early to mid1800s to the present, I see them from my specific context, my history, my memories and how my influences throughout my life have affected the way I interpret those images. It is fair to assume that placing those images out into the world where people do not have my context will cause an entirely different reaction from others who view them. However, Deane's project functions not in its attempt for people to understand her context through the archive but rather to recognise in her decontextualized history some of their own. That is perhaps only possible through the removal of the human element, the specificity of identity. The Ghost series shows that context is not what is required to understand someone else's history but rather, when removing the faces, each image becomes a mirror that reflects ourselves (Deane, n.d.).

Angela Deane has greatly influenced my way of working. Introducing removal and complication photographically. I have thus curated an album, filled with family photos that I

Figure 6. Julia Arbuckle Looking After (2022), found photograph collage, 9cm x 6,5cm (production provided by artist)

 have collaged and reimagined to try and best express my feeling towards the vast history I have at my disposal. When considering my practical work, I struggled with the importance of each image and conveying to the viewer how much I had attached to these images: the stories, who the people in them are, where and when they are from and how they lived their lives. I need the audience to mourn these people with me, to understand how I see them – an impossible task. Leaving the images to stand alone would not work because then they are not explained, and the viewer does not connect to their struggles, their lives. Attaching a long list of facts to the image about the person would mean that they are not attaching that person with that history as I am. They are given the information and expected to just believe it. The mystery of history is lost. It is not nostalgia if they are not remembering it themselves. What I have also come to realise is the absurdity of it all. Trying to piece together for myself an understandable history from archives, histories, stories and memories that are all jumbled inside my head is what I have dwelled on while creating these images.

The photo album *Untitled I* prefaces the importance of storytelling in memory – the way we can create quasi-realities through the layers of memory and history. It engages with this layering of history, how stories are told and retold and are altered each time. I have physically altered family photographs using collage and digital manipulation to replicate this change over time. In these photographs a chair becomes an elderly chin and a child becomes a middle-aged man's moustached face. The subtle changes in the photos represent how the mind can alter and manipulate the past. In that abstraction, the audience manipulates history into a story of things, places, and people. We are confronted with archives that we must contextualise and in so doing, we recreate a history that we have never lived, one that we believe but will never be able to prove. That is where story lives: in the gap between history, memory, and archival truth. These

Figure 7. Julia Arbuckle Looking After (2022), Found Photograph collage, 9cm x 6,5cm (Production provided by artist)

practical pursuits aim to visualise the gaps in history where the stories get in.

Absence as a storytelling device over presence helps in the furthering of my practical exhibition as it removes the urge for me to tell the story. Instead, it allows me to create the circumstances for the viewer to uncover the story for themselves. In this way, I not only recreate my archival
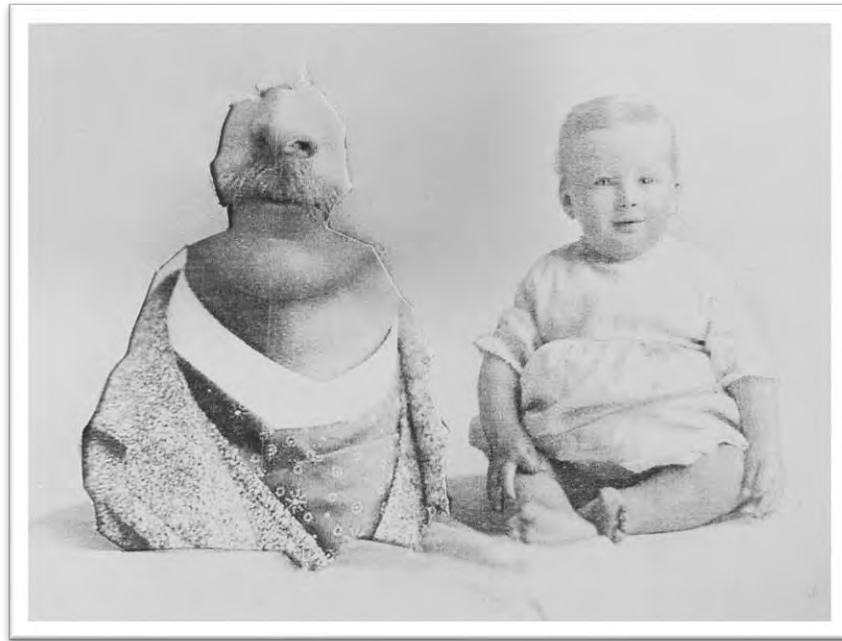
Figure 8. Julia Arbuckle Looking After (2022), found photograph collage, 9cm x 6,5cm (production provided by artist)

experience of uncovering, but I also highlight the way that archives are not necessarily truthtelling spaces: rather, they are houses for the conglomeration of histories that people formulate into a story for themselves. This methodology references Patrice Ladwig (et al.) in *Fieldwork Between Folders* in using the Benjaminian notion of *montage*. Ladwig writes:

> it is this project of transformation of archival fragments from their disordered, fragmentary state into insightful pieces of historical and ethnographic significance that we would like to enact […] it is therefore not the historian anthropologist's task to reconstruct a 'complete whole' of the archive (a historian's utopia). The task is rather to conceptualise it as a "sliver rather than an incomplete whole". (Ladwig, 2012, pp. 4 -6)

CHAPTER THREE
Archival Re-Inscription: Makhanda, Grahamstown, eRhini.

Whenever an elder dies, a library burns to the ground.

- Proverb credited to Amadou Hampâté Bâ (1960)

Makhanda in the Eastern Cape has had several names throughout history, ranging from the Zuurveld to Graham's Town, known in amaXhosa as eRhini, to Grahamstown and now Makhanda. The Zuurveld, also known as the district of Albany, was a strip of land used to separate the white settlers and the Xhosa between the Bushman's River and the Fish River. The Zuurveld was inhabited by the Xhosa and was not part of the Colony's frontiers. However; when Colonel Graham arrived in 1811 with his Corps, he nonetheless began the systematic removal and murder of families with a famously "proper degree of terror". This involved the killing of innocents and the destruction of crops with scorched earth tactics, as well as driving over 20 000 Xhosa from the area (Marshall, 2008, p. 5). Graham's Town was the capital of the Albany District once the settlers took the Zuurveld and, as it was very close to neighbouring white farms, it became one of the biggest towns in the country. Before this, it was used as an army base for the British fighting against the Xhosa from whom the land was stolen. Eventually, Graham's Town became just Grahamstown. In 2018, the town's name changed from Grahamstown to Makhanda, for the Xhosa war prophet and adviser to chief Ndlambe. This change attempted to re-centre the historical narrative away from the pervading Colonial perspective (Mail & Guardian, 2014).

These name changes are contextual to the social and political climate of their time. And with each name change, there is a sophistication of the geographical setting. The name Makhanda betrays the decolonial turn of removing colonial era markers; similarly, Graham's Town's context is one of colonial rule and military politics. Each shows the trends and the moods within the broader political 'players' of the area. This is an example of a 're-inscription'.

When talking of archival care, Jelstie Stobbe uses the term re-inscription. Defined by Akrich & Latour as "a feedback mechanism; it is the redistribution of all the other variables […] a complication – a folding – or a sophistication of the setting." (Akrich & Latour, 1992, p. 262). In the context of the Eastern Cape, the re-inscription takes place over time and allows a broader more nuanced understanding of the location's history. Similarly, re-inscription is used within archives and curated exhibitions in kind.

My practice as research enacts a re-inscription through envelopes. Envelopes have become a metaphor for the holding and dissemination of historical knowledge. I have used them as a motif throughout the *Looking After* exhibition which will be discussed further on in this chapter. Just as an envelope is filled, licked and folded, I pursue a broader and deeper folding of my history. Imagine, your laundry ironed and folded. Historical sources would be a bird's eye view of that laundry. Only the top layer is visible. Only what is revealed is understood. But if one decided to dig a little deeper there are many other layers to the source: a sleeve: the historic context; a row of buttons: the decisions made by the museum curator or archivist; a stain: the effects of the archival processes, as well as the socio-political climate of when the object was sourced, packed or classified. The re-inscription of my history begins when I unfold those layers from the perspective of my experiences. I start with myself and work my way backwards.

The *re-inscription* of archives, as opposed to that of town name changes, becomes an act of methodological care. Engaging in the broader contextual variables of an archive object rather than accepting it at face value, reflexively uses your position to allow for a broader understanding and reading of the object *in time*. While Stobbe uses the term *re-inscription*, Akrich and Latour refer to this as *a folding*. *Folding* is a theoretical framework that I will unpack throughout my practice as research, as well as through a case study of Maureen de Jager's *WO 32/8061 [The Book of Holes]*.

Alongside the discussion on archival re-inscription, I am introducing the notion of curation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines curation as "the action or process of selecting, organising, and looking after the items in a collection or exhibition" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). Within a museum context, the curator of the institution handles curation. "Working in a museum" mentions Jennifer Stretton, "promotes strict institutional practices and formalised procedures" including that "the word was historically used in relation to museums: it was tied to a civic responsibility because museums were controlled by the state" (2018, p. 2). Stretton continues, however, in the definition of curator and its movement away from the traditional sense, citing uses for boutique owners or large companies, rather than the traditional museum or gallery sense. "It could also be associated with the exercise of care" states Stretton, "as in using one's own education and understanding of culture as a departure point for extending care to others" (Stretton, 2018, p. 2). In essence, curation is a human action upon something, usually kept in a collection or exhibition. Within this context, it would be archival sources or historical data owned and housed by the museum. When connecting curation and re-inscription it is important to keep in mind how human interference with archives and museum exhibitions plays a role in the framing and understanding of the histories displayed.

In this case, the contextual evidence of human curatorship in the archive, description and labels become as important in the *re-inscription* as the archive objects themselves.

This discourse surrounding transformation brings into play not only what is archivable but also how archives are treated, especially archives that have been directly affected by the political, cultural and social entities of the time. The way things are labelled, stored and displayed can all be affected by social politics and norms (Stobbe, 2021, p. 15). According to Verne Harris "In archives emerged a discourse informed by the assumption that archives required redefinition, more precisely reinvention, for a democratic South Africa" (Harris, 2002, p. 2).

Figure 9. Albany History Museum (2022) (Own photo)

This notion of re-inscription plays a huge role in engaging the aporias within archival institutions. It forefronts human engagement in the archival and curatorial processes that take

place. I chose to look at the Albany History Museum in Makhanda. The main aim is to engage in the labelling and the display choices alongside the archival exhibits.

The Albany History Museum was established in 1855 and is an affiliate research institute of Rhodes University. According to the Albany Museum website, the museum houses historical artefacts and genealogical archives for the 1820 British Settlers. The Albany museum has four exhibits dealing with the history of Makhanda (Grahamstown, eRhini, Graham's Town etc). One room is dedicated to the relics of the amaXhosa tribes alongside the settler families. This room is divided down the middle, separating each history as though there was no overlap between the two. This is done as an organisational decision. To delineate between the histories being exhibited. It could be read as a separation along racial lines.

The Albany Museum settler relics are housed in glass cabinets and the description cards tell not only what objects are but also the families that donated the items. Settler surnames adorn displays designated to entire families. Their stuff is all set up for display as though the descendants are expected to walk through the door any minute and swell with pride at the inclusion of their family history in a museum.

I shall focus on the display case within this exhibit for the Bowker family, from which I am a descendant. The case for the Bowkers includes pipes, walking sticks, a violin and some paintings done by the family. One such painting is by Mrs FW Barber. She was also known as Mary Elizabeth Bowker. While the plaque describes her as an amateur botanist, she was in fact the first female to be invited to the South African Philosophical Society for her scientific work. This is an example of re-inscription. The wording of the plaque displays information about the content of the case but also the opinions and understandings of those who wrote it. Reading the

plaque as context for the curation alongside the object itself gives one a deeper understanding of the entire museum context.

These labels (as written by human beings) are as anthropologically important as the exhibition content itself. Through this folding of the historical setting – the ways the exhibit was set up, labelled, and preserved – we see the ways that such choices betray the differing ways these histories are engaged on a museum level. These curatorial choices that allow such a reinscription allow the viewer to create a story and a timeline of the history presented that may not be accurate to the period. Thus, an aporia is created.

Why do families get to be recalled in museums, like taxonomic dinosaur exhibits? This chair; Genus: *Settler*, Family: *White.* I think this shows the thought process of people coming to the museum or donating things; the urge to be remembered, to identify with a history, and to know where one comes from. The curation of these archives affects the reading of the history involved: strange family trees that sit within a broader history. It speaks to the families being a huge part of the town at the time. The museum website describes this exhibition as a genealogical archive of settler families, but nowhere in the exhibition room does it explain this.

These labels are as anthropologically important as the exhibition content itself. Through this folding of the historical setting, the ways the exhibit was set up, labelled, and preserved, we see that such choices betray the differing ways these histories are engaged on a museum level. These curatorial choices that allow such a re-inscription allow the viewer to create a story and a timeline of the history presented that may not be accurate to the period. Thus, an aporia is created.

My practice as research has emulated taxonomic display in some senses. The envelopes in my installation *An Archive of Familiar Things* are lined up, pinned to the wall like butterflies would be, in a glass case. Some are filled, others empty. Some are labelled, and others are left with no context. Alongside, dispersed between walls of envelopes are curated items that are significant to me in some way. A wedding dress, a pair of baby shoes, a hanky.

This deliberate parallel between my exhibition and those seen in archival institutions foregrounds my intention as a curator of these archives and hopefully promotes an engagement with the objects on display. One important difference in my own display is that it is interactive. Instead of existing behind glass, each aspect of the exhibition can be removed, touched, read and inspected. This decision is an attempt to counter the notion that archives are precious nogo zones. My *Archive of Familiar Things* solidifies the idea that archives are directly affected by human engagement all the time. The envelopes are available for people to sort through, engage with and, if they feel the need, remove. The experience embodies the notion of archival

Figure 10. Albany History Museum, Assimilate! Resist! Make a Home! (2022) (Own photo)

re-inscription: as each audience member engages with my archive, they make assumptions based on my curatorial approach that informs their understanding of my history.

Another exhibition in the next room, titled "Assimilate! Resist! Make A Home!" engages in the tricky social, political, cultural and economic issues of the 1800s within the Eastern Cape as a British colony. It tries to discuss the nuanced complications of navigating the colonial situation, discussing the Khoekhoen, the amaXhosa, the Dutch colonisers, and the British settlers. The exhibit is small: metal mannequins are dressed in reproductions of historical garb and sit rumpled on boxes. The majority of the exhibit are posters that are walls of text. The goal of the exhibition is to engage with the first 50 years of the town of Makhanda and the complicated relationships between all the players over the years. The entire exhibit, while not interesting to look at, enacts a re-inscription of the history of the town. It takes all the variables and lays them out on top of each other. We see them simultaneously rather than separated and distanced. They are folded amongst each other, just as history is. It is as though this room's goal is to remedy the problems of all the other exhibitions. There is a single glass cabinet, filled with both settler trinkets as well as amaXhosa relics, bibles, snuff boxes, and beaded prayers: a single display case showing the conglomeration of a multifaceted society – what could be the future for the history of this town.

Re -inscription in archives exemplifies how human interaction has a direct effect on archival materials. Ruination within archival spaces can have a similar effect. Ladwig et al. describe ruination as "a variety of processes, ranging from modes of knowledge fragmentation, exclusion and silencing by means of archival classifications, to more blunt facts of physical destruction of documents and buildings" (Ladwig, 2012, p. 3). As Francis White comments in a letter to the Committee of the Grahamstown Cathedral: "It does seem to be the trend in Africa

that as soon as one political faction comes to power, in one way or another, they pull down all monuments and statues erected by the previous regime" (2020, p. 45). I am reminded of "The Museum of Science and Industry Story" written by David Mamet where museum exhibits come alive and wage war with each other at night. The newer exhibits prepare a coup of the elderly exhibits of American history. The old, steadfast in their belonging as historical relics, are quick to stake their claim against the newer museum assets (Mamet, 1975).

This engagement with historical relics curated by human beings mimics the way that abstract thought archives function within the human brain. There is curation and ruination in both modes of historical recollection. The human interaction with each modality becomes the entry point to which we see the aporias in the mediums of historical recollection.

It is important to know that while there are gaps in each way of remembering, these lacunae can be seen as a function of these modes rather than a fault. While they cannot be considered a realistic truthful view of the past, perhaps they should not. There is no way of engaging colonial and historical knowledge that is not affected by our positionality in the present. As such, there is and should be merit in each modality of history, be it archives or memories. As quoted by Ricoeur in Ladwig et al.'s *Fieldwork Between Folders,* "These connectors add the idea of a mutual overlapping or even of a mutual exchange that makes the fault line upon which history is established a line of sutures" (Ladwig, 2012, p. 14).

'The Folding' in *WO 32/8061 [The Book of Holes]*

The fault line that is described by Ladwig is articulated in the artistic medium through *WO 32/8061 [The Book of Holes]*. Created by Maureen de Jager in 2016, *WO 32/8061* is a curated artist book made up of 172 close-up photographs of documents from the British War Office Archives of the South African War. This war resulted in de Jager's grandmother and her children being sent to refugee camps. The book, however, does not focus on the document content. Rather, it focuses on the holes that the archival treasury tags have been threaded through in each top corner and the damage that has occurred in the turning of the pages. In this method, de Jager complicates the historical data, re-inscribing the document with a deeper meaning and understanding. She focuses on the act of turning the page and the destruction that ensues. This, in parallel with the content of the sources, creates a complication, a folding. "That which was one dimensional, gains a second dimension, a complexity to it, as one folds or unfolds, a piece of paper" (Akrich & Latour, 1992, p. 262). "The photographs track the path of the treasury tag feeding into these haphazard holes, and the proximate sites of wounding" visualising the way the punched holes tear more every time the documents are engaged with.

This becomes a metaphor, realised through the book, for the archives themselves as historical

"sites of wounding" (The Book Workshop, 2016).

Figure 12. Maureen de Jager; W032/8061 [The Book of Holes] (2016), Artist Book, 20cm x 15cm x 6cm
(Production taken from http://thebookworkshop.co.za/maureen-de-jager/the-book-of-holes/)

Bookmaking engages not only in the tearing and folding of paper, but also the puncturing and

sewing of the paper block. These two actions are reminiscent of what I have mentioned earlier

on in this chapter: the tearing and folding. As each page is stacked, concertinaed into a block,

the 'sutures' along the spine tie down a myriad of histories into one tome (Ladwig, 2012, p.

14). The construction of the book is done in a way that forces the reader to emulate the ruination

within the physical archives. Each page is connected in one long concertina shape before being

sewn down into the spine along one edge. The knowledge within cannot be uncovered without

physically ripping, tearing or cutting the fore-edge of the pages open. The juxtaposition of this

destruction with the setting of the book (set in an official-looking moss green solander box,

accompanied by white curatorial gloves and a custom paper knife) is stark (The Book

Workshop, 2016). There is a schism in this: preparing oneself in a way that references archival

care while actively participating in the ruination, all the time activating the content of the book.

This speaks back to the duality within archival institutions. The sophistication of the archival

setting is a space of dual care and inevitable ruination. There is a parallel between ruination

and activation that takes place in the human interaction with archives mimicked in this piece:

the ways documents can be damaged, lost or altered through human error while considered safe within an institution of preservation. This duality of archives is mentioned in *Fieldwork between Folders*[11]:

> What is the sort of attention paid to, and what uses and abuses have files in archives been attracting after decolonisation? Is the very existence of archives threatened – either by deliberate destruction, anticolonial iconoclasm, or simply neglect and oblivion? And what is the significance of that which survives these destructions as debris and fragments? (Ladwig, 2012, p. 15)

Alongside the *WO 32/8061[Book of Holes]* de Jager published a proposal for an essay that would accompany the artist's book entitled *Proposal for the Book of Holes*. De Jagers essay contains interjections and ruminations from a voice De Jager titles *The Author*, blurring the lines between the research and the personal narration. In '*The Authors'* own words, the proposal acts as "an endeavour to meditate, experimentally, on the phenomenon of 'holes', proffering an argument that runs through and across and under the concerns of the artefact" (de Jager, 2016, p. 7). This essay meditates on the notion of looking at a history *full of lacunae*, the very statement oxymoronic. The inclusion of this essay exemplifies the way that archival re-inscription (folding) allows a deeper understanding and facilitates "the drama, the suspense, the emplotment of the setting" (Akrich & Latour, 1992).

Part B: The Essay, references *The Book of Margins* and the wounding or violence that Edmond Jabès imbues to the act of writing (as opposed to the "dried blood" of silence), paralleling the ripping of uncut paper (as seen in Part A *WO 32/8061*). And while each '*Book of*' references different traumas surrounding other concentration camps across time and distance (Auschwitz

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[11] A section aptly designated the title *Perils and Potentials*, a theme clear in De Jager's work.

vs The Anglo-Boer War camps), de Jager echoes Jabès's sentiment: *There is danger in the house*.

The proposal is split into sections looking at the holes in history through the lenses of *Testimony, Mythology, Orthodoxy* and *Anarchy*. The first, *Testimony,* focuses on the telling of the story of the War Camps, discussing the notion of truth and authenticity in sources and the propaganda surrounding each 'side' of the history that it includes. Included in this section is a discussion on the accuracy of memory and the way trauma affects the retelling of history referencing dissociation that manifests as "a blind spot on the psyche" (de Jager, 2016, p. 9). *The Author* also includes comments about trauma response and recall, which will be discussed further in Chapter 4 of this research in the form of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* (afterwardsness). Testimony, or the telling, links directly to my use of postmemory within this practice as research as it helps to forefront the story. Using collected audio from my daily life, especially interactions with my grandparents, I have created audio to accompany the physical exhibition. In this way, I engage the multiple mediums that my history and family archives take.

Mythology, as the second heading of de Jager's essay, engages in the sources coming out of the war camps and the role of myth in the recording of that history. The sensitivity of the subject of the archival documentation meant that any action in dispelling accounts as false or exaggerated became an action against the survivors, therefore, against Afrikaner nationalism. *The Author* expresses these holes in history through the writing of their grandmother stating that "her very recollection of what had occurred must have been tainted by the '"cultural and narrative frames' within which she found herself" (de Jager, 2016, p. 10). A racial element is brought up in this section where *The Author* recalls visiting the memorial site of the concentration camps: the way that the remembrance of the white victims precedes and exceeds that of the black and the 'lacuna' that exists in the location as a "no-go zone" within the present.

This statement almost echoes the same sentiment expressed toward *The Author's* grandmother's writing, the recollection of what had occurred having been tainted by the cultural and narrative frames of the present in which *The Author* stood (de Jager, 2016, p. 11). This is a familiar experience, while also entirely different. While my histories are grounded in settler history and nationalism there is still the racial element. My white history and archive exist because the history and archives of amaXhosa and KhoeKhoen were deemed less. Within my practice, I have been trying to grapple with the enormity of the archives, and the privilege of owning such a history so tangibly while also intangibly. These archives haunt my present through monuments, town planning, socialisation and the difference in cultures. This has culminated in a systematic looking back towards my historical past, choosing to engage these spaces of historical resonance and in some way haunt them back. This project is realised through my filmed performance *A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions* referred to in Chapter 2.

The 3rd section of *The Essay – Orthodoxy –* describes when history and memory are collectivised and the dangers of this. This section is the shortest and serves as a criticism of the movement from collective memory to orthodoxy and the similarities between this and the 'camp mythology' of the Afrikaner: the gatekeeping of history to the point that it cannot waiver from one singular narrative. "Anyone who remembers differently is suspect" (de Jager, 2016, p. 12). Orthodoxy in general insinuates a correct way of doing things. My practice as research questions this notion strongly through the use of autoethnographic study, as well as a forefront on the ways that orthodox management of archives has failed in preserving a narrative. This questioning of the orthodox is also mirrored in de Jager's final chapter, *Anarchy.*

Anarchy looks inwards at the essay itself expressing the parallels: orthodoxy; surety and solidarity in history and recollection of the past, and, comparatively, at erasure: the "wearingthin" that occurs with time (*The Author* mentions again the experience of decaying memorials in the present day). This section discusses the arbitrary nature of archives, being

chosen at random through whichever political or social apparatus is at play and even within that existing only within the parameters of time and the decay that inevitably occurs in all things. (*The Author* recalls paging through the war office Archives and Jabès's violence in reading. They describe their senses at that moment in detail). *Anarchy* exemplifies that which this research aims to clearly show. "Even left to their own devices (untouched by destructive human intention), archives necessarily gravitate towards erasure. They are temporal and unstable: as tenuous, in many ways, as memory" (de Jager, 2016, p. 12).

The Essay ends with a postscript entitled "*(some reflections on a methodology, after the fact)*" and engages with a review of the text that queries what is left after a "hole" is created, described poetically as "the dirt displaced by the coffin". The postscript is self-described as just that, the displaced dirt, the afterthoughts, the excess. I would do it a disservice to try and summarise it here, because of course I cannot force that displaced dirt back into an already full grave. *Part B: The Essay* exemplifies *The Book of Holes* as a project in reflexive autoethnography, ending thus: "the perplexing task of looking back can and should redirect us forwards, towards the limitless potentialities of a history forever in the making" (de Jager, 2016, p. 13).

"The Folding" within these two works is exemplified in the interaction between *The Author*, *The Artist, The Audience* and the work itself. By delving into the past from the point of the present the archival setting becomes more complicated. You are confronted not only with the archival document but also the choices of people before you in preservation method, archival coding and tagging.

Patrice Ladwig et al. state in *Fieldwork between Folders* that:

> In museums, many archival traces on the identity and history of objects have been left
> behind by successive generations of workers – former and present-day archivists,
> certainly; but also, former colonial agents and scientists. Therefore, rather than being
> sites of silent things and hidden memory, (they) present themselves as sites inhabited

by a proliferation of stories told by former museum anthropologists, travellers and adventurers, missionaries and settlers, soldiers and colonial administrators, or other actors involved in the collecting. (Ladwig, 2012, p. 8)

The statement helps to understand and situate both *WO 32/8061* and *The Essay* within the context of archival 'folding'. The emphasis is put on the understanding of lacunae in history through methodological notions of *Testimony, Mythology, Orthodoxy* and *Anarchy.* This helps to better understand the ways that history and archives are altered not only by the temporality of the physical document but also by 'the time' in terms of the social, cultural and political agendas 'of the time'. With this in mind, the similarities between the way we recall in memory and the function of the archive as a *re*-collection are clear.

Memory, Trauma and Acts of Self

Avishai Margalit discusses in *The Ethics of Memory* the way the human body recalls trauma and emotion. The discussion surrounding the recollection of emotion within memory promotes the ethics theory of reflexivity. "Dwelling on the past in a democracy is as irrational as crying over spilt milk," states Margalit, qualifying the statement by continuing: "Traditionalists would argue, however, that what was spilt in the past was blood, not milk; crying over the spilt blood of your community – much thicker than milk – is what ethical theory is all about" (Margalit, 2002, p. 12).

This section entails my "crying over spilt milk" and how the traumas of my past and present have influenced my research. There is nostalgia. A homesickness for the past, a longing, a pull that I feel towards my history that I cannot deny. There is also a shame. I could easily choose not to engage in the uncomfortable areas of my past but that would not be conducive to the understanding I have of myself in the present. As I exist today, I am moulded by whom I

consider my ancestors to have been. If I choose to only look at the histories that are easy to engage with then ethically I have done myself a disservice. When I talk about this or write about it I cannot help but consider the role of postmemory in this creation of a self. If I keep looking backwards to understand who I am, I have no gauge for a personal identity that is not filtered through a colonial, settler 'sieve'. I, thus, dedicate this area of my research to my understanding of self and the conversation surrounding the ethics of reaching a 'me'.

Postmemory, as previously discussed, is the introduction of past narratives that begin to take over the mind and persona of the bearer of historical knowledge. For example, I cannot see the town I live in without my settler family roots. The South African Library for the Blind was opened by my Grandfather's aunt. The Settler Family monument was sculpted by Ivan MitfordBarberton, an ancestor whose mother was a prominent figure in the sciences of the time – not common for women in the 1800s. I cannot see The Cathedral of St Michael and St George without knowing that inside it there is a memorial plaque to T.C White, the first in the family to settle in the Cape Colony. And if I drive for long enough out of town in any direction there are family farms along every route. My identity is overrun by those who came before me. While at times it is a curiosity, a need to know my roots and my beginnings, at other times it is a breezeblock dragging me further down into the past and away from the creation of myself in the present.

The identities of the ancestors before me are not the only variables at play in hindering my selfdiscovery. I recall February of 2020 telling my mother, "I feel like something terrible has to happen". It was a month later when the global pandemic hit South Africa and we were all plunged into a "New Normal". With the global climate one of panic and uncertainty, I entered 2021 with the thought that perhaps the worst was over.

Then March came. My partner with whom I had imagined my entire life and future, whom I have lived the last 4 years alongside, abruptly ended our relationship. My mother ended her relationship with my father and moved out. My sister was institutionalised for Anorexia Nervosa.

Needless to say, the abrupt and astronomical changes to my personal life alongside the broader Covid-19 panic became a time of deep introspection for me and the understanding of what I wanted out of my life and my future. It helped reframe my research from being about the past to being about the present and the future as well. A complication of my life setting, a *reinscription*, to say the least: 200 years after the settler interruption in the Eastern Cape, there is an interruption in my life. The life I had begun imagining for myself is replaced by an entirely new narrative in my head about what I wanted for my future. My narrative is folded, becoming more complicated, and is affected by elements out of my control. And who knows what this re-inscription of my setting will do for the future? How will my decisions going forward affect the recollection of this past or this present?

The events of the recent past have allowed me to look at my practice as research in another way. I have chosen to position myself in the centre of it all. I am the historian tasked with curating my familial heritage from the pieces of the past. While I look after, I also look forward, beyond what is now, beyond what has already occurred, to what may occur in the future. What does it mean for me to hold this history within me? What does it mean for me to potentially be the last person to know any one thing or other? If I choose not to have children what will that mean for the future of my past? This project has become an act of letting go, of surrendering that which I cannot change and breathing out.

What I am left with now is grief, nostalgia and hopefulness for the future. Like the Portuguese

Saudade: "an orientation towards the past – grief and remembrance" meets "an orientation towards the future – desire and hope" (Leal, 2000, p. 274). According to Pascoes, quoted by Leal, this creates "a special and contradictory feeling linking universes which were usually viewed as disconnected – the material and the spiritual, the past and the present" (2000, p. 274). Throughout this research, I have been considering the archive as a creation of and for the past. But now, I consider it more a creation for the future. Derrida helps qualify this thought thus:

> The archivist produces more archives, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future. How can we think about this fatal repetition, about repetition in general in its relationship to memory and the archive? It is easy to perceive, if not to interpret, the necessity of such a relationship, at least if one associates the archive, as naturally one is always tempted to do, with repetition, and repetition with the past. But it is the future which is at issue here, and the archive as an irreducible experience of the future. (Derrida, 1995, p. 45)

Looking After and Taking Care: Archiving my Histories

This practice as research is about the modes of historical transportation through time. It is not necessarily about the content of those modalities or which is most successful, but rather it is an engagement with the most accessible modes of history in comparison to the most powerful. And this comparison is not trying to promote one over the other. Rather, it is an attempt to expose the faults and similarities in both: the lacunae in both.

Looking After in essence is my way of coming to terms with my position in history and my identity as a keeper and interpreter of my familial archive. I have chosen the phrase 'Looking After' as on the one hand, I have tasked myself with taking care of or 'looking after' the archive that is within me. But at the same time, there is a point where my identity is swallowed by the past that precedes it. With regards to that, the project becomes a letting go, a putting down of

history and a choice to look at what comes after, for myself, to find my identity that is not reliant on the ancestors that came before. In this sense, I am looking after. I embody my paradoxical longing to look at what comes after the archive, setting down the burden of my history and looking to my future without having to look through the blur of the past.

I reference *Nachträglichkeit* earlier on in this chapter, referring to the Freudian psychoanalytic understanding of trauma (Bistoen, 2014). In my experience, there is a back looking reflexivity that occurs when engaging historical archives of one's own family. *Nachträglichkeit*, while not used formally in the psychoanalytical study, is a term used to describe a delayed traumatic reaction to past events. Translated to mean 'Afterwardsness' in English, the phrase holds an understanding that past and present are reliant on each other and both have huge stakes in the future. I am not a psychologist and I cannot claim to have PTSD in any sense of the term. However, I do not think it would be contested for me to claim a *Nachträglichkeit* firstly occurring within my recent experiences that have affected my practice as research, but also, within South Africa, or even on a smaller scale, the Eastern Cape. If we consider the area, the historical trauma occurring to the land, the people, and the history left behind, it is no small leap to consider the present day as having deep trauma: a post-traumatic stress disorder that grips the country politically, socially, religiously, archivally, monumentally, sexually, racially. I could go on. Apartheid would have been enough to grip the country in a shell-shocked stupor, let alone colonialism and the introduction of alien peoples spanning back to 1652.

This is all to say that while current South Africa is expected to continue its movement forwards, there is no way to outrun the past. It lives alongside us, constantly affecting and infecting how we choose to live our lives. Essentially, I am discussing the "potentialities of history forever in the making" as described by De Jager, welcoming the notion of the archive as existing for the future rather than the past (De Jager, 2016, p. 14). Derrida corroborates this potentiality, stating:

The question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. This is not the question of a concept dealing with the past which might already be at our disposal or not at our disposal, *an archivable concept of the archive*. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. (Derrida, 1995, p. 27)

Taking my responsibility for tomorrow seriously, I could not leave this project open-ended in the sense that it would end after the exhibition is uninstalled. So, alongside the exhibition and the thesis, I have included a digital archive of the collection that includes all aspects of the final exhibition, as well as some explanation of the choices I made throughout the creative process. This process of digitising my physical familial things into an archive that can be accessed online for anyone to visit brings my theoretical study full circle. I have engaged in multiple archontic mediums, hopefully allowing this research to exist for the future as much as my present. You can find the digital archive by scanning the QR code below.
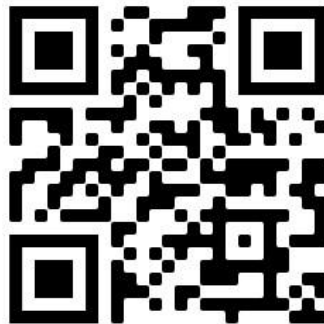

Figure 13. QR Code for Access to the Looking After Digital Catalogue.

Conclusion

I wanted The past to go
away, I wanted
To leave it, like another country, I wanted
My life to close, and open
Like a hinge, like a wing, like the part of the song where it falls
Down over the rocks; an explosion, a discovery;
I wanted
To hurry into the work of my life; I wanted to
Know,
Whoever I was, I was
alive
for a little while

Excerpt of Mary Oliver's *Dogfish* (1986). Notice the folding: hinges, closing and opening, wings, musical climax. All indicative of a re-inscription, of a potential.

This practice as research has aimed to highlight the delegitimising of Thought Archives, a method that is not in line with those of the traditional archive. It introduced that which exists in an abstract sense outside of the written documentation of the past, as a legitimate line of historical and archival inquiry and collection. While Achille Mbembe insists upon the archive being built and documented, this research hinges on the archive being able to exist past the physical. Arguments from Jacques Derrida are used concerning this contradiction. To understand the privileging of the archival space I have used the Albany History Museum, problematising the institutionalised ways of curating archival mediums, highlighting the ways that re-inscription becomes an important tool in the broader understanding of documents, sources and relics and the way they are read within an archival setting. In this discussion of contextualised archival mediums, there is an argument for the archive existing temporally too, within time and for a time.

This practice as research has culminated in the practical exhibition titled *Looking After*, the main themes of which grapple with the notions of archival curation within my familial archives. The practice of Angela Deane and Maureen De Jager parallels artistic solutions to archival fragmentation, ruination and re-inscription alongside my theoretical study. These case studies have provided a productive entry point into understanding histories from an artistic point of view.

This research forefronts thinking and knowing in a human sense rather than finding knowledge from documents. In this research, I legitimise the ways that human history is passed down from generation to generation. In doing so, I question the gaps in both of these modalities: memory and history. This research has been an attempt at an autoethnographic method. Within this context, the methodological storytelling that occurs in autoethnographic study is key to the understanding of my research into thought archives. The use of such is imperative in the crossexamination of the archive as a space of history and memory collection. Storytelling is a key component of the autoethnographic method as it underpins the self-narrative within the research method. In this vein, I am attempting to use my stories as a way of better understanding the broader social, political and cultural elements of memory recollection and the mediums to do such things.

Thought archives promote critical thinking about archives. It allows for the engagement with archival material from a point that does not automatically consider archival sources as proof of truth, but rather as an entry point into the broader understanding of how these sources came to exist within archive spaces: what it means for such archives to have prevailed against time and history; what it means for archives that have been ravaged by time, destruction and curation; what it means for people who have recorded their histories through memory and story rather

than physical archives and the journey they had to take to become an archive. These are discursive considerations seen in Maureen de Jager's *WO 32/8061 [The Book of Holes*] and

Angela Deane's *Ghost Photographs*. In this practice as research, they are seen in Julia Arbuckle's *Looking After.*

The inclusion of intangible histories alongside archives creates a discourse along the lines of archival curation, preservation and social memory. It hopefully allows a space where archives can be taken care of, as well as investigated in a manner that allows a re-inscription of the archival setting: a complication that is not swept under the rug and written off as illegitimate or untrustworthy. The stories and histories I hold inside me are as legitimate as those stored in museums, libraries or archives.

Conclusions assume perhaps an end is in sight when in actuality it is a beginning. Understanding the modes that we choose to recall history is merely a way for me to justify the ways I want to be remembered. I can make many statements at this moment that I believe to be true and in years to come, they may not be. Looking back at who I was, I have no understanding of what the future holds for me, or who will hold it then. In looking at the way history presents itself to me, in memory[12], this research has shown me that the narrative of people and the history of their stories is what the archive should be attempting to preserve. Above all else, the archive is about humans and human interaction with a history that was also about humans. Although the archive as an institution is attempting to remove the human element, the ways we have of recalling and recollecting show how traditional archival techniques are damaging to the numerous other ways of understanding. "The question of the archive remains the same," writes

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[12] In archive, in postmemory, in stories, in monuments, in time, in things.

Derrida: "What comes first? Even better: Who comes first? And second?" (Derrida, 1995, p. 28).

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